

INSPECTION REPORT

ASTON FIELDS MIDDLE SCHOOL

Bromsgrove, Worcestershire

LEA area: Worcestershire

Unique reference number: 116957

Headteacher: Mr B Dinsdale

Reporting inspector: Mr G Knights
3268

Dates of inspection: 27th –30th November 2000

Inspection number: 223794

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Middle Deemed Secondary

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 9 - 13

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Drummond Road
Bromsgrove
Worcestershire

Postcode: B60 2ET

Telephone number: 01527 876026

Fax number: 01527 574798

Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs Jean Richardson

Date of previous inspection: June 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mr G Knights	Registered inspector	Mathematics Equal opportunities	The characteristics and effectiveness of the school and Key Issues for Action. What sort of school is it? How high are standards? – The school's results and achievements. How well are pupils taught?
Mrs C Hinds	Lay inspector		How high are standards? – 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? How well is the school led and managed?
Mrs S Richardson	Team inspector	Music	
Mrs D Sheffield	Team inspector	Design & technology	
Mr J Sheffield	Team inspector	Art	
Mr G McGinn	Team inspector	History	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
Mr M Davidson	Team inspector	Science Religious education	
Miss G Biscomb	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
Mr B Simmons	Team inspector	Physical education	
Miss L Tumman	Team inspector	Geography	
Mrs E Gillmon	Team inspector	Information and communications technology	
Mrs J Flisher	Team inspector	English English as an additional language	
Mrs J Marshall	Team inspector	French	

The inspection contractor was:

The Cambridgeshire Partnership
Business Centre
Suite 2, St. John's Court
East Street
St Ives
Cambridge PE17 4PD

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The Registrar
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House

33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This is a mixed comprehensive middle school for pupils aged 9 to 13 years of age. It is located to the south east of the centre of Bromsgrove in Worcestershire. Around four fifths of pupils live in the locality of the school. The school is over-subscribed and numbers on roll have risen since the previous inspection. There are now 613 pupils on roll, which is much larger than the majority of middle schools nationally. Pupils of all abilities attend the school and come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. Only three pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and have English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils on the school's special educational needs register, at 19.7 per cent, is close to the national average, but the percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs, at 1.1 per cent, is below the national average. Almost all pupils transfer, at the end of Year 8, to a 13 to 18 high school within the pyramid of local schools.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Aston Fields Middle School is a good school which continues to provide an effective education for all its pupils. It has many strengths and some areas where improvements are necessary in order to sustain developments. Standards are improving and pupils learn well as a result of consistently good teaching. Leadership and management together ensure a climate where each individual is valued and where all are committed to one another. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- The school lives out its aims, especially in terms of promoting the academic development of each individual pupil.
- Pupils achieve well as a consequence of much good, and some very good, teaching.
- The school fosters very good attitudes to school and encourages good behaviour; these factors enable pupils to learn well.
- The contribution made to pupils' personal development is very good overall, and to their moral and social development is excellent.
- The range of activities in which pupils participate outside lessons enhances their enjoyment of school and enriches their curricular experiences.
- Very good links with parents enable them to support the school very well in helping their children make good progress.

What could be improved

- Having a clearer view about what the most important issues for development are, and involving the whole staff team in tackling them.
- Ensuring a better match of the budget to areas that will do most to improve standards, and evaluating how successful the school has been in its spending.
- Making better arrangements for keeping a check on how well each pupil is doing, and using this information to plan further improvements.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made satisfactory progress, overall, since the previous inspection. Standards have risen and teaching is now of a higher quality, leading to more successful learning. Good progress has been made in addressing the key issues identified in the previous report. Provision for information and communications technology (ICT) has been much improved, with better equipment, better provision in discrete ICT lessons and better staff expertise. The work to develop ICT across the curriculum has not, however, been successful. Homework is now better organised than at the time of the previous inspection. There is a clear rationale, which is made known to parents, and homework makes a positive contribution to pupils' learning throughout the school. Good work has been undertaken to ensure that higher attaining pupils are now appropriately challenged in their lessons. Progress has been slow in a number of areas identified within the text of the previous report and they have thus become key issues following this inspection. These particularly relate to decision-making, to the monitoring and evaluation of aspects of the school's work and to the collection and analysis of data on pupils' performance in order

to guide planning and development. The school does not now ensure that all pupils have a daily act of collective worship.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
English	C	C	C	C
Mathematics	C	D	C	C
Science	C	B	B	B

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

At the end of Key Stage 2, standards in English and mathematics are in line with the national average and the average for similar schools, while standards in science are above the national and similar school averages. Overall standards in English, mathematics and science have risen in the five year period to 2000. In all three subjects, the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 or above was above the national average, indicating that the school is attending well to its brightest pupils. Pupils currently in the school are achieving well in most subjects.

Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3 and, when they leave the school at the end of Year 8, they are achieving standards in English, mathematics and science which are above the national average for children of this age. Similarly, good progress is made in most other subjects during Years 7 and 8. Throughout the school, pupils' literacy and numeracy standards are good and the introduction of the national strategies for literacy and numeracy has had a positive impact.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils adopt very positive attitudes to their work. They eagerly engage in the wide range of opportunities which the school provides.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils behave very well in lessons and are careful, considerate and sensible in their behaviour around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils are given a wide range of opportunities to take responsibility and to act maturely, and they respond positively to these. Relationships, both among pupils and between teachers and pupils, are very good.
Attendance	Attendance is above the national average and has improved in the past year. Punctuality to lessons is also good.

The school aims to help pupils enjoy school and, in this, they are being very successful. The school is a harmonious community, characterised by high levels of respect, care and concern. Pupils are very keen to settle to both work and play and this makes a very positive contribution to the good progress they make in their learning and to very good personal development. Good levels of attendance also help ensure that pupils make the most of what the school has to offer them.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 9 - 11 years	aged 11 - 13 years
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Lessons seen overall	Good	Good
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Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The quality of teaching has improved since the time of the previous inspection. Teaching in both key stages is good or better in 80 per cent of lessons and is very good or excellent in 33 per cent of lessons. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection. Teaching in English is good or better in almost all lessons, whilst in mathematics it is good or better in three fifths of lessons. Science teaching is good or better in three quarters of lessons and is very good in around half of all lessons. Elsewhere, teaching is particularly good in music and history, and is good in almost all other subjects. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, and many share the objectives of lessons with pupils, giving good contexts for learning. Teachers use an interesting variety of styles and methods to enrich pupils' learning. Homework significantly enhances learning in lessons. Literacy is being taught well, both in English and other subjects, and a good contribution is being made to the improvement of pupils' skills in numeracy. Whilst information and communication technology (ICT) lessons are successful, teachers in other subjects do not use ICT skills and experiences sufficiently for pupils to apply their learning across the curriculum.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum at both key stages meets all the requirements of the National Curriculum. Good progress has been made in adopting the revised National Curriculum which has recently been introduced. The school offers pupils the opportunity to start studying French in Year 6, thus giving them a good grounding for their study of this subject in Key Stage 3. The school offers a good programme of personal, social and health education and meets the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus for religious education.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The school makes good provision for these pupils by identifying their particular needs and modifying the work accordingly.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	There are only a very few pupils with English as an additional language. None of these is at an early stage of English language acquisition and all are well integrated into classes. They are all making good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school makes very good provision, overall, for pupils' personal development. The contribution made to pupils' social and moral development is excellent.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares for its pupils well. Arrangements for ensuring children's welfare are very good, as are procedures for monitoring attendance and behaviour. Arrangements for the assessment of pupils' work are satisfactory, but lack whole school coordination in terms of tracking performance, analysing data and using it to guide planning and development.

The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities. These include many clubs and groups particularly, but not exclusively, in the areas of sport and music, and a good variety of trips, visits and visitors to school. The school is a caring community, made up of individuals who care deeply about the education and development of the pupils. The school keeps parents well informed and encourages them to become actively involved in the education of their children. Many parents respond very positively to this encouragement. The quality of links between the school and its partner first and high schools is

exemplary, ensuring a good flow of information and making sure that the curriculum in each phase of education complements that in the others.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school is effectively led and managed. Teachers are encouraged and enabled to work well, both individually and in groups, and there is a high level of commitment among staff. There is insufficient overall accountability to ensure that the current good work in the school is maintained.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are active in undertaking their duties and are clear about the school's strengths. They are not yet fully involved in identifying priorities for development, nor in evaluating the impact of their decisions. They fulfil all statutory responsibilities, except for ensuring that all pupils have a daily act of collective worship.
The school's evaluation of its performance	This is an emerging area. Some good work has been undertaken to monitor teaching, but the school lacks sufficient rigour in its systems for evaluating its work, especially in the areas of cost effectiveness and relative performance.
The strategic use of resources	Overall, the school makes satisfactory use of its resources.

The school succeeds because all who work there are encouraged and enabled to get on with their work. Limited resources mean that staff have to work hard, often with very large classes, and this they do readily. Resources are generally adequate, though the number of computers available is insufficient, and accessibility to them is inadequate. The school is very full. A building programme, currently under way, will improve specialist facilities in several subjects and accessibility to computer use in a range of subjects. School development planning, though thorough in many respects, does not sufficiently involve all members of the staff team and governors in deciding priorities. Procedures for evaluating the impact of budget decisions are not sufficiently rigorous. The school is thus only part way toward applying the principles of best value to its work.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Thirty parents attended a meeting with the Registered Inspector prior to the inspection and 57 per cent of parents returned a questionnaire expressing their views about the school.

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children like the school and are making good progress, as a result of good teaching. Pupils' behaviour is good and the school helps pupils to become mature and responsible. The school works closely with parents and keeps them well informed about how well their children are getting on. Parents are comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A small but significant number of parents are concerned about the amount of homework given to pupils – some considering that the school gives too much, whilst others believe that the amount is too little.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school expects children to work hard and do their best. • The school is well led and managed. • The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons. | |
|---|--|

Inspectors agree with the positive views which parents hold about the school. They do not share the concern of a minority of parents about the amount of homework provided for pupils. The school has done much to improve homework arrangements and keeps parents well informed about these. The amount of homework set builds up over the four years the pupils are in school, both in terms of quality and the range of subjects in which it is set. Tasks set are generally well linked to classwork and, overall, homework makes a positive contribution to pupils' learning.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

- 1 The attainment of pupils on entry to the school at the beginning of Year 5 is broadly in line with national expectations. Records of pupils, transferred from first schools, are set alongside the informal assessments made in each subject to provide a benchmark against which progress can be reviewed.
- 2 By the end of Key Stage 2, when pupils are 11 years of age, results in national tests in 2000 indicate that attainment in English and mathematics is in line with the national average, whilst attainment in science is above the national average. This represents an overall improvement in all three subjects during the past three years. Results in 2000 were in line with similar school averages in English and mathematics and above similar school averages in science. Results in all three subjects have also shown an improvement, in terms of average points scores, during the five year period from 1996 to 2000. In all three subjects, the proportion of pupils gaining Level 5 or above at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2000, was above the national average, indicating that the school is attending well to the needs of the higher attaining pupils. This is an improvement on the situation at the time of the previous inspection, when attention to the needs of the higher attaining pupils was identified as a key issue for the school. There are generally no significant differences in the overall attainment of boys and girls in any of the three core subjects, though writing standards among boys are lower than those of girls, as they are nationally.
- 3 The school sets targets for mathematics, English and science at the end of Key Stage 2. Suitably challenging, targets for 2000 were met in all three subjects. The targets set for English and mathematics for 2001 and 2002 are higher, anticipating further improvement, whilst those in science anticipate a continuation of good performance.
- 4 On the basis of inspection findings, pupils currently in the school are achieving well and are performing above the level of national expectations in English, mathematics and science. The introduction of the national strategies for literacy and numeracy has been a significant factor in helping pupils to make good progress in English and mathematics, while improvements in science provision have been a major factor in helping improve science standards.
- 5 In other subjects in the curriculum, pupils are achieving well in music, art, geography and history where they are reaching standards which are, overall, above the level of national expectations. In physical education and design and technology, pupils' achievements are close to national expectations, as they are in discrete information

and communications technology (ICT) lessons. Pupils are able to start their study of French in Year 6 and they make good progress during this year, establishing a good base for their work in Key Stage 3. The attainment of pupils in religious education is average in all key elements of the locally Agreed Syllabus.

- 6 By the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8, they have made good progress in their learning and are achieving standards in English, mathematics and science which are above national expectations. For pupils who left Aston Fields in 1999, the percentages gaining Level 5 or above in all three subjects at the end of Key Stage 3 in their high school were above the national average. This good progress is borne out by inspection findings.
- 7 Good progress in Key Stage 3 enables pupils to leave school at the end of Year 8 attaining above national expectations in music, art, geography, history, physical education and French, and in line with national expectations in design and technology and ICT. Standards in religious education are in line with the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus.
- 8 Literacy skills throughout the school are generally good. Pupils are keen readers; most carry a reading book with them and often read voluntarily in registration time. They can work with books in a variety of ways because their teachers actively teach skills such as skimming and scanning and give them opportunities to practise them. Pupils' writing skills are good. High attaining pupils in both Key Stage 2 and 3 use a wide range of styles. They make up imaginative stories that engage the reader's attention. They know how to write factual reports, newspaper articles, and persuasive, critical or evaluative essays. Spelling and punctuation are reasonably accurate. Pupils take great care with handwriting and work is always attractively presented.
- 9 Numeracy skills are developing well, especially in Key Stage 2. Pupils are developing considerable confidence in mental calculation and their improving ability to describe their work is helping them gain a better understanding of mathematical ideas. In other subjects, pupils' numerical and graphical skills ensure that they are able to make good progress in science and they have good opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in design and technology and in geography. The development of pupils' ICT skills is good in lessons in the subject, but there are too few opportunities for pupils to apply their skills to support learning in other subjects or to develop a good grasp of the contexts in which their ICT skills would be further enhanced.
- 10 The most able pupils are reaching standards which are above those expected of pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 in English, mathematics and science. Boys generally achieve less well than girls, but no less well than boys do nationally. In some subjects, notably in history, some more able pupils are working well above expected levels during Years 7 and 8. There is a very small number of pupils in the school for whom English is an additional language. None of these is at an early stage of English language acquisition. All are well integrated into lessons, are making good progress and achieving good standards of work.
- 11 Roughly ten per cent of pupils have individual education plans and targets related to their special educational needs and, of these, seven pupils have statements of special educational need. For their age, their standards of achievement when they enter the school are generally below and, in some cases, well below the level expected. A further ten per cent of pupils cause some concern either because of behaviour or slow progress in learning and teachers are aware that extra support

might be needed at times. Most pupils with special educational needs make good progress through both key stages. A small number of pupils who are at a very early stage of reading and writing make slow progress in these skills, but good progress in their ability to talk about and to show an understanding of the work they are doing in lessons. In English, Year 7 pupils with special educational needs were, for example able to analyse a text in detail, remembering and interpreting the characters and events. In Year 5, pupils were able to separate fact from opinion and in Year 8 to find a selection of adjectives for an advertisement to attract a buyer for a castle; 'fabulous' was popular but also 'beautiful', 'lovely', 'eye-catching'. These pupils were also seen to be making good progress in mathematics, music, physical education and history.

