

INSPECTION REPORT

AYLESTONE HIGH SCHOOL

Broadlands Lane, Hereford

LEA area: Hereford

Unique reference number: 116936

Headteacher: Mr A G Wray

Reporting inspector: Ann McGough
2939

Dates of inspection: 6 -10 November 2000

Inspection number: 223826

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 16

School address: Broadlands House
Broadlands Lane
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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr J W M Dent

Date of previous inspection: 4 – 8 March 1996

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				Management
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				Care for pupils
				Links with parents
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4893	Peter Sellwood	Team inspector	Art	
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12470	Brian Geasley	Team inspector	Geography	
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The Registrar
 Inspection Quality Division
 The Office for Standards in Education
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Aylestone School is a mixed 11-16 comprehensive school of above average size with 1240 pupils on roll. In addition to seven main feeder schools, pupils are drawn from approximately 30 primary schools in total. Up to 10% of places each year are set aside for talented musicians wishing to join the Music Plus course. Standards on entry are broadly average. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is also broadly average and pupils come from the full range of social backgrounds. The permanent exclusion rate is low. The school has a special educational unit for fifteen pupils with moderate learning difficulties. The number of pupils on the school's register of special educational needs (SEN) is below average but an average proportion of pupils have statements of SEN. The number of pupils with English as a second language is slightly above average. 73% of pupils go into full-time education when they leave the school.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school that has made consistent progress in raising standards and improving the quality of education since the last inspection. It is very well led and managed and provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Achieves high standards with a rising trend in GCSE results over the past four years which is above the trend nationally
- Teaching is consistently good and results in effective learning by pupils
- Pupils behave extremely well, work hard and demonstrate very positive attitudes towards the provision made by the school
- The school is very well led and managed
- Relationships are very good
- The care for pupils' personal and academic development is good

What could be improved

- The co-ordination of special needs provision across the school and the amount of SEN support in mainstream classes as resources allow
- The time allocated for personal, social and health education (PSHE) at Key Stage 3 and for core religious education (RE) and information and communication technology (ICT) at Key Stage 4
- Flexibility in curriculum planning and structures
- The contribution of middle management to whole school strategic planning
- The amount and/or quality of accommodation particularly for science, indoor physical education (PE), drama and library resources
- Full compliance with statutory requirements for the governors' annual report to parents

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Aylestone School was last inspected in March 1996. Since that time, consistent improvements have been made in the standards of attainment achieved by pupils and in the quality of teaching. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is now better balanced and there is better use of ICT. Assessment is better co-ordinated and monitoring of pupils' progress should further develop as more consistent use is made of whole school data. Long-term planning has improved. The role of senior management in monitoring and planning has been extended. Remarkable improvements have been made in the quality of RE. Though there is greater consultation with middle management, their role in strategic planning needs to be further strengthened.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	All schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	A	A	B	B

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

Test results of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were above average in English and well above average in mathematics in comparison to both national averages and those of similar school (those with a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals). Results in science were in line with the national average and almost in line with those of similar schools. Over a four-year period, the trend in the school's results at Key Stage 3 was broadly in line with the national trend. In GCSE examinations in 1999, the average points score was above the national average and of the average for similar schools. The proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE was very high in comparison with the national average and above that of similar schools. Broadly similar results were achieved in 2000. The trend over time in the point score per pupil is above the national trend. In the last two years, results have exceeded the targets set by the school.

The standard of work seen during the inspection was always at least satisfactory and good or better in most subjects at Key Stage 3. Attainment was particular high in mathematics and art. Standards are generally maintained or improved at Key Stage 4 with very good attainment observed in English, mathematics, design and technology (DT), history, geography and music. Only in ICT are standards below those expected. Standards of literacy and numeracy are well developed at both key stages. The achievement of pupils is good in relation to their progress and the demands placed on them

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils show very positive attitudes to the school, work hard and show a high level of commitment in and out of lessons
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Standards of behaviour are very good and often exemplary
Personal development and relationships	Pupils relate very well to teachers and their peers, show respect for others, respond well to responsibility and an increasing maturity as they move through the school.
Attendance	Attendance is very good.

This is a strong area with no significant weakness. The very positive attitudes shown by pupils make a major contribution to their success in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	Aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	N/A

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 is good in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 3. Teaching continues to be good in mathematics and science at Key Stage 4 and is very good in English.

Good teaching is a feature across most subjects in the school. In addition to English at Key Stage 4, the quality of teaching is a strength in art, music and RE at both key stages and in PE at Key Stage 4. Consistently high standards are seen in teachers' knowledge and expectations, their planning and their management of pupils. Literacy and numeracy are well developed across the curriculum. The needs of all pupils, including those with SEN, are met well. Teaching was satisfactory or better in 98% of the lessons observed and good or better in 78%. In response to good teaching, learning is also strong. The effort made by pupils in lessons is a particular strength.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Though the curriculum is broad, there is some inflexibility in way it is structured. Insufficient time is allowed for PSHE at Key Stage 3, ICT at Key Stage 4 and to meet requirements for RE in core studies at Key Stage 4.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision for SEN enables pupils to make good progress though there is a need for better co-ordination of SEN across the school and additional support for pupils in mainstream classes.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Sound provision is made for the few pupils with English as a second language
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good provision is made to support pupils' spiritual and social development. Provision for moral and cultural development is particularly strong.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The measures taken to ensure the welfare of pupils and to support their personal and academic development are good.

Partnership between the school and parents is generally satisfactory. Though the school offers a sufficiently broad curriculum, there remains a need to ensure that curriculum organisation and planning provide appropriate breadth and equality of access for all pupils. Extra-curricular provision is good. Plans are being developed to ensure that core RE at Key Stage 4 fully meets statutory requirements and builds on good practice at Key Stage 3. Care for pupils is good with particular strengths in the procedures in place to promote good attendance and behaviour and to eliminate bullying.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership and management of the school are very strong and promote high standards of teaching, learning and attainment. Departmental management is good but middle managers are not yet sufficiently involved in whole school strategic planning.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors play an appropriate role in the life of the school and fulfil their responsibilities well other than in meeting statutory requirements for RE at Key Stage 4 and in their annual report to parents.
The school's evaluation of its performance	There is good evaluation of performance through regular monitoring of pupils' work and analysis of test and examination data. Use of new technology should further improve this as will more systematic monitoring of teaching.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are well used to meet pupils' needs and improve outcomes

The school has an adequate number of well qualified teaching staff to meet curriculum needs. Non-teaching staff make a valuable contribution to the life of the school but the number of support staff for pupils with SEN is insufficient. Though much accommodation is of good quality, many teaching and circulation areas are cramped. Provision for science, PE, drama and the school library is inadequate. Learning resources are generally adequate other than for ICT. Good use is made of the best value principles of comparison, challenge, competition and consultation in management and use of the school's resources.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The progress made by their children • The quality of teaching • Their children are expected to work hard • Behaviour in the school is good • The school helps their children to mature • Their children like school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work done by their children at home • How closely the school works with parents • Information on how their children are getting on

The inspection team agreed with the positive views of parents as expressed in the questionnaire sent out prior to the inspection. The team did not, however, agree with parents' views on homework. The amount and relevance of homework tasks were judged to be well planned and appropriate. Completion of classwork at home could, however, increase the load. Annual full reports to parents and the systems for contacting individual parents were seen to be sound but the inspection team noted concerns about the organisation of parents' evenings and considered that this should be reviewed by the school. The team also considered that in order to establish closer working links, the school should improve the frequency and quality of information sent to parents to ensure they are kept well informed about current practice and events in the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Pupils' attainment when they enter the school is broadly average. They make good progress and by end of Key Stage 3, standards of attainment are above average. In the three core subjects in 1999, results as measured by national tests showed that attainment was average in science, above average in English and well above average in mathematics. Though there is some variation across years, results over a four-year period indicate that, taking all three core subjects together, the performance of pupils was well above the national average. In comparison with similar schools (those with a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals) results as measured by an average total points score per pupil were above average in English, well above in mathematics and almost in line with the average in science. The trend over time in the average points score is broadly in line with the national trend. The performance of girls is above that of girls nationally whilst that of boys is well above the national average for boys. Test results for all three subjects in 2000 indicate an improvement in the number of pupils achieving level 5 or above in all three subjects.

2. Observations during the inspection confirmed the good progress made by pupils across Key Stage 3. Pupils achieve particularly high standards in mathematics and art. Standards of work seen were good in all other subjects other than ICT and Latin where standards were broadly in line with expectations. Literacy skills are well developed across the key stage and good standards of numeracy are established enabling pupils to apply these appropriately in other subject areas. Pupils make satisfactory progress in the acquisition of ICT skills and use these to good effect across the curriculum.