- 12 Information from subject teachers, contributing to the annual reviews of progress of the pupils with statements of special educational needs, shows that the majority of these pupils make steady progress towards their targets for learning and behaviour. The good progress in lessons is due both to the skilled teaching and to the pupils' willingness to learn. Whilst the progress of pupils with special educational needs is good overall, writing is an area of weakness for many. They have poor control of a pen or pencil, sometimes holding it incorrectly, and some have not moved beyond the printing stage. Although this is recognised and addressed by teachers who provide work which is not too demanding, the basic skill is not being improved at an early stage. This limitation reduces the pupils' ability to put their ideas and knowledge down on paper and, as they go through the school, they become more reluctant to write.
- 13 The generally good progress made by all pupils in the school is a direct consequence of the high level of commitment of individual teachers. Care is taken to match work to the needs of pupils and, in the majority of subjects, clear objectives are shared with pupils at the start of each lesson. In the best lessons, teachers carefully review with pupils how well they have done and this ensures that pupils are aware both of their progress and of what they need to do to improve still further. In turn this encourages pupils to adopt positive attitudes to their studies.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

- 14 Aston Fields aims to help pupils enjoy school. The school regards this as an important factor in stimulating the children's appetite for learning. Teachers are very successful in achieving this aim, a feature recognised and valued by parents. Pupils talk animatedly about their lessons and the wide range of other activities available to them. Boys and girls were eager, for example, to start their tag rugby session at lunchtime. They thoroughly enjoy all the House sporting and musical activities. Eager participation in artistic and scientific competitions is a significant feature of school life. Pupils take great pleasure from both their work and play at Aston Fields.
- 15 These very positive attitudes are apparent as pupils arrive at school and as they enter classrooms, eager to begin their work. Their readiness to get pens and books out was apparent in many lessons. Year 6 pupils in a mathematics lesson carefully displayed their own number cards and arrows on their desks ready to start their mental work. This diligent and conscientious approach often develops into enthusiasm for learning. Another Year 6 class was buzzing with excitement as pupils shared their ideas about how smoking could be controlled. Lots of hands were raised to answer questions.
- 16 Pupils are invariably eager to settle to their own work, whether in written tasks or practical activities and they work quietly and conscientiously. Pupils in a Year 6

literacy lesson, for instance, were diligently contrasting two poems or completing their own versions of a Ted Hughes poem. This absorption allowed the teacher to concentrate on another group at the flip chart. These very positive attitudes help pupils learn well. The occasions when pupils' attitudes are not so focused on work are very rare indeed and do not impede the overall progress which is made in the school.

- 17 Pupils also behave very well in lessons. The school's clear code of conduct allows and enables the whole community to get on with the business of learning. When pupils are required to sit and work quietly, they do so willingly and calmly. When lessons demand more activity pupils revel in exploiting the opportunities provided, without taking undue advantage of the freedom they are given.
- 18 Pupils are careful and considerate as they move around the school. The school is on several levels and a major building programme is under way on the school site. Pupils nevertheless show high levels of awareness of the needs of others as they cope with these situations. Doors are held open for others and pupils wait patiently for other children and adults to pass through. They adhere to the one-way system on the stairs. Almost all the pupils are cautious and sensible as they move around the very muddy grounds created by the building works. The behaviour of most of the pupils in the playground is good, and breaks are therefore joyful occasions where youngsters play energetically and happily.
- 19 A very small number of pupils find conforming to the school's expectations difficult but their occasionally unsatisfactory behaviour does not affect the progress which other pupils are making. Nor does it upset the genuinely harmonious atmosphere of the school. Only two pupils were permanently excluded last year. Pupils respond very well to the school's very good arrangements to promote an environment free from bullying. Bullying is rare and pupils rightly feel confident that when it does occur it will be handled quickly, carefully and sensitively.
- 20 The school rightly prides itself on being a 'caring school-family community'. The school has successfully created a very harmonious and caring atmosphere which fosters a sense of responsibility and citizenship. Pupils get on very well together. In an extremely good Year 6 assembly focused on happiness, many pupils commented in front of everyone that it was their school friends who made them happy. Pupils work very well together in lessons. Year 7 dancers, for example, co-operated well as they created group sequences based on a boredom theme. Pupils are also very supportive of, and sympathetic towards, the less able. No-one ridiculed others when their pitch was 'way off' in a music lesson, for instance. All their classmates clearly listened to children who experienced difficulty reading patiently and sensitively.
- 21 The relationship between boys and girls and between older and younger pupils is equally relaxed and supportive. Lunchtime tag rugby, for example, is thoroughly enjoyed by a large group of Years 5 and 6 boys and girls. Older pupils help their younger counterparts in the library at lunchtime and Year 8 pupils helped new Year 5 pupils familiarise themselves with the school and its routines at the start of the school year.
- 22 Members of this community appreciate the needs, feelings and experiences of others. Year 8 English pupils studying love sonnets were, for example, discussing love with sensitivity and maturity. Their faces showed real empathy and understanding as they reflected on death and touched on the lives of Victorian children. Pupils are alert to opportunities to actively and materially support those temporarily or permanently

disadvantaged. They commit considerable time and energy to fund raising for others, often organising their own activities. Year 5 are currently organising a stamp appeal, joining the Blue Peter national campaign.

- 23 The personal development of the pupils at Aston Fields is very good. They are therefore able to make critical judgements about themselves and their relationships with others. They take responsibility for themselves, their possessions and their life in school. One hundred and fifty pairs of shoes are instantly removed and carefully lined up outside the gymnasium for year group assemblies. The speedy collection of the correct pair at the end is a highly impressive operation. Site staff maintain the school in very good condition, and many pupils play an active part by willingly performing litter duty.
- 24 Pupils embrace the many opportunities which the school provides for them to take responsibility for aspects of school life. Many of the Year 8 pupils are prefects. They ably fulfil a wide range of duties which support the school's smooth operation. Prefects are dutiful and responsive in their care of younger pupils moving around the school. Particularly impressive is their alertness to potential hazards. One prefect was observed suggesting a shoe-lace be tied. Others urged caution as younger children were tempted to run along muddy paths. Pupils are proud to belong to their respective Houses and identify closely with House success. The announcement of weekly House Point winners is anticipated with excitement and interest. House captains fulfil their leadership roles well. The composure of almost all of the pupils in the school, as they experience school life, is impressive. Aston Fields pupils are friendly, sensible and charming young people.
- 25 Another factor contributing to the good standards achieved by the pupils is their good attendance. The school has worked very hard and successfully to secure improvement in attendance rates since the previous inspection. It is to the pupils' and school's credit that many classes had almost full attendance during the inspection week itself. Pupils want to come to school. This very positive approach of the pupils supports their good attendance and prompt arrival to school and to individual lessons.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

- 26 The overall quality of teaching in the school is good and has improved since the previous inspection. Teaching is good or better in four fifths of all lessons and is very good or excellent in about one third. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during this inspection. There is little difference in teaching quality between the two key stages. This good teaching overall is the main reason why pupils learn well in the school and make good progress.
- 27 Teaching is good overall in English, mathematics and science. In English, teaching is good or better in almost all lessons, with half of all teaching in Key Stage 3 being very good. In mathematics, teaching is good or better in three fifths of lessons, and is slightly better in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 3. In both English and mathematics, as in many other subjects, the quality of teachers' questioning is a major factor in helping pupils to learn well. Teachers vary the nature of the questions they ask to enable all pupils to respond according to their ability, and much questioning probes and provokes in ways which encourage pupils to talk confidently about their work. This leads to good gains in understanding. In science, teaching is good in three quarters of lessons and very good overall in half.

- 28 Across other subjects of the curriculum, teaching is particularly good in music, where it is never less than very good and in history, where teaching is at least very good in over half of lessons. In these subjects, teaching is sometimes excellent. Teaching is very good in two thirds of French lessons and in two fifths of lessons in personal, social and health education. Teaching is good in all religious education lessons and in the majority of lessons in art, geography, design and technology and physical education. In information and communications technology (ICT), teaching is good or better in over half of lessons. In both ICT and design and technology, teaching is better in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 3, but there is little variation between key stages in other subjects.
- 29 Teachers generally have good expectations of what pupils will achieve. Expectations are frequently translated into clear objectives for lessons. These objectives are made known to pupils, either by discussing them or by displaying them in classrooms. Frequent reference to objectives during lessons, together with discussion of the progress that pupils have made toward achieving them, makes a significant contribution to helping pupils learn. Pupils have a clear grasp of the purposes of their work, they are encouraged to become constructively critical of what they are achieving and they are able to be clear about the progress they are making. In turn, this helps to motivate them as they recognise their successes.
- 30 Most lessons are well planned. Care is taken to ensure that the needs of individual pupils are met, even in subjects where pupils are grouped according to ability. Many examples were seen of teachers providing tasks of varying levels of difficulty and this meant that all pupils were given tasks that were achievable but which also challenged them and helped them improve their knowledge and understanding of what they were studying. This careful match of work to the needs of individuals, and especially of the higher attaining pupils, is a significant reason for the overall improvement in teaching since the previous inspection. The planning of lessons extends, in most subjects, to ensuring that tasks and activities are appropriate for the objectives and this helps maintain good levels of interest and concentration amongst pupils.
- 31 A feature of almost all lessons is the very good relationships between pupils and teachers. This helps foster a spirit of enjoyment in learning and encourages pupils to collaborate well. Teachers organise classrooms well and this is particularly important where space is limited by some classes which have well over thirty pupils in them. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour in lessons very well, and this, too, contributes to the very constructive atmosphere which exists in lessons. Good use is made of the resources and equipment available, and pupils show high levels of responsibility when handling these.
- 32 The marking of pupils' work is undertaken conscientiously, though there is significant variation in the quality of what teachers record on pupils' work, both within and between subjects. Occasionally, marking merely indicates that the teacher has seen the work, but much marking is of exemplary quality. In this marking, teachers provide detailed comments on the extent to which pupils are achieving their targets in their work, together with clear guidance to pupils on what, specifically, they can do to improve the standard of their work. Through both marking and discussion, many teachers thus help pupils gain a good knowledge of their learning and some teachers are beginning to encourage pupils to become involved in self-assessment. Many teachers modify lessons, taking account of their assessments of the progress that pupils are making, and this helps ensure that pupils are able to work at an appropriate pace.

- 33 Since the previous inspection, considerable attention has been paid to the development of a homework programme. The school now has a clear rationale for setting tasks for pupils to do outside the classroom, and this is made known to parents. A homework timetable provides a clear framework for setting tasks and, generally, teachers provide activities which are interesting, challenging and which build on work done in lessons. This work is reviewed by teachers and followed up in later lessons. A minority of parents expressed concern about aspects of homework arrangements but their concerns are largely unfounded. The extent and range of work set to do at home is carefully built up as pupils move through the school and, overall, homework makes a positive contribution to pupils' attainment and progress.
- 34 There is some very good teaching and learning for the most able pupils, with some of teachers being particularly aware of, or planning for, those who are capable of making faster progress than others in the group. There are, for example, opportunities for investigation and research in history and more demanding work in some mathematics lessons in some year groups, but insufficient attention is paid to the needs of the more able pupils in design and technology or ICT.
- 35 During the inspection, teaching in all lessons for pupils with special educational needs was at least satisfactory, with some good or very good lessons. Teachers are aware of the targets set in the pupils' education plans and the work planned is appropriate, with a variety of activities and demands. Questions are well-phrased so that pupils are encouraged to think. In the best lessons, pupils know at the start of the lesson what is to be learned and at the end of the lesson there is an assessment of how successful they have been. In some good lessons it is recognised that pupils make progress at different speeds and groups work at different tasks within the overall theme of the lesson. Pupils are expected to work without the teacher at times, whilst another group is helped with a particular skill. This helps pupils to take responsibility for their own work and also to help each other. It also enables the teacher to reinforce points for some pupils rather than with the whole class. In many lessons, the excellent relationships between teachers and pupils with special educational needs help to overcome the occasional loss of concentration or demanding behaviour of some pupils. The classroom assistants who work with pupils with special educational needs are well-informed and experienced in working in support in the classroom. They know what work is to be done and are sensitive and skilful in giving support to pupils and teachers.
- 36 Little use is made of information and communication technology to support the work of pupils with special educational needs in literacy and numeracy. The presentation of work is often poor because of pupils' limited writing skills, and greater use of word processing would enable them to present their ideas in a satisfying way. Learning programs are available in school, but computers are not in the rooms where they could be used to the best advantage. This is a limitation which restricts the learning possibilities for pupils with special educational needs

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

- 37 The school's organisation of the curriculum and the provision of other opportunities for learning make a good and valuable contribution to educational standards. They help to fulfil the school's aims of promoting the 'full personal, intellectual, social and physical development of all the pupils' and to fostering a strong sense of moral values and good behaviour.