3. Pupils continue to make good progress at Key Stage 4. In GCSE examinations in 1999, the proportion of pupils attaining 5 or more A*-C grades was well above the national average and above that of similar schools. Attainment as measured by an average point score per pupil was above both the national average and that of similar schools. The number of pupils attaining 1 or more GCSE passes was very high. Results in 1999 exceeded the targets set by the school and the trend over time exceeds the upward trend nationally. Attainment in English was significantly above the national average for both boys and girls though a below average proportion achieved the highest grades. Standards were particularly high in English literature but with a very low entry in comparison to that seen nationally. Standards were well above average in mathematics and above average in science. In all three core subjects, boys and girls achieve broadly comparable results though boys achieved a greater proportion of the highest grades in science. Pupils also performed well in 1999 in art, DT, drama, modern foreign languages (MFL), history and, particularly, in geography. GCSE results in 2000 were broadly in line with those of previous years. Observation and scrutiny of pupils' work confirms this positive picture. Pupils' achievement in the work seen was well above expectations in English, mathematics, science, DT, music, PE and by girls in art. Achievement is generally good in most other subjects though standards in ICT are unsatisfactory at this key stage. Basic skills of literacy and numeracy continue to be well developed across the curriculum but.

4. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is good throughout. Where the pupils in greatest need work in the SEN unit for English and mathematics, progress is good due to the good quality of the teaching and work which is well structured to individual needs. Where SEN pupils are taught in subject areas, progress overall is good through supportive teaching and work generally well matched to their needs. The lowest attaining pupils would, however, benefit from more in-class support as, for example, in English and history. Pupils for whom English is a second language make good progress. Provision made by the school for gifted and talented pupils such as the Music Plus course encourages very good progress by these pupils.

5. Since the last inspection, standards of attainment have been maintained at Key Stage 3 and have improved considerably at Key Stage 4. Standards in RE which were well below expectations at that time are now very good at Key Stage 3 and in the newly introduced GCSE course. Standards in the core RE course at Key Stage 4 are still unsatisfactory because of insufficient time to meet the requirements of the Local Agreed Syllabus. This is currently under review by the school.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

6. The positive attitudes shown by pupils towards the school are a major factor in the high standards they achieve. In 99% of the lessons observed, their response was satisfactory or better. In 62%, their response was good or very good.

7. In lessons, pupils are generally quiet and attentive, are courteous towards staff and visitors, supportive of each other and will readily engage in conversation about their experiences. Many commented that, despite the size of the school, they value being identified and treated as individuals by staff. Their willingness to work independently and take responsibility for their own learning was very evident particularly in PE and music. In science, the degree of self-discipline shown by pupils ensured that practical work could take place safely in very crowded conditions. Interest and involvement in learning is a feature of many lessons as, for example, in English, art and DT. Most pupils express positive views about their experience and learning opportunities and many participate in the comprehensive extra-curricular programme most notably in music and sport.

8. Behaviour in and around the school is very good and a positive feature of school life. The school operates as an orderly and tranquil community where it is sometimes difficult to accept that there are over 1200 pupils on campus. Pupils are responsive to the school's code of conduct and recognise that action swiftly follows any breach of this. They are confident that should any incident of bullying occur, this will be dealt with quickly and effectively. The school uniform code is universally complied with, increasing the visible sense of identity and positive image of the school.

9. The emphasis on a strong pro-active approach to dealing with behavioural issues has resulted in a number of fixed period exclusions (36) with just one permanent exclusion during the year prior to inspection. LEA data indicates that the school is well below other local schools in its use of permanent exclusions despite being the largest in the county.

10. Importance is placed on creating and maintaining a secure and orderly environment which allows pupils to develop to their full potential. There is a spirit of self-help that sits well with the learning opportunities and effective teaching in the school. Staff and pupils enjoy positive relationships that benefit both. Pupils display a high degree of respect for each other, particularly those who are less able academically. Respect is also shown for the environment and resources of the school and for the property of others.

11. Pupils are encouraged and willing to take on a range of responsibilities in tutor groups and lessons. In addition, from Year 10, pupils can offer themselves for consideration as prefects. This system works well and was favourably commented on by both staff and pupils as providing an important bridging role between them and an aid to good order and communication.

12. Overall attendance rates of 92.8% are above the national average of 91%. Unauthorised absence rates of 0.2% compare favourably to a national average of 1.1% and are likely to improve even further as a result of a new school initiative to tackle absenteeism.

13. The attitude of pupils with SEN is good. Most behave well, are attentive, and enthusiastic, showing an enjoyment in their work. Books are kept in good order, work is usually completed and pupils try hard to present this neatly. They generally work cooperatively with each other and play a full part in lessons.

14. The good standards of behaviour and positive attitudes of pupils noted during the last inspection continue to be a strength of the school.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

15. The quality of teaching is good. In the lessons observed, teaching was satisfactory or better in 98% of lessons and good or better in over three-quarters of these. The consistent quality of teaching across key stages and across subjects is a strength of the school. Teaching is particularly strong in art, music, RE and in English and PE at Key Stage 4. It is satisfactory in ICT and good in all other subjects. Some examples of excellent practice were observed in English, drama, science, modern foreign languages and RE.

16. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of their subjects and this is communicated effectively to pupils. Their expectations are high but realistic as, for example, in English where teachers encourage, challenge and support pupils according to their needs. In history, challenging and skilful questioning is used to encourage participation and an emphasis on skills development in DT ensures that pupils can meet the requirements of progressively complex and challenging tasks. Though the school is currently developing formal policies on literacy and numeracy, these are well taught across the curriculum. Teaching of ICT is broadly satisfactory but needs better co-ordination to ensure equitable provision for all pupils.

17. Almost without exception, lessons are well planned and presented to ensure that pupils clearly understand what is expected of them. Teaching methods are generally both appropriate and effective though there is scope for more use of group work in

history and for more exploration of intuitive ideas in mathematics. Very good use is made of target languages in both French and German. Most teachers make good use of time and resources to enhance learning though the size of some classes, particularly in mathematics, science and history, puts a considerable strain on teaching resources.

18. Pupil management is very good across the school and owes much to the high level of mutual respect developed between teachers and pupils. In a small minority of lessons, however, where staff were over-critical the response of pupils was inhibited.

19. Teachers have a good knowledge of their pupils and use day to day assessment well to structure lesson content and materials to meet individual needs. Homework is relevant and generally used constructively to extend and reinforce work done in lessons. Though parents expressed some concern over the amount of homework set, this was not found to be excessive. The completion of unfinished class work at home, however, could overburden some pupils when this is added to formal homework tasks.

20. In response to good teaching, pupils learn well with good acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding. They make considerable effort to develop and apply appropriate skills across the curriculum and work at a good pace. There is a high level of interest and concentration in lessons particularly at Key Stage 4. Pupils' knowledge of their own learning is good.

21. The quality of teaching and support for pupils with SEN is generally good. Subject teachers have a good knowledge of the requirements of these pupils and the work set is carefully planned to meet their needs. Good use is made of support teaching in class where this is available and learning support assistants and teaching staff co-operate effectively to help individual pupils. The teaching of English and mathematics for those pupils in greatest need by specialist SEN teachers is of good quality. Lessons are well prepared and organised, have clear aims, are well planned with a variety of activities, and relationships with pupils are good. Good provision and support are made for those pupils for whom English is a second language and for gifted and talented pupils.

22. Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching and learning has improved overall. There is now better acquisition and application of ICT skills across the curriculum but there remains a need for further development of this provision.

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

23. The school has well-established links with its feeder primary schools and transfer arrangements work well. Curriculum links at subject level are less well developed. Consolidation of the different learning experiences of pupils leads to some repetition of work during the early stages of Year 7. This does not, however, hinder progress. Year 11 pupils receive good advice for progression to post-16 education though curriculum links are surprisingly limited given that specialist colleges and post-16 institutions occupy the same campus.

24. The school has a broad and reasonably balanced curriculum that meets National

Curriculum requirements. Some curriculum issues highlighted in the last report have been addressed. All pupils now study a modern foreign language and DT in both key stages. There has been an attempt to broaden pupils' experience of ICT by including some skill development in subjects across the curriculum to supplement the discrete lessons provided in Key Stage 3 and Year 10. This is only partially successful. Though the time allocation is adequate, the inclusion of ICT as a module within DT in Years 8 and 9 impacts on the amount of work that can be achieved in that subject. Provision of ICT in Year 10 is not available to those pupils taking Music Plus or Latin and is addressed across the curriculum in Year 11 where provision is varied. Further work is needed to co-ordinate the mapping and assessment of this cross-curricular provision to ensure that all pupils have an equitable experience. The quality of RE provision has improved greatly and all students have contact with the subject in both key stages. Lessons are very effective but, in Key Stage 4, insufficient time is allocated to the core programme to enable teachers to fully achieve the objectives of the local agreed syllabus. In this respect only, RE provision does not fully meet statutory requirements. The recent introduction of a full GCSE option in RE and current plans to provide a short GCSE course for all students indicate a resolution of this issue.

25. Literacy and numeracy are developed effectively in a number of subject areas. Recent staff appointments offer the potential for improved mapping and co-ordination of this good practice to give pupils a focused developmental experience across the curriculum.

26. The school offers additional learning experiences to extend pupils' experience especially for the higher attainers. Though this is commendable, it does lead to some inequality of access to the curriculum at Key Stage 3. This in turn has an impact on the range of choice in Key Stage 4. Pupils in the top ability group for French are offered German as well as French in Years 8 and 9. They may also study Latin. Time for Latin comes in part from their English provision. Those not in the highest ability groups take a classical studies course. Apart from the differing opportunities and possible questions of relevance, these arrangements make movement between ability groupings difficult. When pupils are moved to higher sets, it is sometimes too late for them to attempt the extended range of languages and a different timetable experience is contrived that unduly increases the size of other classes. Year groups receive a very different share of staff resources. Key Stage 3 is currently providing a significant subsidy to Key Stage 4 and Year 8 carries the main burden in this respect.

27. In Key Stage 4, only the top ability groups in English study for GCSE English literature. Only those who have studied German have a choice of foreign languages. Latin is taken as an extra subject. The science curriculum in Key Stage 4 offers choice to the majority of pupils. Pupils take either three separate sciences or the dual award scheme at GCSE except for a very small group who study for the entry level Certificate of Achievement. The school monitors those opting for the three sciences, recognising that this affects the balance of their curriculum experience, with an impact on recruitment in the remaining option subjects in humanities and creative arts. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is broadened by the inclusion of courses in child development, information systems, drama, a humanities Certificate course. A GCSE business studies course recruits a relatively small number who are taught sensitively and carefully. Teachers use effective case study materials and vocational scenarios to good effect and pupils make appropriate progress.

28. Careers education and guidance are well organised, benefiting from discrete lessons in Years 10 and 11. The supporting documentation is excellent. The comprehensive programme includes work experience with appropriate support, guidance and information for parents, employers and pupils. An effective partnership with the local careers service provides pupils with independent advice and helps in organising work experience placements for Year 10 pupils. Clear progression routes and limited job opportunities lead 94% of pupils to take part in some form of post 16 continued learning. In Key Stage 3, however, there is no developed careers education programme until the end of the first term of Year 9 when pupils have careers sessions in preparation for option counselling.

29. The science curriculum and the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme provide appropriate cover of health and sex education as well as dealing with the consequences of the misuse of drugs. Specialist teachers address citizenship, environmental education, economic and industrial awareness and some health and first aid topics in Key Stage 4. PSHE in Key Stage 3 is not so well served. There is a twenty-minute lesson every two weeks with an additional one hour session once per half term to address a range of associated aspects. A very large number of form tutors teach this programme which may make it difficult to ensure a consistent approach. The newly appointed PSHE co-ordinator has initiated an audit to identify planned opportunities to support the personal and social development of all pupils. Though many other activities support individual development, the current arrangements for the formal delivery of a consistent PSHE at Key Stage 3 are unsatisfactory with insufficient time to deliver the planned programme.

30. The school meets the requirements of all pupils on its Code of Practice SEN register. Individual education plans broadly match the needs of the pupils. Each individual education plan, however, includes general targets provided by the SEN co-ordinator and also those set by subject teachers. These are unco-ordinated and result in a proliferation of targets that can be confusing for pupils. Many targets are not sufficiently specific and are not shared with the pupil. A well structured curriculum and support teaching in class are provided in English and mathematics for the group of pupils with the greatest need. Support in some other subjects for this group and for other pupils with SEN elsewhere in the school is insufficient and was reported at the time of the last inspection. The support provided for pupils with specific difficulties is soundly organised. Good careers education and guidance are provided for pupils with SEN.

31. There are plenty of extra-curricular opportunities to extend pupils' personal interests and provide additional academic challenge. Music makes an impressive contribution in this respect. Most of the practical music sessions are open to all with elementary skills who benefit from working alongside the more advanced 'Music Plus' pupils. 'Music Plus' pupils indeed rely heavily on extra-curricular time to make the impressive progress in practical musicianship and theory that is so evident in their performances. Sport is also very popular and there is considerable commitment to the after school activities by many teachers who provide a good range of team events. Specialist clubs, societies, performances, house competitions, environmental activities, cultural visits and foreign exchanges all play their part. Many pupils participate and they and their parents welcome the range of opportunities available.

32. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The spiritual dimension of the curriculum is effective and the school makes satisfactory provision for collective

worship. Assembly themes are varied and interesting, making good use of the talents of pupils and senior staff. Local ministers also contribute and during the inspection one such visitor captured the imagination of many pupils with a series of engaging assemblies that provoked considerable opportunity for reflection. On other days, form tutors present a 'Thought for the Day', published in the weekly bulletin. These are succinct, witty and frequently inspiring. Many are secular and humanitarian as well as religious and provide the opportunity for inspiration and reflection at the start of the day. Some form tutors make good use of these but others employ a more mechanistic approach. In consequence, pupils do not have a consistent and positive experience. The RE department makes a significant and strong contribution to spiritual development. The spiritual dimension is also apparent in special events such as the annual carol service in the cathedral and is also addressed in topics across many areas of the curriculum. The art response to JC 2000 is notable and displays of paintings around the school effectively explore themes of peace, suffering and starvation.