- 38 The curriculum is broad and balanced, including all subjects of the revised National Curriculum, plus religious education and personal, social and health education. At Key Stage 2, teaching is in mixed ability tutor groups, except for English and mathematics, where classes are set. There is specialist teaching in such subjects as science, music, religious education, physical education, information and communications technology (ICT), and in French, which commences in Year 6. At Key Stage 3, all subjects except personal, social and health education are taught by specialists. Drama is taught as a separate subject. Setting continues in English and mathematics, some subjects have banding by ability, while art, music, religious and physical education, design and technology, ICT and personal and social education are taught in mixed ability form groups.
- 39 The school has made positive steps to address the criticisms made in the last report. Teaching time has been increased at both key stages to 24.5 hours. ICT is now taught as a separate lesson in all years, thus providing good learning opportunities and now meeting statutory requirements. However, opportunities to apply ICT skills to support learning in other subjects are very limited. The balance of time to different subjects is now good overall, with the allocation to science having been increased to twelve per cent. Time allocations to music and design and technology, although slightly below recommended levels, are adequate and not affecting standards adversely. The purposes of homework have now been made clear and it is better organised, both in its consistency and range, and in involving the parents through a remodelled pupil diary.
- 40 The curriculum at both key stages meets statutory requirements in all subjects. Statutory requirements for the provision of sex and health education are being met and the provision of religious education meets the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus. However, whilst assemblies provide pupils with an act of collective worship, this requirement is not being consistently implemented in all the morning tutor periods.
- 41 The school makes good provision for pupils identified as having special educational needs, involving outside agencies appropriately and meeting the requirements of statements and of annual reviews. Classes for English and mathematics are arranged so that groups of pupils with special educational needs are small and supported by learning support assistants. This enables most of these pupils to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. A small number of pupils make little progress in spelling and writing; for these pupils even well-planned lessons and skilful teaching are insufficient for them to improve those skills. ICT which would help to address some, though not all of these problems, is not available where it is needed to extend or consolidate pupils' learning.
- 42 Strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy skills are effective. The daily literacy hour in Years 5 and 6 provides a very good foundation for the development of pupils' literacy skills. Pupils are taught a range of strategies to help them understand what texts are really about. In many subjects they are presented with a wide range of texts, some quite difficult, and they read these with good understanding. Most subjects include teaching about writing. In science, pupils are taught how to write clear reports on their experiments. In English and history they learn how to make useful notes, and in music and design and technology they learn how to write evaluations of their practical work. Teachers stress correct spelling and punctuation, emphasise the importance of using the correct subject vocabulary and help pupils to improve their written work through careful marking. In mathematics, the successful introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy at Key Stage 2 has had a positive impact also in

Years 7 and 8, with a growing emphasis in lessons on developing pupils' skills in mental calculation and generally improving levels of pupils' confidence.

- 43 The arrangement of the curriculum ensures that there is equality of access and opportunity for pupils to learn and make progress. The school's aims show a clear recognition of the importance of equal opportunities in learning. No pupil is disadvantaged from the National Curriculum. There is generally a good match of teaching styles and materials to the needs of pupils, especially in English, mathematics, science, geography, history, French, music and physical education. However, in design and technology, materials are not appropriately matched to the needs of the mixed-ability groups and this is constraining the learning of lower attaining pupils. Also, the limited provision of ICT through other subjects limits access for all students to the full range of experiences in the subject. Access to multi-media activities and the Internet are only available to pupils in Key Stage 2, though the completion of the new technology block will address this. The school provides well for talented pupils in music, sport, dance, drama and the outdoor activity of orienteering, ensuring that there are opportunities outside the school in competitions and performances.
- 44 The curriculum is enriched by a very good provision of extra-curricular activities that extend the educational opportunities for the pupils. This is consistent with the situation at the time of the previous inspection and is a strength of the school. Pupils respond very well to the opportunities on offer and participation rates are high. There are museum and theatre trips to places such as Stratford and London. There are regular concerts, an annual musical production and the school's fine choir and orchestra have performed in the national Schools Choirs Festival. Pupils are actively involved in charity work such as raising money for the Mozambique Appeal, Children In Need and the Blue Cross. Fieldwork trips to Malvern for the whole of Year 8 and to Goodrich Castle for all in Year 7 support their work in history. In sport, there are many opportunities to join school teams and a wide range of lunchtime activities, in which four fifths of the pupils participate, helped by nearly half the staff. The school's rugby team has had much success in the district competitions and its tag-rugby side are regional champions. Many inter-school competitions promote sport to a high level. Year 7 pupils go sailing at Upton Warren and a group of twenty pupils regularly do orienteering at weekends.
- 45 The community is very well used to contribute to the pupils' learning. Information and publicity about community affairs and activities is well displayed in the school. Pupils visit three local churches, as well as a mosque, a synagogue and a temple in Wolverhampton as part of their studies in religious education. The good links with the local council promote awareness of environmental matters and a readiness of pupils to volunteer for litter-picking. The school frequently participates in local competitions, such as the science trek. There are strong links through the performing arts, for instance the County's 'Visions and Voices' and 'Skills on Show' concerts and the choir singing at the Primrose Hospice. Members of the community come into school to enhance pupils' learning, such as the police, fire officers and senior citizens to talk about the Second World War. A group of professional actors helps Year 5 pupils enjoy being Tudors during their 'Tudor Times' day.
- 46 The school, through its curriculum arrangements, makes very good provision for personal, social and health education. A very well organised personal social and health education programme is generally well taught as a separate timetabled lesson. It includes sex, health and drugs education, which the governors have approved. The

programme is regularly reviewed and monitored by the coordinator, as are the pupils' files. Plans are in hand to include citizenship, and staff are being trained.

- 47 There are very good links between the school and its partner schools, which contribute strongly to making a smooth transition in the curriculum. The school has a real commitment to ensuring continuity in pupils' learning. There is very good liaison with the first schools with a well-planned programme of transfer of assessment and curriculum data. The Year 5 coordinator visits the schools regularly to speak to the pupils. Liaison with the high schools is even stronger. There are twice-termly opportunities for heads of all subjects to meet with the high school coordinators to discuss curriculum and pupils' performance. The head of Year 9 from the high school visits the school regularly, attends Year 8 assemblies and lessons, often with two ex-pupils, to talk about life in the high school. Sixth form pupils, who are former members of the school, act as mentors to Aston Fields pupils when they start in Year 9. Staff also go for training to the high school. Headteachers in the three tier pyramid of partner schools meet termly and there is an effective tracking of pupil performance from Key Stage 2 through to A level. Such is the success of this good liaison that the schools are contributing to a national project on 'Transition and Transfer'.
- 48 The school's intentions for pupils' personal development, summarised in its aims, are realised very well: overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.
- 49 Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. Much is done to enable pupils to develop sensitivity to others, both in the day to day life of the school, and more widely, for example, by collections for charitable purposes. The ethos of the school is one where learning is enjoyed and pupils are able to express their insights and creativity during lessons, as in writing in English. The assemblies for large gatherings of pupils are of very good quality and meet the requirement for collective worship well. They contain interesting and thought-provoking contributions from staff, pupil involvement and opportunities for prayer and reflection. The same cannot be said of all the class assemblies. Here, some opportunities are missed to provide collective worship that meets national requirements in some classes. The curriculum makes a generally sound contribution to pupils' spiritual development, though more could sometimes be done to develop pupils' sense of curiosity and wonder.
- 50 Pupils' moral development is strongly catered for at the school. The example by adults of courteous and friendly behaviour sets high standards for the pupils to follow. Pupils are patiently taught how they should behave when, infrequently, they fail to rise to the school's high expectations of them. The low-key and well understood school rules, the work of class tutors, the personal, social and health education programme and the ethos of sustained work during lessons all contribute to this excellent provision for pupils' moral development. The school rightly places emphasis on pupils' self-discipline, supported by attentive supervision by teachers and midday supervisors. Pupils rise to this challenge. Care for the school's environment, building and resources is fostered so that the school is a pleasant place in which to work.
- 51 Pupils receive excellent support for their social development. The school has a strong sense of community: staff and pupils show a lively interest in each other's achievements, and there are strong links with pupils' parents. During lessons, pupils have frequent opportunities to work together in groups, and to listen to and learn from each other. They have plenty to do outside of lessons also, following interests and developing talents, particularly in sport and music. Visits to places of interest and residential experiences help pupils to practise and develop their social skills in other

contexts. Some pupils are able to experience aspects of citizenship by representing others in the house system, though this role is open only to those pupils who excel in sport and music. Year 8 pupils are helped to develop their leadership capabilities by performing various duties to contribute to the smooth running of the school and they show younger pupils how to behave in a mature way.

- 52 Overall, the provision for pupils' cultural development is good. The curriculum, through subjects such as English, French, geography and history, provides well in this respect, teaching pupils about their own culture and others also. Music makes a particularly strong contribution through classroom work for all pupils and the choir, orchestra, musical events and productions. Religious education, and also some assemblies, by teaching pupils about the beliefs and practices of faiths in addition to Christianity, make a valuable contribution to helping pupils understand the diversity of groups in British society. This aspect of the school's work is not developed, however, as well as it should be. The variety of cultures represented in Britain does not feature consistently enough in the school's work.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

- 53 The level of care which the school provides for its pupils is good. The framework which enables this high quality care is underpinned by very good relationships throughout the school. The harmonious atmosphere created ensures that all pupils quickly learn to feel secure in their environment. Parents are justifiably very appreciative of this feature of school life. The school has managed to retain its family atmosphere despite its increasing size.
- 54 The pastoral system is based on staff knowing the pupils very well. Very good transfer and induction arrangements ensure that pupils' needs are identified and supported by careful allocation to tutor groups. The Year 5 tutor team is well established and is skilled in providing for the needs of these youngest pupils. Year heads provide good leadership for their teams, giving sensitive guidance on the handling of a range of situations and circumstances. Registrations and tutor periods are generally used well to support pupils, although there is some variation in the quality of this provision. Very positive rapport between teacher and pupils was evident in a Year 6 tutor-led personal, social and health education lesson. One pupil felt sufficiently confident and secure to enable him to share his own experiences of resisting peer pressure.
- 55 Staff are clearly committed to meeting the needs of each individual pupil. Pupils are, in turn, confident that they will be given suitable help and support. Staff make good use of the many informal opportunities in school life to exchange information about particular pupils and situations. Formal opportunities, such as the weekly pastoral team meetings, are very well used to exchange information about individuals. The school has an extensive programme of meetings at year, management and pastoral group level. Pupils' personal and social needs are extensively discussed and plans of action usually identified. Notes are taken during meetings, but there is no shared record of decisions made and thus the actions required are not consistently taken, nor followed up in subsequent meetings.
- 56 All support staff in the school make positive contributions to pupils' welfare. Members of the office staff are friendly, caring and efficient as they tend the pupils' particular needs within the school's administration. The school works very well with other agencies. The very effective partnership with the school's attached Education Welfare Officer is helping to improve the pupils' attendance at school. These links

benefit the overall welfare of pupils experiencing difficulties as they progress through school.

- 57 The school has very good arrangements for promoting good behaviour and this ensures the civilised atmosphere which exists. The code of conduct is consistently applied and clearly understood by the school community. Promotional displays are exceptionally attractive and interesting. Almost all the pupils are committed to the school rules. Sanctions, including exclusion as the ultimate, are fairly and sensitively applied to those very few who do break the rules. House points and certificates are usually used well to motivate the pupils. On the rare occasions when bullying does occur, the school manages the situations, and those pupils involved, very well.
- 58 Attendance figures have improved since the last inspection. They are now good and still improving. This is partly a result of the increased vigour and rigour of all staff in fulfilling their attendance and absence responsibilities. It is also a result of the very good use of competition to stimulate the pupils' own commitment to good attendance.
- 59 Child protection arrangements are very good. Equally good arrangements exist for the care of sick and injured children. The school pays particularly careful attention to ensuring the health and safety of all children and the quality of this provision is very good. Risk assessments are carried out regularly and the governing body fulfils its health and safety responsibilities very well. There are areas of the school where the attention to health and safety is excellent. In the science department all staff are very diligent as they constantly remind pupils of the need for caution. Considering the very wet weather and the building works, the school is kept in remarkably good condition. This reflects the very high commitment of site staff to the welfare needs of all the school community.
- 60 Overall, procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are satisfactory. The school has a recently updated policy for assessment, recording and reporting which sets out a rationale and gives some guidance on procedures to be adopted for most of the major aspects, including marking and pupil self-assessment. A strong emphasis is placed on assessing and rewarding effort to raise pupils' self-esteem and to celebrate pupils' successes through the record of achievement processes. However, the assessment policy demands little of departments in terms of assessing and recording of pupils' academic attainment and links to National Curriculum attainment levels. Procedures for target setting and whole school systems for tracking pupil progress have not been consistently established.
- 61 A range of time-tabled, formal tests in the core subjects and the use of cognitive ability testing (CAT) allows some detailed academic records to be maintained for each pupil. The school has some arrangements in place to analyse the results of these assessments. However, comprehensive assessment data and information is not gathered and rigorously analysed to identify patterns in achievement, for example by gender, by ability groups or from subject to subject. In turn there is not sufficient guidance to enable teachers to take focused action where necessary to raise achievement.
- 62 There is some variation in the standards of day-to-day assessment and its effective use within and between departments. Practice is generally more effective in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science than in other subjects. The quality and consistency of marking of pupils' work across the school are also variable, with some teachers making full and valuable comments, including how pupils can improve their work, whilst others only give an effort grade or leave work unmarked. Limited

progress has been made since the previous inspection in establishing greater consistency across the school in the use of assessment to guide curriculum planning. Present practice is still variable. In French it is good, and it is satisfactory in English, mathematics, science, history and religious education, but in history, geography, information and communications technology, design and technology and art, assessments are not used effectively to inform subject planning.