33. The school strongly promotes the principles of distinguishing right from wrong. Exploration of moral issues features in many subjects, particularly in RE, history, geography, science and general studies. School rules are simple and clearly stated. Teachers generally set a good example in their dealings with pupils. Pupils understand the system of rewards and sanctions and this promotes good standards of behaviour and responsible attitudes. The concepts of justice and fairness underpin much of the work of the school. Pupils are encouraged to care about others and also to respect their own and the wider environment. They make a notable contribution through charity and community events. Support for the local hospice and events such as the annual money raising Malvern Walk and sponsorship in India through the 'Goodwill Villages' campaign, provide opportunities to accept responsibility for the care and support of others. In school, paired reading schemes and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme accentuate awareness of the benefits of service and encourage acceptance of personal and social responsibility. There are opportunities to exercise responsibility as prefects, house captains, members of the environment committee and as environmental wardens, boosting pupils' self-confidence and inter personal skills.

34. Pupils gain a very good insight into their own cultural traditions especially in the humanities, English and the creative arts. The school seeks to promote knowledge, understanding and recognition of the multi-cultural reality of life in Britain. There are active and diverse strategies to foster an awareness of other cultures in RE, the humanities, food technology, music and modern foreign languages. The foreign exchange programmes, corridor and classroom displays and charitable work, all contribute effectively in broadening horizons and developing a shared sense of pride.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

35. Effective measures are in place to ensure the welfare, health and safety of pupils. Health and safety issues are addressed systematically through regular reviews involving both governors and staff. Matters requiring attention are carefully considered and appropriate action taken. Good attention is paid to safe practice in practical departments particularly science where the accommodation is severely restricted. Teachers take their responsibilities seriously and are quick to intervene if they detect potential safety hazards as, for instance, in ensuring that pupils were correctly using seat belts when on a short bus journey to an out of school venue.

36. A designated deputy head has overall responsibility for Child Protection issues, including liaison with external agencies. Appropriate guidance is given to staff, including those new to the school, through training and documentation. Heads of year are correctly informed of specific cases where close monitoring is necessary.

37. Very effective measures are in place to promote attendance. Analysis of attendance reports allows identification of "at risk" pupils who need to be closely monitored. The absence of such pupils is swiftly followed up after morning registration usually by means of a telephone call to a parent or guardian. The school works in close co-operation with the Education Welfare Officer. Early analysis of these measures indicates the successful re-integration of some pupils who might otherwise have become completely disaffected. This effective pro-active approach is a credit to the school. Legislative requirements on attendance are met and new technology is used to good effect to provide detailed up to date information to the senior management team. To encourage consistency in attendance, a range of certificates is awarded to pupils in recognition of their full attendance. Conversely, action is taken against persistent poor or late attendees.

38. The school has a clear code of conduct that is well understood by pupils and effective as evidenced in the high standards of behaviour observed throughout the school. A system of rewards is effectively applied to recognise and reward achievement, effort and good behaviour. A range of sanctions is applied to deal with poor behaviour and includes referrals to senior staff, a report system, a graduated detention scheme and, in the last resort, exclusion from school. Governors are supportive of the approach to discipline and receive details in regular confidential reports from the headteacher. Their discipline sub-committee complies with statutory requirements relating to exclusions, is fully apprised of incidents, aware of their role and involved where necessary in decision making. There is some parental concern about the use of detention but the school does respond to special circumstances through the grievance procedures.

39. Monitoring of pupils' academic progress is thorough. Increasing use is made of Key Stage 3 test data to provide information on projected GCSE grades at Key Stage 4. Twice yearly reviews enable senior management to identify and support those pupils seen to be under-achieving. Regular checks are made on attainment and progress through scrutiny of books and interviews with pupils. New technology has been introduced to monitor progress across the school. Target setting at Key Stage 3 is already being developed in some subject areas. Good practice in monitoring and assessment is evident in mathematics, science, art, history and English with the development of target setting in Key Stage 3. In most departments, ongoing assessment is well used to inform lesson planning and meet individual need though insufficient use is made of assessment to inform long term planning in DT, geography and PE. The school has not yet developed a whole school approach to marking and assessment though this is under review.

40. The identification and initial assessment of the requirements of pupils with SEN is good. The arrangements for monitoring the progress of those pupils in greatest need are sound. The procedures for monitoring the progress of these students in mainstream classes are, however, neither systematic nor comprehensive and are unsatisfactory.

Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are supported by the pastoral staff in the school. This provision is well organised, supportive, and generally effective.