- 63 The school takes very good care of pupils with special educational needs, involving them in setting and meeting targets, raising their self-esteem through recognising even small successes and providing skilled teaching and well-planned work. Teachers are provided with information from the special educational needs co-ordinator about each pupil, together with guidance on teaching approaches. Although the school is able to identify the needs of these pupils, and reviews their progress regularly, there is no record of progress through the key stages to show how much pupils with special educational needs have gained in knowledge and understanding in those areas of learning where they are below the expected level of achievement.
- 64 The assessment and reporting requirements of the National Curriculum at the end of Key Stage 2 are fully met. Reports to parents are well presented, informative and include reports on all subjects. Parents are given details on pupils' behaviour, involvement, organisation and homework, together with grades for effort and attainment and teachers' comments describing the pupils' strengths and areas for further improvement. There is also a separate sheet inviting parents to comment on the report received.
- 65 Good arrangements are in place for guiding pupils' personal development, whilst guidance in academic work and progress is satisfactory. The school has recently begun to timetable weekly sessions for teachers to hold tutorial sessions with their pupils. During the year, every pupil will be seen at least six times, on an individual basis, to discuss work and progress and to set targets for future work. Pupils and staff spoke very positively about the potential of this system. The atmosphere in these interviews is relaxed, purposeful, friendly and supportive. The interviews are already providing good opportunities for detailed discussion of individual pupil progress. Staff have been given a sheet of guidance on how to undertake these tutorials, but no specific training has been provided and there are no plans in place to share good practice. Tutorials provide good opportunities to discuss topics such as homework, attendance, interests and attitudes. Targets are beginning to be set for future improvement but these are often rather general and related to personal development. Tutors are not given the necessary information about the standards of work pupils are achieving in all subjects to make these tutorials successful in discussing progress and setting specific targets related to achievement and standards. Pupils do now complete a record of achievement, an improvement since the last inspection, but the school has no system for collecting, collating and analysing individual pupil results across all subjects and tracking them through the years. Some individual departments such as science, music, physical education, history and French make good use of information to guide pupils.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

- 66 The majority of parents are very supportive of the school. They recognise and applaud the good quality education it is providing for their children. They are rightly particularly appreciative of the good teaching at the school. The school aims to work together with parents and this it does very successfully. Overall, this very valuable

partnership with parents is ensuring that parents understand and are able to participate in their child's education.

- 67 The school welcomes its parents, and members of staff are open in their approach to parents. Staff commit significant amounts of time and energy to communicating with parents. They listen carefully to their queries and are diligent in following up concerns. The welcome extended to parents and visitors by the office staff is very friendly and efficient. This initial welcome is further enhanced by the attractive and interesting way the school presents itself. Displays in the entrance hall, main school hall and corridors are attractive, interesting and invigorating. The school is very well sign-posted, helping visitors feel comfortable in finding their way around. There is much evidence of the time and energy which the school continues to devote to ensuring that parents and visitors feel part of the community.
- 68 The school produces a very good range of general information for parents. The Prospectus is interesting and weekly newsletters give a more detailed picture of school life. Information sheets about homework for each year group are sent out at the beginning of each year. Project information sheets are also circulated. These explain projects clearly to parents and suggest ways in which parents could help and support their children in completing their studies.
- 69 Annual reporting systems are well organised. Parents are given timely opportunities for consultation about their child's progress. This is through consultation meetings and the opportunity to discuss the child's annual report. Reports give an overall impression of strengths and weaknesses of each pupil. Reporting of personal development, including comments on behaviour, organisation, homework and involvement in lessons, is good. Good reporting is evident in several subject areas such as mathematics, modern foreign languages and history, where information about subject specific skills is provided. The language used, and what this means to parents, is easier to understand in these particular subjects. Only in Years 5 and 6 is reporting of attainment matched to National Curriculum levels, though the school recognises the need to extend this practice into Years 7 and 8. Some parents have been requesting this information at parent interview evenings.
- 70 Parents are actively encouraged to involve themselves in the life of the school. Curriculum support is offered by a few parents who help with reading and practical activities. Parents are very willing to support children who need transport to sports matches and the many other competitions and events. Their support for school based activities, such as the recent production of 'Joseph', is enthusiastic and whole-hearted. The school benefits from the large amounts of money raised by the energetic and committed Parent Teacher Association. The pupil planners are attractive and functional. By giving details about homework, they help encourage parents to support their children's learning at home and are thus a useful tool for promoting the overall partnership with parents.
- 71 An outstanding part of the overall home-school partnership is the Parent Partnership Scheme. This is an excellent provision for the parents of children with special educational needs. Twice each term the school organises a session for these parents to come together at the school to discuss a wide range of topics, with recent sessions focussing on spelling and homework. As many as fifty parents attend these sessions and they are rightly fulsome in their praise for the school's understanding of their own needs.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

- 72 The school is effectively led and managed. The head teacher has a very clear vision for the school, which is articulated clearly in the school aims. He is well supported by senior colleagues who all share his vision. This vision is reflected very well throughout the school. It is epitomised, for example, by the notice 'You are now entering a learning zone' on one of the staircases. The endeavour to maintain the tradition of being a caring, school-family community, striving for excellence in every aspect of school life is very successful. The school fully meets its aim to make the needs of each individual a priority. High levels of desire to raise standards permeate all aspects of the school's work. Staff morale is high and everyone works together for the good of the whole community. As at the time of the previous inspection, there is a powerful sense of team spirit among the staff, which is felt and shared by pupils and their parents. This is shown in the way teachers willingly give up their time for pupils and help each other in many areas across the school. Almost half the staff, for example, support the physical education department with extra-curricular activities, and all staff were involved in the school's recent musical production. The school thus has a strong community ethos and identity, based upon the commitment of each individual member of staff to helping pupils do well at school.
- 73 Governors are committed to the school and proud of its very good reputation within the community. They are well informed about the way the school works and are able to articulate the school's strengths very well. They take an active interest in all the school activities, through formal meetings, through involvement with subject departments to which individual governors are linked, and through many informal links with the school. They have not been sufficiently involved in setting the strategic direction for the school and they are thus less aware of areas where improvement is needed. They ensure that the school meets most of its statutory responsibilities, but have not ensured that the school provides a daily act of collective worship for all its pupils.
- 74 The co-ordinator of the provision for pupils with special educational needs provides very good leadership and vision for this aspect of the school's work. She has built on the good work reported in the last inspection by involving subject and class teachers in a committee which disseminates ideas and information to their departments and year groups. She encourages teachers and support assistants to attend training courses and provides clear guidance on the ways to provide different experiences for pupils with special educational needs. She has built up a very successful link with parents through the Parent Partnership group with regular, well-attended meetings. Her work-load includes a good deal of administration to maintain the register and details of individual education plans for a large number of pupils. There is also little time for her to assess the work being done in the classrooms, and also that of the learning support assistants in order to identify and share the good practice to be found in different parts of the school. There are limited opportunities for her to meet the learning support assistants as a group, or to recognise their contribution to the school through discussions about their work. Despite these limitations, the work for pupils with special educational needs is a strength of the school, but has the potential to be even more effective.
- 75 The school is beginning to evaluate its performance and to use data to analyse results. Individual departments are attempting to monitor their performance, but there is neither whole school guidance nor frameworks for supporting this work. As at the time of the previous inspection, there is no requirement for heads of subjects to provide detailed analysis for the headteacher or governors. Thus no systematic review is undertaken in order to identify those subjects or groups of pupils which are

being more or less successful. Too much responsibility lies with individual heads of department who, whilst they are genuinely committed to trying to improve, lack the necessary guidance to ensure that they are successful. A programme of monitoring and development of teaching is being implemented, but practice varies considerably from department to department. It is good in English and geography but unsatisfactory in science, art, religious education, design and technology and information and communications technology. There is similar inconsistency in the review of attainment in different subjects.

- 76 The school development plan provides a review of work undertaken in recent years and sets out a programme of activity for the current academic year in the form of a list of those activities that the headteacher, with the agreement of staff and governors, feels the school needs to achieve. This list is not placed in priority order. The activities are based on a blend of national and school-specific initiatives. The development of performance management arrangements exemplifies the former. school-specific initiatives include implementing a safe and successful building programme and extending and further developing the school's use of information and communications technology in both curriculum and administration. The effectiveness of the school development planning process is, however, limited. There is insufficient consultation with staff and governors about the core content. Targets for improvement and the actions needed to stimulate improvement are confused, and the items in the agenda are not set in priority order. The plan lacks any detail of the anticipated impact of its actions on standards or provision and there is no information about how the programme will be evaluated. Although there is a commitment to linking the development planning and budget setting processes, there is insufficient costing of initiatives in the plan to guide the drawing up of the budget. The resources needed for an action which would, for example, require the appointment of an additional teacher to the school was merely recorded as 'time'.
- 77 Each department is required to produce its own annual development plans. Heads of department show commitment and loyalty to their departments and a willingness to plan for improvement. Many transfer this willingness to precise and relevant courses of action, which are often successfully implemented. The commitment to improvement and capacity to succeed is particularly good in English, science, history and French, and is outstanding in the special educational needs department. However the limited whole school approach to development planning restricts the effectiveness of planning in individual departments. Departmental plans are not well coordinated with whole school priorities and heads of department lack the training, guidance and support necessary for them to make best use of their own departmental planning and review processes. The school benefits from the many good ideas which are initiated and implemented at departmental level. However there is no structured means of ensuring the visibility of these, nor to share them more widely.
- 78 Informal communication within the school is very effective. The staff operate as a cohesive unit and constantly share information with one another. Formal opportunities to discuss are planned and timetabled regularly. Pastoral teams, management teams and senior management meet weekly or fortnightly. Agendas are prepared for these meetings and staff are fully committed to these meetings. As at the time of the previous inspection, records of decisions made in meetings are neither made nor communicated to those who need to know. This leads to a lack of clarity throughout the school in decision-making, which has the overall effect of slowing the pace of change and development.

- 79 Administration in the school works very well. Staff are highly competent and introduce their own systems to support the work of the school. The identification of a colour for each year group, which remains the same as the group progresses through the school, is one example of a clear and rationalised approach. Even the homework letters for parents go out in the appropriate colour.
- 80 The budget is set annually by the governing body, after review of recommendations by the headteacher and a consideration of the content of the school development plan. Governors are aware of the balance of expenditure in the budget between different items, but do not have robust arrangements for ensuring that the proportions of the budget spent on different items are appropriate. There are no arrangements for reviewing the cost-effectiveness of spending decisions, mainly because there are no clearly articulated intended outcomes of actions in the school. A good example of this is that governors have no arrangements in place to evaluate the impact of establishing a pupil tutoring programme in school, the cost of which is equivalent to an additional teacher. Day to day administration of finances is tight and well managed. Governors regularly review expenditure patterns and necessary virement between budget headings is well controlled. All matters identified for attention in the most recent auditor's report have been dealt with appropriately.
- 81 The school has sufficient well-qualified and experienced teachers to teach the National Curriculum in all subjects apart from design and technology. In this subject, in spite of much effort by the school, it has been difficult to appoint specialist trained teachers. The difficulties the school had in staffing provision for ICT, mentioned in the last report, has now been overcome. There is a good balance of both men and women teachers and those who have been primary and secondary trained. Teachers are effectively deployed to make the most of their expertise and experience and this contributes well to the good quality of teaching and learning. Teachers work hard, both in timetabled lessons and in the time they give to extra-curricular activities.
- 82 Newly qualified and newly appointed staff are effectively supported through a well structured induction programme. Arrangements for the professional development of staff are well managed and monitored by a senior member of staff. In-service training provision reflects the priorities for school improvement that are contained in the school development plan. Full records of in-service courses attended by staff are maintained. Arrangements are being put in place for the implementation of a performance management policy but there remains a considerable amount of work to be done if its implementation is to meet the national timescale.
- 83 The school is well served by its support, administrative and site staff. The administrative staff team are very helpful and make a most welcoming first impression to the school for both parents and visitors. The science technician and librarian make a good contribution to the progress of the pupils but there is no technician support for either design and technology or ICT. This means that teaching staff frequently devote time to routine technical tasks when this time should be focused on activities related to teaching and to subject management.
- 84 The present accommodation, although barely adequate for the increasing school population, is clean, well maintained and in good order. The majority of permanent and temporary buildings provide an effective and very pleasant learning environment. All present buildings are used well and, where possible, all year groups are based together. Corridor space and areas between buildings allow easy access and freedom of movement around the school. Displays in most classrooms and around the school are very good.