41. The school has a well-established and effective pastoral system. Parents and pupils comment favourably about the smoothness of transition and good induction arrangements when pupils enter the school. Pastoral support is good and teachers ably demonstrate a good knowledge of individual and collective needs. Heads of school chair regular pastoral group meetings to consider whole school issues and the problems of individual pupils. Observation of working practice indicates that the needs of pupils are addressed with skill, knowledge and consideration. A house system also helps encourage good relationships and extends teachers' knowledge of pupils. At Key Stage 4, good personal support and guidance are provided for pupils through the core studies programme and careers education. Appropriate advice is given on options in Year 9 although the option booklet needs to be simplified and made more user-friendly. More time is needed, however, to extend support for pupils' personal development through the formal PSHE programme at Key Stage 3.

42. Since the last inspection, procedures to assess and monitor pupils' progress have improved with the potential for further refinement as wider use is made of new systems to record attainment and extend target setting.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

43. Aylestone is a popular school and has been oversubscribed for a number of years. Many pupils are drawn from outside the normal catchment area indicating a high regard for the school. Parents attending a meeting with the registered inspector prior to inspection and the unusually large number who returned questionnaires were largely supportive of its achievements. There was a high level of appreciation for the progress made by children, the expectation that they will work hard, the quality of teaching and the good standards of behaviour. This picture largely reflects the good relationship with parents noted at the time of the last inspection.

44. Many parents expressed appreciation of the efforts made by pastoral staff to contact them if problems arise and the way in which these are dealt with swiftly and in the best interests of the child. Most felt comfortable approaching the school about problems and many were appreciative of the response of teachers. A substantial proportion, however, of those who returned questionnaires indicated concern over the information received on their children's progress. Though the full annual pupil reports were judged to be informative and helpful, there is clearly some concern about the effectiveness of interim reports and the organisation of parents' evenings where there is insufficient time to consult teachers. The school could usefully review how these aspects might be improved.

45. There were also a substantial number of critical comments from parents about the lack of a close working relationship with parents. As in most secondary schools, there is only a limited amount of direct involvement by parents in their children's learning. The school has, however, an active PTA that assists with fund raising and social events and a number of parents involved with the PTA are also members of the governing body. Parents also participate in sponsorship and fund raising activities for charity and many support their children's involvement in extra-curricular activities.

46. To keep parents informed of events and information about school life and involve them more closely with the life of the school, a number of letters are sent out each year. These were seen to be very formal in both style and content and this could appear intimidating and off-putting to parents. Whilst existing practice is functional, consideration should be given to ways in which communication with parents could be extended and presented in a more informal way using the considerable investment made by the school in improving its ICT facilities.

47. The governors' annual report to parents does not currently comply with statutory requirements in that it does not include comparative information on school performance or details of exclusions.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

48. The school benefits from strong and effective leadership and management that promote high standards and very good teaching and learning. Clear aims and values are reflected in all aspects of school life. The headteacher, senior management team and governing body have developed a good working relationship and complimentary roles which are very successful in meeting the needs of pupils.

49. The governing body is committed to supporting the school and its management. They are very well informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses and have devised an effective sub-committee structure to deal with all aspects of provision. Some governors spend significant amounts of time in school during the working day. In most respects, governors fulfil their responsibilities well and meet their statutory requirements other than in the provision of core RE in Key Stage 4 and in the way in which they report to parents.

50. The work of the school is regularly monitored and evaluated through on-going checks on pupils' work at both senior management and departmental level. Use is made of test and examination results and LEA data to inform teaching and learning particularly in Key Stage 4. Departmental reviews are regularly undertaken by the headteacher. A computerised record system has been introduced to develop this work further with some initiatives already in place in art and English to extend monitoring and target setting at Key Stage 3. The potential of this initiative is, however, underdeveloped as yet in most other departments.

51. There has been regular appraisal of teachers and a new system has now been introduced for performance management. There is an expectation that all heads of department will regularly make formal observations of teaching within their departments. Though this is already well-established in mathematics and modern foreign languages, it is often informal or in its infancy in other departments and needs to be more systematically addressed. There is also scope for more formal monitoring of teaching by members of the senior management team. Monitoring of the work of newly qualified teachers is very good.

52. The school has recently adopted the LEA format for improvement planning and strategic planning at whole school level is now appropriate. Long term strategic planning at departmental level needs to be further developed, particularly in English,

mathematics, DT and history and this should both reflect and more closely inform whole school planning.