- 85 Some individual teaching areas are too small, but the comprehensive building programme, now under way and due for completion in September 2001, will increase space and provide specialist facilities in areas where there are, at present, inadequacies. Provision for science, ICT, music, art, design and technology and the library will be considerably enhanced. The whole community is coping very well in the interim period while building work continues. The external environment is well maintained, and there are adequate green and hard areas for sports and recreational activities. The school provides a pleasant, welcoming and safe environment for all.
- 86 Most departments are generally well resourced, the only major concern being the extent to which each department can gain access to computers to support learning. The school is aware of this problem and plans are in place, associated with the current building programme, to bring about an improvement within the next year. Departments are provided with additional funding when particular developments are taking place. For example, there have been increases in funding recently for English and mathematics departments to support the implementation of national strategies for literacy and numeracy.
- 87 The present library, while carrying more than the recommended stock of books for the number of pupils, is too small for the size of the school and for current requirements. Many books are kept within departments for easier access. There is good liaison with the county library service, ensuring a regular supply of up-to-date reference and fiction books. The new library will be used as a learning resource centre with electronic records and internet access and with more space for study and for reading for pleasure. The school has appointed a library assistant with particular responsibility for helping pupils to use the library effectively for their learning and development, and this is having a positive impact.
- 88 There are good computer resources within the ICT department. Resources for the use of ICT across the curriculum are more limited, with some departments making hardly any use of computers in their own subjects. Better use is made of the digital and video cameras. The present library will become an ICT suite as part of the current building programme. Parents, through the work of the Parent Teacher Association, have helped a great deal in the provision of resources, including computers.
- 89 The school has made some progress toward seeking to apply the principles of 'best value'. Consultation processes with parents are good and with staff and governors are satisfactory, though are limited by the lack of clarity about where responsibility for decision-making following consultation lies. Pupils are consulted informally through tutor group and other arrangements. The school seeks to review how well it is doing when compared with other schools, and is helped in this by data provided by the Local Education Authority. There are no formal systems for comparing the performance of different subjects in school, however. There is a significant lack of mechanisms through which heads of department can be held to account for work in their subjects. The development of systems to challenge practice and performance in the school, and to compete, are thus limited. The lack of success criteria in school and departmental development plans is indicative of a limited awareness of the need to ensure that what is being undertaken is being effective.
- 90 The school has, overall, made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection. Standards, as indicated by both end of key stage assessments at the end of Key Stage 2 and evidence from work in lessons, have improved since the previous

inspection. Teaching is better now than previously. Good progress has been made in addressing the main key issues identified in the previous report. Where progress has been slow is in a number of aspects of management, identified within the text of the previous report and not attended to, to the point where they have now become key issues for action. These particularly relate to decision-making processes, and the need to communicate the outcomes of decisions to others, to monitoring and evaluation of aspects of the school's work, and to securing good value-added measures.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

91 In order to raise levels of attainment of all pupils in the school and to improve overall provision, attention should be given to the following issues:

Improve the processes of strategic planning in the school, by:

- Involving the staff team and governors more fully in identifying and planning whole school priorities for development;
- Involving the whole staff team in implementing priorities;
- Providing, within a school management plan, clear measures of success which indicate the intended outcomes, in terms of improvements in standards and provision. *(Paragraphs 73, 76, 77, 80, 89)*

Ensure better cost-effectiveness, by:

- Providing better systems for matching spending priorities in the budget to areas which will do most to improve standards and enhance provision;
- Ensuring that governors evaluate the impact of their spending decisions. *(Paragraphs 75, 76, 80)*

Make more effective use of data on pupil attainment and progress to guide planning, by:

- Establishing and maintaining better systems for measuring the attainment and progress of each pupil in each subject;
- Providing an efficient system for the collection and analysis of this data, using computer technology where appropriate;
- Training staff in interpreting and using the information arising from this analysis;
- Establishing a whole school system for comparing performance from subject to subject in order better to target resources and support on areas which are under-achieving. *(Paragraphs 60, 61, 62, 65, 75, 89, 109, 120, 130, 136, 146, 172)*

The following additional issues should be included by the school in their action plan:

Improve provision for information and communication technology (ICT), by:

- Ensuring that all pupils have the opportunity to apply their ICT skills in all subjects and to use ICT to support learning in these subjects;
- Ensuring that pupil attainment is assessed in terms of capability and progression throughout all subjects of the curriculum as well as in discrete ICT teaching. *(Paragraphs 41, 43, 62, 86, 110, 116, 120, 127, 137, 146, 153, 161, 177, 180)*

Meeting the requirement to provide all pupils with a daily act of collective worship, by ensuring that the arrangements for tutor time assemblies are properly implemented.

(Paragraphs 40, 73)

Make better use of new technologies, especially with regard to the collection and analysis of pupil data.

(Paragraphs 60, 61, 65)

Ensure that decisions made in meetings are recorded and made known, in order that appropriate action is taken.

(Paragraphs 78, 79)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	108
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	44

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6	27	47	20	0	0	0

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	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils on the school's roll	613
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	65

Special educational needs	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	7
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	121

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	9
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	14

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	5.61
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.009
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	67	74	141

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	48	48	61
	Girls	61	52	68
	Total	109	100	129
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	77 (70)	71 (61)	91 (86)
	National	75 (70)	69 (69)	78 (78)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	43	44	56
	Girls	64	49	63
	Total	107	93	119
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	76 (70)	66 (65)	84 (86)
	National	70 (68)	72 (69)	79 (75)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	610
Any other minority ethnic group	2

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	5	2
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y5 – Y8

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	28
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y5 – Y8

Total number of education support staff	5.0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	101

Deployment of teachers: Y5 – Y8

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	84.4
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Average teaching group size: Y5 – Y8

Key Stage 2	26.6
Key Stage 3	25.2

Financial information

Financial year	1999 - 2000
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	£
Total income	999 218
Total expenditure	982 044
Expenditure per pupil	1609.91
Balance brought forward from previous year	20 150
Balance carried forward to next year	37 324

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	613
Number of questionnaires returned	351

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	48	44	6	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	47	47	4	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	47	46	4	1	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	26	58	12	3	1
The teaching is good.	52	45	1	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	37	49	10	1	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	60	35	3	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	66	31	1	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	39	48	9	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	54	40	2	1	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	52	42	1	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	42	44	6	1	7

Other issues raised by parents

Parents at the pre-inspection meeting with the Registered Inspector felt strongly that the school had improved since the time of the previous inspection. Particularly, they felt that homework arrangements were now more appropriate, higher attaining pupils were being challenged better and links with partner schools had been strengthened. Many felt that there was a need for further improvement in provision for information and communications technology.

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

ENGLISH

- 92 The standards reached by pupils in the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests for English in both 1999 and 2000 indicate that their attainment is close to the national average, both for all schools and for similar schools. However, these tests assess only reading and writing and the very high quality of pupils' speaking and listening skills means that pupils' overall attainment in English at the age of 11 is above average. In addition, results over the last few years indicate that standards are rising at a faster rate than nationally. The school sets performance targets for Key Stage 2 English tests each year. In both 1999 and 2000 these targets were met. This is confirmed by the standards seen in pupils' work during the inspection. In the 1999 Key Stage 2 tests, pupils performed better in English than they did in mathematics but not as well as they did in science. Girls perform better than boys in English, as they do nationally. Because of the good teaching of English in all years, when pupils leave the school at the age of thirteen, their attainment in all aspects of English is above average.
- 93 The vast majority of pupils, including those who have special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language, are confident and competent speakers. Many show maturity beyond their years. Because their teachers ensure that there is a secure atmosphere in lessons, pupils know that others will listen and that their views will be respected. They speak clearly and audibly when addressing the whole class and use standard English in formal situations. When reading aloud, they do so fluently and with good expression. When they work in groups, pupils listen to each other with attention and interest. They learn from each other, build on others' ideas and offer alternative views. For example, pupils studying the novel *Goodnight Mr Tom* were able to discuss in a thoughtful and balanced way whether it is always wrong to break the law. This not only gave pupils practice in discussion but also contributed to their moral development.
- 94 Pupils are keen readers and the range and number of reading books has been considerably improved since the last inspection when the stock was considered to be inadequate. Most pupils carry a reading book with them and often read voluntarily in registration time. In lessons, they are presented with a wide range of texts, some quite difficult, and they read these with good understanding. They can work with books in a variety of ways because their teachers actively teach skills such as skimming and scanning and give them opportunities to practise them. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 can recognise whether a text is a narrative or a play script, fiction or non-fiction, persuasive or informative. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 can point out the essential features of a text, recognise and describe what makes up a specific style, identify themes and different layers of meaning in a text. In a Year 8 lesson, pupils reading a sonnet by Elizabeth Barrett Browning were able to recognise and describe the poetic techniques through which she conveyed her strong feelings about love. They went on to select phrases that supported what they said and then to compare it with a sonnet by Shakespeare.
- 95 Pupils' writing skills are developed through well-organised teaching that focuses on the features of different forms of writing. High attaining pupils in all years use a wide range of styles, including interesting stories that engage the reader's attention, essays that weigh the two sides of an argument and alternative endings to *Romeo and Juliet* written in Shakespearean verse. Lower attaining pupils in Years 7 and 8 had clearly

been enthused by their reading of David Almond's novel *Skellig* and this had led them to write sustained and interesting accounts of their feelings about the book.

- 96 Pupils' literacy skills are generally good. The daily literacy hour in Years 5 and 6 provides a very good foundation for the development of pupils' literacy skills, and pupils quickly become comfortable at using technical grammatical terms. Pupils take great care with handwriting and work is always attractively presented. Teachers stress correct spelling and punctuation and teach pupils how to use more advanced forms of punctuation such as colons and semi-colons.
- 97 The good learning seen in every lesson owes much to the very positive attitudes and behaviour that pupils bring to the classroom. Very good relationships exist between teachers and their pupils and this creates a purposeful and happy classroom environment where pupils enjoy their lessons and are enthusiastic about their learning.
- 98 The quality of teaching in the subject is good. Lessons are planned well, with clear objectives for learning. These are shared with pupils and revisited at the end of the lesson so that pupils can recognise what they have learned and reflect on the progress they have made. This increases pupils' own understanding of how the work builds on what they have learned in earlier lessons and encourages them to become independent learners in their own right. This is illustrated in many literacy hour sessions in which pupils aged 9 and 10 work with concentration and independence when the teacher is focusing on one particular group. Teachers ensure that work is well matched to the needs of individual pupils. They put much effort into preparing work that not only stretches the highest attainers but also provides stimulating and appropriate materials and tasks for lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs. This has addressed an issue raised at the time of the previous inspection and ensures that all pupils, including those with an aptitude for the subject, make good progress. Good explanations at the start of lessons engage pupils' interests and make them want to learn. Skilled questioning helps them to extend, consolidate and deepen their understanding even further. Marking of pupils' work is thorough; strengths are identified and the use of clear, short-term targets shows pupils how they can improve.
- 99 The department has a good balance of experienced and more recently qualified teachers. The head of the department leads and manages this strong team well. Very good new schemes of work have been developed for Years 7 and 8 and these are making a positive contribution to the raising of standards. In addition to the drama work done in English lessons, drama has this year been introduced into the Key Stage 3 curriculum in a more structured way and each class now has one term of drama in each year. Because of good planning and good teaching, drama is already making an effective contribution to pupils' creative and imaginative development. Good extra-curricular opportunities and the use of books such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Walkabout* extend and enrich pupils' knowledge and understanding of the wider world. The English department continues to maintain and build upon the high standards noted at the time of the last inspection.

MATHEMATICS

- 100 By the age of 11, pupils attain standards in mathematics which, overall, are in line with the national average. In national tests in 2000, pupils' results were close to the overall national average, and also close to the average for similar schools. The proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 or above in these tests was above the national

average, with girls and boys performing broadly similarly. This represents an overall improvement on the results gained by pupils at the end of the key stage in 1998 and 1999. Results in 2000 indicate that pupils have made good progress, taking into account their performance in mathematics tests at the end of Key Stage 1 four years previously.

- 101 Achievements of pupils currently in school indicate that this good progress is being maintained. The introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy is making a significant contribution to helping to improve pupils' mental calculations. Pupils are becoming more skilled in their use of spoken language to describe and explain their work and this is, in turn, giving them greater overall confidence in their approach to mathematics.
- 102 Pupils currently in Year 6 are achieving standards above those expected of pupils at this age. Higher attaining pupils can, for example, calculate the mean and range of a distribution and discuss the significance of these measures. Average attaining pupils can sort the different quadrilaterals according to their properties. This they achieved through the development of a 'decision tree'. They effectively used a range of skills including sorting, classifying and making decisions. They skilfully modified their work as the classification became more complex. Lower attaining pupils have a good grasp of place value and can present and evaluate alternative methods for undertaking a range of calculations.
- 103 By the age of 13, pupils' achievements indicate that they will, by the end of Key Stage 3 when they reach the age of 14, attain standards above the national average. Higher attaining pupils in Year 8 can, for example, transform algebraic expressions by multiplying brackets and collecting like terms and they can solve quite complex linear equations. Their confidence in their ability to deal with algebraic expressions is a direct result of very good teaching which concentrates on the basic principles and helps pupils relate algebraic processes to well known numerical strategies. Average attaining pupils are competent in the calculation of the areas of compound shapes, having a good grasp of how to break down the task into manageable sections. Lower attaining pupils are developing a good understanding of place value with decimal fractions, they are able to find areas of simple shapes and have a reasonable grasp of when it is most appropriate to use either the mode, mean or median of a distribution.
- 104 At both key stages, care is taken to ensure that there is a reasonable gender balance in all mathematics sets. This helps ensure that both boys and girls make good progress overall. Pupils with special educational needs are well known to teachers, who take into account their specific needs when planning lessons. As a result, pupils with special educational needs are making good progress, as are the highest attaining pupils in most year groups. The small number of pupils in the school for whom English is an additional language have no difficulties in understanding the tasks demanded of them. The progressive move toward more oral work is helping these pupils and thus they, too, make good progress.
- 105 Pupils work hard in almost all lessons. They are keen to do well and to improve their mathematics. They value the helpful feedback which many teachers provide for them through discussion and marking of written work. Pupils welcome opportunities to talk about their mathematics, explaining and describing their answers and methods. Skillful questioning by teachers helps to develop pupils' confidence in oral work and, overall, this is making a major impact on raising standards. When given the opportunity to do so, pupils work well either together or individually. Many lessons are

stimulating and challenging, and pupils respond well to these, showing genuine enthusiasm for the subject.

- 106 Overall, the teaching of mathematics in the school is good and it is slightly better at Key Stage 2 than at Key Stage 3. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the material they are teaching and present topics in interesting ways. The introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy into the school at Key Stage 2 has had a considerable impact on teaching throughout the school. The attention to improving pupils' basic mathematical skills has been helped by placing considerable emphasis on the recall of previous work and the development of pupils' abilities to calculate and handle numbers mentally. The encouragement to describe their thinking and explain their methods has begun to bring about major improvements in the level of pupils' understanding of the mathematics topics they are studying. Teachers' levels of expectation of what pupils can achieve are generally good, though only satisfactory in some of the classes for the highest attaining pupils. The school groups pupils into sets for mathematics, but care is taken, in most classes, to ensure that tasks are varied to provide a good match to the needs of each individual pupil. The expectations of what lower attaining pupils can achieve are good.
- 107 Teachers use a wider range of methods and approaches than at the time of the previous inspection and this helps to maintain pupils' interest. Good use of spoken language, concentrating on appropriate technical terms, is helping pupils gain confidence in talking about their mathematics. The scheme of work for mathematics provides a clear framework to support teachers' planning of topics and lessons. It does not, however, provide sufficient guidance on how to match different methods to different aspects of each topic. Thus some opportunities are lost to develop a range of mathematical processes and applications by integrating them into the learning of other aspects such as number, shape and space and data handling. Teachers generally set realistic homework tasks, which are closely linked to work in class. This work helps pupils consolidate their learning in school and contributes well to helping pupils sustain good progress overall.
- 108 A good start has been made to ensuring that all lessons have objectives which are made known to the class, and each pupil is aware of what he or she should be able to understand and do by the end of a topic. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly, but the quality of this marking varies considerably. Some provides little more than an indication that the teacher has seen the work, whilst other marking is of a very high standard. Here, pupils are given clear guidance on how well their work indicates they are progressing toward meeting the objectives for the work, together with helpful pointers to what to do to improve still further. Teachers assess pupils' work at the end of topics. These assessments are carefully recorded in order to build up a picture of the progress that each pupil is making in the subject. These records contribute to the information which is transferred to the neighbouring high school when pupils leave at the end of Year 8.
- 109 The management of mathematics in the school is effective, especially in supporting teachers with the introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy. A clear scheme of work ensures continuity of topics, but lacks detailed guidance on matching teaching strategies to the topics being taught. Some steps have been taken to put in place a programme of classroom monitoring and evaluation, linked to the review of the implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy in the school. This is beginning to ensure more consistency in the quality of mathematics teaching throughout the school. The time available for the head of mathematics to develop this programme of monitoring and evaluation is limited, as is the time for him to work alongside

colleagues in classrooms. This is regrettable, especially as he is a very good role model as a teacher of mathematics. The department has effective processes in place for the detailed tracking of pupil progress through the school, but the analysis of this information is not used by senior staff to compare performance in this subject with that in all others.

- 110 The introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy has been used effectively to improve planning and to promote training in teaching methodology. Resulting improvements in teaching are helping pupils to make better progress by improving their numeracy skills in mathematics. Teachers of other subjects are also becoming aware of how to help pupils develop these skills and, overall, pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum are satisfactory. Insufficient use is made of computers to support the learning of mathematics, although some work is done in information and communications technology lessons to develop some aspects relevant to mathematics, such as the use of spreadsheets.

SCIENCE

- 111 Pupils join the school at the start of Year 5 with around average attainment in science. In the past two years they have made good progress up to the time they take the national tests at the end of Year 6. In the 1999 tests, pupils aged 11 reached standards that were above the national average for all schools and also for similar schools. Over the four years since 1996, standards have been close to the national average, though with a rapid improvement at the school since 1997 from below to above the national average. The attainment of boys and girls was close to their national averages during these four years taken together. The 2000 test results were an improvement on the 1999 position, with many more pupils than nationally reaching above average standards. Again, results were above those for all schools and also for similar schools, with boys and girls reaching similar standards. The school exceeded its target for science by 5 per cent in 1999 and by 17 per cent in 2000. This is mainly a positive consequence of pupils in this middle school benefiting from being taught by specialist science teachers. From the good foundation laid by Year 6, pupils at Key Stage 3 continue to make good progress, though the school does not track their progress carefully enough in their final two years at the school with respect to National Curriculum levels. Inspection evidence indicates above average standards in Year 8.
- 112 Pupils presently in Year 6 are achieving above average standards, with particularly good attainment in practical investigations. They apply their generally secure knowledge and understanding well in order to test ideas and write reports of their findings. Both boys and girls generally write clear and sufficiently detailed accounts of what they have done and found out. Year 8 pupils are achieving standards that mostly are at least in line with the national expectation and are often above. They show a particularly strong grasp of how to conduct scientific investigations and often have a well-developed knowledge and understanding of the remainder of the science curriculum. They are well placed to meet the expectations of the final year of Key Stage 3 at high school.
- 113 Throughout the school, pupils are achieving at least satisfactorily in science. In general, boys and girls are progressing equally well. More able pupils achieve high standards as shown, for example, by the good proportion of Year 6 pupils who reached above average levels in the 1999 and 2000 national tests. Pupils with more average ability and those who learn more slowly, including pupils with special educational needs, also generally achieve at least satisfactorily. When teaching is

particularly good, which is quite often the case, and pupils are challenged to think hard, they achieve well. Pupils' own attitudes to learning contribute very positively to this picture of satisfactory or better achievement. The majority of pupils readily try to answer oral questions, and a few ask questions of their own. Sometimes, they use information and communication technology (ICT) to try to find answers, showing a developing curiosity.

- 114 The quality of the sample of teaching observed during the inspection, judged by the way in which it helped pupils to learn, was good overall, and varied from very good to satisfactory. Teaching of pupils in Years 7 and 8 was generally very good, as was some at Key Stage 2. In the best teaching pupils are challenged by clear explanations and sustained questioning to think, speak and write, clearly and accurately. The content of lessons is mainly carefully planned, with all pupils achieving well. Occasionally, however, not enough is expected of the most able pupils and they can become bored, which is sometimes the case at Key Stage 2. Good attention is paid to the accurate use of scientific language and pupils quickly become competent in using it in many classes. A particular strength of the teaching is the way in which knowledge, skills and understanding are woven together during many lessons. The consequence of this is that pupils often have above average skills in conducting investigations, basing their work on well thought out predictions and accurate observations and measurements. Teacher and pupils pay very careful attention to safe working in the laboratories. Time is usually used very well, though occasionally the lesson proceeds at too slow a pace and a few pupils become distracted. Resources for pupils are ready; the science technician plays a key role here. The best marking of pupils' work is particularly thorough, with clear guidance on what needs to be done to improve.
- 115 Pupils' attitudes to learning science are at least good and often are very good. Generally, they make the most of the learning opportunities, are very co-operative and concentrate well. Both boys and girls use the school's resources carefully and they work together safely and constructively in groups. They enjoy science and numbers of them take the opportunity to join in with the activities of the weekly science club.
- 116 The quite recently appointed head of department has a clear understanding of what needs to be done to keep the subject improving, building on the overall satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. However, as at the time of the previous inspection, insufficient use is made of ICT to support learning in science, particularly at Key Stage 3. This is also the case with respect to the use of National Curriculum levels for keeping a check on how well pupils are doing and on using this information to identify what needs to be done to improve teaching and learning in science. In other respects, improvement has been good. Time for teaching science has been increased and more attention is given to meeting the needs of the most able pupils, as shown by the good proportion who achieve above average standards.

ART

- 117 By the time pupils are 11, their attainment is at least in line with the national standard. At the end of Year 8 in Key Stage 3, attainment levels are good, and pupils are well placed to reach above the national standard by the end of the Key Stage. Overall, standards have been maintained since the previous inspection.
- 118 During both key stages, pupils achieve well, making good progress in lessons, and are acquiring a growing knowledge and understanding of art and its many elements, including specialist language and terminology. Pupils develop a comprehensive

range of skills in a wide range of media and materials including paint, fabric and crayon. They are willing to experiment with media and work with imagination. For example, in a landscape project in Year 6, card, fabric and coloured papers were used to produce textures and cloud effects in their pictures. Pupils generally demonstrate a good balance between imaginative responses and technical skills. They are able to use simple perspective and can produce tonal ranges of colours. At Key Stage 3, pupils use line, colour, tone, and texture with increasing confidence, they can draw with some accuracy and are aware of how three dimensional effects can be produced by the use of light and shade. Year 7 pupils, for example, in a project on self image, used colour tones to good effect to give their portraits depth, realism, and a three dimensional effect. The critical and historical element of the course across both Key Stages is developing well. Pupils have knowledge of a wide range of artists' works from different cultures and times, including North American, Aboriginal, and European. This is evident in many projects, for example when pupils use the works of Aboriginal painting by the Luke brothers and the works of Brueghel in landscape paintings as a stimulus or starting point. This is adding a spiritual, moral and cultural dimension to much of their work. Throughout their course, pupils work with increasing confidence and skill, producing outcomes of quality and imagination. Gifted and talented pupils are well supported and those with learning difficulties are given quality individual help; all of these pupils make good progress.

- 119 The quality of teaching across both key stages is generally good and, occasionally, very good. This represents an improvement since the previous inspection and has a very positive impact on learning and standards. Lessons are lively and stimulating, containing many elements of good practice. Individual lessons are well planned and cater for a wide range of abilities with good use made of discussion and directed questioning, such as in a discussion of the moral issues relating to the environment and the protection of animal species in Aboriginal paintings. Activities are challenging, pupils are well managed, and time is well used. Good use is made of visual material and techniques are demonstrated when appropriate, for instance in the use and application of water colour washes to build up features in portrait painting. Teaching is conducted in a friendly, supportive atmosphere. Pupils are encouraged, praised and valued, with the needs of the individual given a high priority. Good use is made of homework to practise skills and develop ideas relating to projects. Pupils respond very well to this good quality teaching. They work with increasing motivation, concentrating well and working at a good pace. They develop their ideas and are keen to extend their knowledge and understanding. Relationships are very good; pupils work well together and enjoy their art. Older pupils are able to talk about their work with confidence, and, in Year 8, they show initiative and perseverance and are proud of the work they produce.
- 120 The curriculum for art meets statutory requirements at both key stages, with equal access for all. The curriculum is being revised to include the requirements of the new art curriculum based on nationally produced units. Insufficient emphasis is placed on consistency, in terms of content and skills progression. The use of information and communications technology within art and design has not improved since the previous inspection. The use of ongoing and end of project assessment is weak, giving little indication of attainment, and assessment opportunities are not written into the schemes of work or lesson plans. Criteria for assessment are not shared with pupils who are not clear about what they need to do to improve. The head of art has a good overview of the art curriculum, its direction and contribution to the whole curriculum, but is not given sufficient time and support to share her considerable expertise and experience with staff, or to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the art curriculum. There are opportunities for staff teaching art to have regular

meetings to consider future planning and action that needs to be taken. Staff are very enthusiastic and value the subject. Both classroom and specialist accommodation for art supports visual investigation, and the excellent range of displays celebrates pupils' achievement.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

- 121 Standards since the previous inspection have been maintained. At the end of Key Stage 2 and in Year 8, attainment is in line with national expectations, and boys achieve as well as the girls. Pupils with special educational needs also demonstrate satisfactory standards of work but the gifted and talented pupils are not yet attaining the higher levels that could be expected of them.
- 122 By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils are able to use their own experiences, commercial products and research skills to generate ideas. They can communicate their designs through discussion, theme boards, annotated sketches and 2-dimensional models, for example when designing textile pouches for mobile phones. From Year 5 onwards, pupils are able to produce sequenced plans to guide the making of their products and can evaluate outcomes. In Years 7 and 8, pupils can produce a design brief and specification and are beginning to use more formal graphics skills to develop a working drawing. However, their investigational and analytical skills are limited.
- 123 At both key stages, pupils demonstrate good making skills. They can safely use a range of tools and equipment to measure, cut, combine and join materials to make a variety of products, including bread in Year 5 and acrylic pencil holders in Year 6. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 work with greater accuracy and are able to test and modify their work, for example when producing a range of pasta and sauce products.
- 124 Pupils have a sound understanding of the basic design process but their knowledge of the working characteristics and properties of materials is more limited. They have a good awareness of health and safety, which enables them to undertake risk assessments and practise safe and hygienic working methods. At Key Stage 3, pupils have some understanding of structures and simple mechanisms, which they apply when designing and making kites. Pupils can also make a circuit and know the function of components such as a diode and resistor, which they use when making a celebration card incorporating a flashing light.
- 125 Pupils make satisfactory progress in lessons. They have very positive attitudes to learning, show enthusiasm and work at a productive pace. They are able to sustain concentration, follow oral and written instructions, contribute ideas and demonstrate initiative and increasing independence. Pupils take a pride in their work and are keen to persevere to produce quality outcomes. Work in folders illustrates a repetition of some process skills, but with little advancement in skill standard. For example, pupils are not improving the quality of their research and planning skills as they move through the key stages, and are not transferring skills and knowledge acquired in one material area to extend their learning in other areas. The scheme of work is not yet sufficiently structured to improve the learning gains between projects and across the key stages, nor to extend the learning of the gifted and talented pupils. With appropriate support, the lower attaining pupils make good progress during practical lessons, for example in the production of layered desserts. However, the progress made over time by these pupils, is more limited.
- 126 The good quality of teaching in design and technology has been maintained since the previous inspection. In both Key Stages, teaching is at least satisfactory with the

majority being good. Lessons are well prepared and effectively organised to make good use of time. Pupils and resources are managed well. Good attention is given to health and safety procedures and to hygienic practices. All teachers use an appropriate range of teaching styles, with a good balance between instructing, demonstrating and questioning, and between whole class, group work and support given to individual pupils. Appropriate homework, related to the current project, is set on a regular basis for all pupils.

- 127 The teaching provides opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills, for example through the use of writing frames, key word lists and opportunities to write for different purposes. Teachers also encourage pupils to estimate and accurately measure materials, although this is sometimes restricted by lack of equipment. Other opportunities to develop pupils' numeracy skills are often missed, for example using number skills to cost materials and products, and to use tables, graphs and diagrams to help interpret the research data collected. As at the time of the previous inspection, pupils do not have access to computer aided equipment for graphics, design, manufacture or control to use when designing and making products.
- 128 Relationships between staff and pupils are a strength of the subject. Pupils grow in confidence and self esteem and are well motivated by the enthusiastic teaching, praise and reward systems. Behaviour is very good. However, the teachers' limited subject knowledge restricts their ability rigorously to challenge pupils' thinking and decision making during lessons and systematically to extend pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding over time. Also, assessment practices are weak and mainly focus on pupils' effort rather than on their achievements. The quality and use of on-going marking does not help pupils to rectify misconceptions or to know how to improve their work as it develops. Formal assessment practices are also ineffective, as they do not help pupils understand their learning and achievements, or help to guide teachers' planning.
- 129 The curriculum broadly meets statutory requirements at both key stages, with all pupils having equal access. Good opportunities are provided to cultivate pupils' personal and social development and progress has been made, since the previous inspection, to develop pupils' cultural awareness. Pupils in Year 5, for example, explore cultural preferences and traditions associated with different types of bread products. New units of work from the national schemes of work for design and technology are being trialled this term, but insufficient attention has been given to long term planning and to focused learning and assessment objectives to effectively guide teachers and to secure advancement in pupils' learning.
- 130 Day to day management and the informal support offered to staff is good. However, in the absence of technician support, the head of department spends a significant amount of her time maintaining workshops and resourcing the curriculum, rather than leading it. Consequently, limited time is given to strategic planning, assessment and recording, monitoring and evaluating practice and meetings with staff to further develop their expertise and understanding of the subject. The head of department and staff are committed to the improvement of the subject, and with time and support, have the capacity for further success.

GEOGRAPHY

- 131 When pupils enter the school in Year 5, attainment is in line with the average for the age group. Pupils work well and make at least satisfactory progress overall. In most lessons and units of work they make good progress but, for some classes,

organisation of the curriculum means that more than half a term goes by in which they study no geography. This has some negative effect on pupils' ability to recall previous learning and make quick progress in new work. This is especially true for pupils whose attainment is below average. Most pupils make good progress overall in Key Stage 3 and, by the end of Year 8, achieve standards that are just above average for their age. Pupils with high attainment achieve well when they are engaged in work that requires them to investigate topics independently but their progress is sometimes limited by narrower, more routine, tasks. Those with average and below average attainment make good progress overall. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported by teachers and they achieve good progress in their work.

- 132 Younger pupils have good map skills and can describe physical and human processes such as those factors that led to the location of early settlements. Older pupils have a wide understanding of geographical and environmental issues and recognise that people hold different views on these. They are developing knowledge of different places and themes. Towards the end of Year 8, the highest attaining pupils produce work of a very high standard, especially in coursework assignments where they show good research skills and a sound grasp of enquiry skills. Most students have a good grasp of geographical terminology, which they use appropriately in their writing and to varying degrees in oral work in lessons. Pupils lack experience in the use of computers to assist their work in geography lessons.
- 133 Pupils' attitudes to work and their behaviour are usually very good. This has a strong impact on the quality of their work. Almost all pupils are very well motivated and show high levels of commitment. They are eager, attentive and generally well focused and they willingly contribute to lessons when the teaching and the task demand it. They work collaboratively in groups. Only rarely do pupils chat unproductively in lessons with the result that they make less progress than they should. Sometimes the pace of the work drops when students are engaged on lengthy tasks that lack guidance on the time available for such activities.
- 134 The standard of teaching is never less than satisfactory and in the vast majority of lessons it is good. This is an improvement since the previous inspection and contributes strongly to pupils' learning. In the most successful lessons, teachers plan the work thoroughly, give clear explanations, use appropriate terminology and pose challenging questions. Pupils respond well to the demands placed on them and gain confidence in the use of geographical vocabulary. The tasks planned by teachers are always purposeful but are most effective when they give opportunities for pupils to investigate places and themes, to discuss ideas that arise and to write at some length. Most lessons proceed at a steady pace, but sometimes this is not brisk enough to ensure that all the work planned for is achieved. Time is not always made available to recap on what has been learned in the lesson. Teachers give good constructive and critical feedback to pupils about the quality of their work, both orally in lessons and when marking their books. The staff have made improvements to the teaching and support of pupils with special educational needs, both by the provision of carefully targeted activities and the introduction of writing frames. Further work is still to be done to ensure that all work for the highest attaining pupils is matched to their needs.
- 135 Good leadership is provided by the head of department, who has produced clear guidance for the teaching of geography. Sensible priorities have also been identified for the development of the subject. Thorough support is given to the non-specialists to ensure that they are well prepared and have appropriate resources available. There is a commitment to improve standards and to provide a stimulating

environment for the teaching of the subject. The latter is evident in the exceptional quality of display in the geography room and the adjacent corridor. The opportunities for fieldwork within the curriculum are currently limited, although there are plans to increase this in the current year. However, the geography curriculum is enhanced for many Year 8 pupils by a residential visit to the Malvern Hills, which gives pupils a valuable insight into different environments and also develops their social skills.

- 136 Good links exist between the first schools and the high school and also with the other middle school that feeds the high school. The latter is working with Aston Fields to produce joint assignments by which to assess pupils' attainment prior to their move to the high school. Monitoring of the work of teachers and individual pupils in the subject is carried out systematically and administrative tasks are done methodically. However, there is currently no system for establishing the geographical attainment of pupils on entry to the school or analysing the attainment of classes and year groups throughout the school. Thus the department is not in a position to measure the overall progress it makes in raising attainment.
- 137 The use of information and communications technology (ICT) was identified as a significant weakness in the previous inspection and remains an issue for the department. Plans have been made to include the use of ICT during the current year but substantial in-service training is required to ensure that staff are confident to teach the wide range of applications that will enhance the geography curriculum.

HISTORY

- 138 Standards of work of the pupils by the age of 11 are above the national average. This is an improvement on the situation at the time of the last inspection and represents good progress in the level of the pupils' achievement compared with their attainment level when they enter the school. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the main events and characteristics of the periods studied. Most accurately identify changes and similarities between periods, as when Year 6 pupils effectively compared objects from the Sixties and Seventies with those of today.
- 139 Skills of enquiry are well developed in nearly all pupils, encouraged by the frequent research projects undertaken. All pupils can, at least competently, select and record information relevantly from simple written and pictorial sources. Higher attaining pupils can imaginatively gather the evidence together into well-written newspaper accounts, letters and diaries, often showing strong empathy with the people they are describing. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs also work well by themselves on research tasks with the appropriate materials and clear instructions from the teacher. They are also able to identify quite strongly with the feelings of people living at the time. Most pupils display a particularly mature ability to frame questions of their own to provide a sharp focus for their research. Higher attaining pupils understand that an event can have a number of causes, as when Year 5 pupils identified and prioritised the reasons for Henry VIII closing the monasteries. Awareness of the cause of events and circumstances is less developed in average and lower attaining pupils when the teacher fails to make it an adequate focus of the lesson.
- 140 Standards of pupils' work by the age of 13 are above the national average. Compared with the pupils' attainment at the beginning of Key Stage 3, this represents good progress. Higher attaining pupils in Year 8 are achieving standards well above the national average and making very good progress compared with their level of attainment at the beginning of Year 7. Most pupils have a good knowledge and

understanding of the key events of the periods being studied and are able to identify a number of causes of an event. Lower attaining pupils in Year 8 have particularly good factual recall as a result of their strong interest and regular reinforcement of knowledge by the teacher. Skills of enquiry and of using sources effectively are further developed from the secure foundations laid in Key Stage 2. Note-making is at least satisfactory by all pupils and middle and higher attaining pupils are beginning to recognise bias and reliability in different sources. Research work often results in accurate writing in various forms, though the lower attaining pupils require the useful writing frames and starter sentences to help them.

- 141 Higher attaining pupils in Year 8 are producing well-argued, extended writing of a very high quality, showing thorough research, careful analysis and an awareness that events can have different interpretations, for instance, in examining how poor the Elizabethan poor really were, or analysing how well Elizabeth solved her many problems. Skills of listening and speaking are also well developed in nearly all pupils, with lower attaining pupils showing the confidence and enthusiasm to join in class discussion. Frequent group work is also encouraging free expression of ideas and helping to consolidate the pupils' understanding.
- 142 The quality of teaching is good or better in nearly all the lessons seen. It is frequently very good and occasionally excellent. It is never unsatisfactory. It is equally good at both key stages. This is broadly similar to the situation at the time of the last inspection, but teaching is now better at Key Stage 2. More varied and appropriate learning activities, especially well organised enquiry work, actively involve and challenge pupils of all abilities. Teachers have a good subject knowledge, plan their lessons well and set appropriate learning objectives which are clearly explained to the pupils. Pupils satisfactorily acquire historical knowledge and understanding. Their literacy skills are being well promoted, especially in note-making and in various forms of writing. Pupils are developing skills of using source work and interpretation.
- 143 The very good behaviour of the pupils and their readiness to listen, concentrate fully and to cooperate with the teacher and with each other, promote a good atmosphere for learning. Pupils are managed well, very good relations are based on mutual respect and high standards of behaviour are expected and set. There is good monitoring of pupils' progress through frequent questioning and interventions in class in response to identified problems. In most lessons there is a good pace, time is well used and deadlines are clearly set to focus attention. Homework is set regularly and usually requires independent free writing. Marking is done regularly, thoroughly and consistently throughout the department, with helpful comments and targets to inform the pupils on how to improve. These are reinforced by the effective review sheets which also identify strengths and weaknesses and set targets for improvement.
- 144 The teachers' good planning and high expectations result in challenging tasks being set, which actively involve pupils in purposeful enquiry work and exciting challenges. For instance, Year 6 pupils used artefacts from a local museum to find answers to their own questions about how life has changed since the Sixties; highly motivated, higher attaining, pupils in Year 8 worked enthusiastically in groups to present well-researched ideas on flip-charts to the rest of the class on Queen Elizabeth 1's success. They not only accurately identified the problems in her reign, but effectively evaluated the extent of her success in solving them. They could also clearly see the value of learning through the sharing of ideas.
- 145 Significant improvements have taken place since the last inspection. They are largely due to the committed and enthusiastic head of department who has given a very clear

and strong educational direction to the department. Standards have improved at both key stages, with the higher attaining pupils at Key Stage 3, in particular, being pushed to high standards of work. Teaching is now of a consistently high quality with effective emphasis on developing the key skills of research, evidence gathering and extended writing. The department has good documentation on all policies and its development plan and teaching reflect the whole school's priorities for raising standards, especially of higher attaining pupils and in literacy. Displays of pupils' work and artefacts in the corridors and the history classrooms continue to be of a very high standard, as does the ambitious programme of outside visits and external speakers. Liaison with the local first schools, and especially with the high school, is very good in transfer of information, exchanging teaching ideas and curriculum planning. More appropriate resources are now being provided for all abilities.

- 146 Pupils are being strongly encouraged to use information and communications technology (ICT) for research and to word-process their work at home. The internet is also being used at Key Stage 2 and a number of CD-ROMs have been bought. However, there is inadequately planned provision of ICT in the subject to enhance the pupils' learning. Schemes of work are helpful and thorough on content, resources and showing progression through the units of study. However, history skills, match of tasks to pupil needs, points for assessments and the use of ICT need to be more clearly identified during the completion of the transfer to the 2000 National Curriculum. Improved procedures for assessment and target setting are now in place, with regular testing of key skills. However, further developments are still required, especially in more rigorous analysis of results to inform teaching and learning at both key stages. Good beginnings have been made in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching through classroom observation. This now needs to be pursued further and an analysis undertaken of results to more rigorously inform the overall teaching and learning so that the high standards are at least maintained and the best practice shared.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

- 147 Since the last inspection, standards in this subject have improved and resources have been extended. Pupils in all years now receive separate information and communications technology (ICT) teaching in all four years and there is some evidence of its use in other areas of the curriculum.
- 148 There is a wide range of pupil attainment, which can be linked to varying experiences prior to arrival at the school and to differing levels of pupil access to computers at home. In both key stages, some pupils demonstrate evidence of attainment in information handling skills above national expectations for their age. The great majority of pupils can log on to the school's network confidently, load and save files competently, understand and follow instructions using the dialogue boxes and print their work. In Key Stage 3, they are able to research information using multi-media software, enter and manipulate data and prepare simple presentations. Within a design context, they can use a graphics package, create space within text, and move and resize pictures to produce high-quality informative leaflets. The majority of pupils demonstrate confidence and developing competence in the application of generic software, although keyboard input skills are variable. From Year 6, they are developing knowledge and understanding of simple control programs, and by Year 8 they are integrating a range of software to produce high-quality display documents. The attainment of pupils who have special educational needs is often of a high standard, but opportunities for more able pupils to extend their skills are insufficiently frequent.

- 149 Throughout their time at the school, capability in information handling and communication with ICT is progressively developed. Work observed during the inspection showed pupils in all years building on and extending their skills from earlier learning, including the construction of databases and integration of software programs.
- 150 The teaching of ICT is satisfactory overall and, on occasions, good. Very good teaching was observed in the context of control and in database construction. Specialist teaching reflects sound subject knowledge, is well planned to ensure progression and makes effective use of the available resources. The topic-based teaching of generic application skills reinforces learning elsewhere in the curriculum, as when year 7 pupils research information on healthy lifestyles through the design and construction of a database, or cost, plan and promote a school disco, using a spreadsheet. Lessons are well planned in terms of structure, content and resources, but insufficient emphasis is placed on reviewing learning with the pupils themselves. More effective use of time within lessons would enable this, as would more in-depth marking of work print-outs and consistent setting of homework. Task worksheets are not always sufficiently closely matched to the needs of individual pupils, particularly for lower and higher attaining pupils. On occasions, opportunities to improve keyboard skills and to educate pupils about health and safety risks associated with the use of computers are overlooked. Classroom control is good.
- 151 Pupils respond well to the teaching provided. They are enthusiastic about acquiring new skills, and take pride in their achievements, particularly in presentation. Most concentrate well and make satisfactory and often good progress in ICT lessons and over time. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in developing their ICT skills, frequently beyond expectation. More able pupils, and those with greater prior experience, frequently consolidate their own skills through helping other pupils, but would on occasions benefit from greater challenge.
- 152 Attitudes to learning are usually good. Working mainly in pairs, pupils co-operate well with each other and with teachers, and this contributes significantly to the success of the teaching. Most pupils are responsible users of equipment and resources.
- 153 The use of ICT in teaching across the curriculum is increasing, but few subject areas have systematically integrated appropriate activities within their subject schemes of work. Lack of access to appropriate and reliable computers is frequently cited as a constraint by some teachers. Pupils are guided appropriately in the use of the Internet and CD-ROM materials, where possible, although limited access to equipment has restricted this within the Key Stage 3 curriculum. Evidence of some high-quality work by pupils was seen in English, history and music, and teachers in several subject areas make good use of these resources to produce worksheets and display material. The school has recently acquired new equipment and now needs to ensure that all pupils are enabled to reinforce and systematically develop, throughout the whole curriculum, the skills taught within discrete ICT teaching.
- 154 The management of ICT within the school is currently fragmented. This prevents the effective co-ordination of teaching and assessment of pupil achievement in ICT across the curriculum. There is insufficient systematic monitoring of classroom activity to ensure the consistent implementation of planned approaches to meeting the needs of all pupils. Plans are in place to expand access to resources including a move to a common ICT platform. Development of new facilities will provide an opportunity for all subject areas to engage more fully in the development and

application of ICT skills and will enable the development of some ICT-based extra-curricular activities.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

- 155 By the age of 11, pupils have studied French for one year. This is more than is required by the National Curriculum. Pupils are achieving well in Year 6 and most go on to reach levels above or well above expectations in Years 7 and 8, greatly helped by their early start.
- 156 In Years 7 and 8, where classes are set by general ability, there are more girls than boys in top sets with the result that more girls than boys are attaining the higher levels in French. In all three year groups where French is taught, pupils are achieving particularly high standards in understanding spoken French and in pronouncing French words correctly. Many, at all levels of ability, can answer questions in whole sentences. Most can use numbers for everyday topics, such as dates and times, without difficulty. Pupils with special educational needs have good accents and display a good understanding of what their teacher is saying. The most able pupils can use French as a natural means of communication. They can tell their teacher that they have finished work, ask for instructions or explain why someone is absent.
- 157 Pupils of all levels of ability can take part in pair work or role-plays where they know exactly what is expected. Some are able to develop ideas of their own. In a top set in Year 8, for instance, pupils were holding imaginary telephone conversations or ordering imaginary meals in fluent and convincing French. These pupils were reaching levels well above what would be expected for their ages.
- 158 Pupils' written work varies in line with their ability, but all can produce understandable French phrases describing themselves or their homes and families. In Year 6, those at the beginning of their French studies can write simple sentences with guidance. By the end of Year 8, pupils are beginning to write longer sentences which include their own ideas. In Years 7 and 8, pupils are beginning to gain an understanding of French grammar. With appropriate guidance they can make adjectives agree and can begin to use verbs to talk about the future as well as the present. Less able pupils can understand these constructions while still finding it difficult to write them correctly by themselves.
- 159 Overall, the teaching of French is very good, and is better in Key Stage 3 than in Year 6. Teachers are helping pupils to achieve these high standards by using French throughout lessons and expecting pupils to do the same. The teachers' accents are good, ensuring that the pupils have accurate models to follow. Class management is very good, enabling pupils to learn through informal means such as games or role-playing without any loss of purpose. Homework is regularly set and marked so that written work is developed alongside speaking, reading and listening. Lessons are lively and stimulating, with much variety. Pupils greatly enjoy acting out scenes, using the overhead projectors, singing or playing team games.
- 160 The pupils behave very well in lessons. They listen to their teachers, showing respect and quickly doing what is asked of them. They join in activities with enthusiasm and readily volunteer answers or offer to take part in games or role play. Pupils of all abilities show equal enjoyment of their work. Group and paired work encourage courtesy towards each other and respect for each other's ideas. The high standard of work in French is achieved largely through the positive attitudes and common goals of the teachers and pupils working together.

- 161 The department is very well led and has good resources, including extra materials for reading or games. There is no languages section in the library but pupils are encouraged to make use of the French books available in the classrooms. All of the suggested improvements in the last report have been made, with the exception of the increased use of information and communications technology (ICT). There has been some co-operation with the ICT department to achieve some interesting work, but there is still little opportunity for the pupils to use the Internet or other computer resources to develop their knowledge and use of French. Overall, the department plays an important part in the educational development of the pupils and makes a strong contribution to the life and ethos of the school.

MUSIC

- 162 Standards of attainment in music are above average at the end of Key Stage 2 and well above average at the end of Year 8, when pupils transfer to high schools in the area. By the age of 11, pupils are familiar with keyboards, and able to use them with confidence to assist their composition and performance. They can identify notes on the keyboard and relate these to notation used by the teacher. They can create musical ideas which follow the format of a chosen musical style, such as a cyclical rhythm. In Years 7 and 8, they can extend this skill to use formats such as the calypso and the blues, and a significant minority of pupils is able to use accurate musical notation to record their own compositions. When performing in class, pupils show good rhythmic ability; for example, a Year 6 class was able to sustain a series of complex rhythms, overlaying patterns of open and closed sounds on a steady pulse, and use these in quite varied compositions. Those pupils with more advanced instrumental skills, as a result of individual musical tuition at home or at school, are given the opportunity, which they take enthusiastically, to develop their notational skills through the creative use of computer programmes to enhance their composition and performance to a high level. When composing, pupils of all ages demonstrate a sense of music, with pupils in Years 7 and 8 using chords and harmonies accurately and appropriately. Lower attaining pupils gain great satisfaction from their effective participation in group composition and performance, where their lack of more extended musical ideas or skills does not reduce their role in the group. Pupils, challenged by their teaching, achieve well or very well in relation to their prior attainment.
- 163 Since the last inspection, when music was reported as playing a significant role in the life of the school, there have been significant further improvements in standards, as pupils of higher attainment are now encouraged to extend their musical skills, and do so. The tests taken at the end of Key Stage 2 show performance above the national average, and by the end of Year 8, the majority of pupils is already reaching standards better than those expected by the end of the key stage at the age of 14. This was confirmed by a survey in the inspection of computerised compositions, performances seen and work in lessons.
- 164 The quality of teaching and learning is good in Year 5, where after only a term, nine year old pupils are beginning to consolidate new musical skills, although still showing that they have had a very wide range of musical experiences before coming to this school. In Years 6, 7 and 8, as a result of rigorous teaching, pupils achieve very good standards of learning and participation in extra-curricular music, whether in instrumental work or singing. In particular, singing has improved since the last inspection as a result of a sustained emphasis on its importance in lessons, and the creation of more opportunities for performance. The teaching shows a high level of

musicianship and lessons are well planned and highly structured, to give pupils exposure to all elements of the National Curriculum. Good use is made of recently available national guidance on the range of teaching techniques available to extend pupils, and expectations of what they can achieve are high, though realistic enough for all to achieve success at a good level of music making. Good use is made of limited access to information and communications technology to extend the learning of the higher attaining pupils.

- 165 Teaching encourages pupils to evaluate their own compositions and performances and the atmosphere created in the class is such that shared evaluations by teacher and pupils are constructive and take everyone's learning forward. Many opportunities are created for pupils to take responsibility individually and in groups for making a success of a task set and they respond very well to this. The pace of lessons is brisk and routines are well used to ensure that no time is wasted, for example, in getting out musical instruments for group work, despite the confined spaces involved. Behaviour is always very good and often excellent, in response to the good management and control shown in the teaching. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are very good and often excellent. They respond very well to new ideas in their music lessons and work very hard to achieve the learning objectives for each lesson, which, as a result of the emphasis given to learning objectives, they fully understand and share. Their high rates of participation in a wide range of musical activities outside lessons – choirs, orchestra, recorder group and instrumental tuition - show pupils' commitment to and enjoyment of the subject.
- 166 Teaching, overall is never less than very good, and it is often excellent, being characterised by very good relationships and mutual respect, good individual support for lower attaining or less skilled pupils, rigorous reinforcement of key ideas in each lesson and evident enjoyment of music-making. There is a strong and sustained contribution to developing pupils' literacy, particularly in relation to proper use of musical terminology.
- 167 The leadership of the subject is strong and growing in its scope. In particular, a very wide curriculum and a strong programme of extra-curricular musical activities, including full musical performances such as the production of *Joseph and His Technicolour Dreamcoat*, are major improvements since the last inspection. There are limitations in the ways the subject can develop further, however, until poor accommodation is rectified – as it will be on completion of the present building programme – and poor levels of resourcing are addressed. The head of subject has a clear vision of the educational directions possible for music in the school to make it an even stronger presence. Clearly stated aims and objectives reflect the department's determination to continue to improve standards and broaden access. Welcome and expert help from a non-music specialist teacher on a volunteer basis is the department's only other human resource. This position places a considerable constraint on the future development of a subject which is such a great strength of the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- 168 The level of attainment of most pupils at the end of Year 6 continues to be in line with national expectations. Pupils are developing their skills and understanding in a variety of practical contexts and groupings. Pupils arrive at the school with a limited experience of dance but quickly respond to the good teaching so that, by the end of the key stage, most girls and some boys are able to demonstrate good patterns of movement and gesture which are performed with fluency and clarity. In gymnastics,

pupils are able to define their body shape both in flight and when developing sequences of movement both on the floor and apparatus. Swimming is taught to pupils in Year 5 and by the end of the year most pupils have attained the end of Key Stage 2 target to swim 25 metres. There are very few pupils at the school who are non-swimmers.

- 169 The overall attainment of pupils at the end of Year 8 is also in line with national expectations. In games activities pupils display good standards in the basic skills of catching, striking and fielding and are able to transfer these skills into a full game situation. Pupils are confident in discussion and are very willing to ask questions to clarify understanding. They are beginning to evaluate their own and others performances and to make perceptive suggestions about how to bring about improvements.
- 170 Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated. They are given much help and encouragement both by the teaching staff and their fellow pupils and they reach a very satisfactory level of attainment. Teaching is supportive and there are no instances of pupils with special educational needs being disadvantaged by the provision that is offered. The school has a high reputation for the performances of the school's many teams and individual pupils. Many school teams compete in the North Worcestershire Middle Schools competitions and gain much success.
- 171 The quality of teaching is good overall, though better in Years 7 and 8 than in Key Stage 2. In lessons aims are made clear, content is appropriate and the relevant resources are well organised. Relationships between teachers and pupils are sensitive and positive. They show a care and concern for their pupils whilst encouraging the best in fair play, cooperation and competitive experiences. They promote the moral and social development of the pupils by encouraging them to accept responsibility for the organisation of teams and to act as officials for games. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and pupils respond very positively to this enthusiasm in both lessons and extra-curricular activities. They are very well behaved and are prepared to work very hard. Pupils' enjoyment of the lessons is very evident.
- 172 All pupils have equal access to a broad and balanced curriculum which is meeting the requirements of the National Curriculum, although, because of problems at a local swimming pool, the time allocated for Year 5 pupils to have swimming lessons has been limited. The department's development plan covers all aspects of its work, identifies a range of priorities and indicates appropriate progressions within the curriculum provision. The procedures for the assessment, recording and reporting of the pupils attainment have been reviewed and cover the statutory requirements. Assessment within the department is thorough and record keeping is good, although there is now a need to relate pupils' attainment to the newly introduced National Curriculum levels. Many teachers, including non-specialist staff, give very freely of their time to provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities which are supported by an impressive 80 percent of the pupils on roll.
- 173 The on-site facilities for the subject of a gymnasium, occasional use of the hall, playgrounds and a well maintained playing field are enhanced by the use of a local swimming centre. These facilities combine to have a very positive effect on the attainment of the pupils. The department's capitation allowance is wisely spent and the equipment well cared for.

- 174 This is a well managed subject. The head of department has a clear sense of purpose and provides strong direction. He gives much help to the non-specialist teachers who teach the subject. There is good quality documentation. The department handbook gives clear and helpful guidance concerning aims, methodology and lesson organisation. The staff who teach physical education work well together, support each other, and show a very strong commitment to the pupils.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- 175 Pupils join the school with average attainment overall and make steady progress during the two years up to the time they are 11 years old. In Year 6, pupils have developed average knowledge and understanding of key elements in the local Agreed Syllabus. For example, in recent work on religious festivals, pupils have a sound grasp of major Christian festivals and some of those from other religions, such as Diwali. At Key Stage 3, pupils continue their study of Christianity and other world faiths and by Year 8 have studied the life of Jesus in some detail and also the founders of other religions. In recent work on Buddhism, for example, pupils have had the opportunity to learn about the Buddha and they have gained satisfactory knowledge. The school's own summary of pupils' attainments before they leave for high school show that standards are broadly in line with those expected in the local Agreed Syllabus. The inspection confirms that attainment, when pupils are 11 and 13 years of age, are in line with the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus.
- 176 Throughout the school, pupils are achieving satisfactory standards. The many discussions and the writing tasks generally enable pupils of all abilities to succeed at their best levels, if they work hard. Boys and girls, because of their generally good attitudes to the subject, often achieve equally well. However, girls are prepared to write with greater detail and so develop their ideas and understanding further. Pupils with special educational needs and others who learn more slowly achieve satisfactorily, occasionally helped by resources that are more closely matched to their needs. Sometimes, more able pupils could progress further if the tasks, supported by suitable resources, make more demands on them.
- 177 Judged by the way in which pupils were helped to learn, the sample of teaching observed during the inspection was good, with some very good features. Pupils learn step by step due to the carefully planned stages. Teaching explanations are clear. Good attention is paid to pupils speaking and writing accurately so that they become confident using the language of the subject. They are kept busy during lessons and time is well used. Frequent discussions give pupils opportunities to share their ideas and to listen to each other, which they do with respect. Resources for pupils to use have been increased since the previous inspection, including the development of a wide range of religious artefacts. Written work, though not extensive, is carefully marked, with comments to show pupils if they are doing as well as they could. Sometimes, however, more could be done to ensure that pupils explain their ideas in writing thoroughly enough, helped by reference to books and other resources, including information and communications technology (ICT).
- 178 Pupils have positive attitudes to the study of religious education. The great majority, both boys and girls, show interest in their work, concentrate well and present their work carefully. Some pupils, especially boys, are too easily satisfied with brief answers. Pupils' folders contain work that shows the great majority of pupils make a good effort during lessons and they present their work with some pride. They behave very well during lessons.

- 179 Religious education makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development. In relation to their spiritual and moral development, the subject provides opportunities for pupils to think about the religious beliefs and practices of the major religions and how people respond to those beliefs in the way that they behave. Pupils learn about the major world religions, thereby enhancing their cultural development. Visits to places of worship and to meet representatives of religions contribute well here.
- 180 Improvement undertaken since the previous inspection by the head of department has been satisfactory, with progress made on each of the issues raised then, other than with the use of ICT; this improvement is planned, and the head of department is involved in an LEA-wide initiative. More could be done now to find out how well pupils are progressing with respect to the local Agreed Syllabus, and to the use of the resulting information to plan and modify the religious education curriculum in the light of pupils' progress. At present, the gaps between formal assessments are too long, and assessments have not been used to provide information for the management and development of the subject.