53. The income per pupil of the school is slightly below the median and a further strain is placed on the budget by the need to maintain a listed building and tree preservation orders. The school manages its finances very well, has good financial planning and control arrangements and applies the principle of best value in the use of its financial resources. A practical and responsible approach to budget management has served the school's needs well as for example in anticipating government funding by seeking an LEA loan to install a campus wide fibre optic network connecting all the classrooms to the computer network. As a result they are now well placed to ensure that ICT is available and used throughout the school and not simply confined to dedicated computer suites. Though budgetary planning is conducted with precision it does not always directly involve those staff responsible for developing curricular areas and facilities.

54. In most respects, there is good delegation of responsibilities to ensure an effective contribution by staff in management roles. More time, however, should be found to enable the ICT and SEN co-ordinators to better monitor all aspects of provision in their respective areas. Opportunities are provided to extend the experience of teachers beyond their subject areas but there remains a need to further develop the contribution of middle managers to whole school strategic planning. Pupil contribution to whole school planning is currently confined only to prefects and house captains.

55. Leadership of the SEN department is satisfactory, day to day record keeping is sound, statutory reviews are carried out, and information is provided for subject departments. An identified teacher in each subject area acts as a co-ordinator and is responsible for liaison between the subject department and the SEN department. The link, however, is not exploited effectively and systematically as a line of communication for support and guidance. There is no formally developed system for monitoring the effectiveness of the support provided across the school to identify initiatives for implementation by the SEN department and subject co-ordinators. Planning with clear targets for development is unsatisfactory. There has been some improvement since the last inspection but the co-ordination of the work of pupils with SEN across the school remains weak.

56. The school has an appropriate number of well qualified teachers with a good balance of experience to meet curriculum need. Non-teaching staff make a valuable contribution to the life of the school but the number of support staff is insufficient to meet the needs of SEN pupils when they are working in mainstream classes. Staff development arrangements are broadly satisfactory but more opportunities should be developed to extend the professional development of middle managers and the school should review the organisation of whole school training days to ensure that key issues are appropriately addressed. Arrangements for the induction of new staff, particularly newly qualified teachers, are very good and the school is an effective provider of initial teacher training.

57. The school is located on a pleasant and very well maintained site but is constrained by the size of classrooms and circulation areas in older parts of the school which are too small for the number of pupils on roll. Much has been done to improve accommodation but even where subjects such as English are accommodated in new

buildings, some teaching has to take place in other classrooms detached from the main block. Accommodation for science is unsatisfactory. Some laboratories are too small, most need refurbishment and it is only due to the good behaviour of pupils that practical experiments can be undertaken safely. The school also has insufficient multi-purpose indoor space for PE and no dedicated area for drama. The library, though relatively newly refurbished, is too small to accommodate the book stock necessary for the number of pupils. SEN accommodation is sound and the resources provided are good.

58. The school generally has adequate learning resources but with some shortage of texts for homework in science and an insufficient number of books, particularly fiction, in the library. Major developments have taken place to improve ICT resources but there remains a need to extend the use of these at departmental level, through either easier access to ICT suites or departmentally based equipment, in science, English, art, and mathematics

59. The school provides good value for money. Since the last inspection, improvements have been made to long term planning though this needs to be further refined. The enlarged senior management team now has an increased involvement in monitoring the work of the school to inform planning. Some structures have been introduced to increase the contribution of middle management to whole school development but these need to be further extended.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

60. The school should now raise standards further by:-

- improving the co-ordination of special needs provision across the school and, as resources allow, the amount of SEN support in mainstream classes (paragraphs 4, 30, 40, 55, 56, 68, 78, 113)
- ensuring that sufficient time is provided to deliver PSHE at Key Stage 3 and core RE and ICT at Key Stage 4 (paragraphs 24, 29, 150)
- reviewing curriculum structures to ensure flexibility in the learning opportunities that can be offered to all pupils (paragraphs 26, 27, 71, 123, 137)
- further involving middle management staff in whole school strategic planning (paragraphs 54, 99, 117, 126)
- continuing discussions with the LEA to improve accommodation particularly the quality of science laboratories, the amount of multi-purpose indoor space for PE, improved provision for drama and the extension of library space (paragraphs 57, 72, 80, 89)
- complying fully with statutory requirements in relation to the governors' annual report to parents (paragraph 47).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

187

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

49

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7	37	35	20	2	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	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1,240	N/A
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	134	N/A

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	16	N/A
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	193	N/A

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	32

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	21
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	37

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.0
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	111	120	231

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	68	80	66
	Girls	94	89	66
	Total	162	169	132
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	70	73	57
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	32	52	20
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	85	81	65
	Girls	100	89	83
	Total	185	170	148
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	80	74	64
	National	64 (61)	64 (64)	60 (61)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	42	50	43
	National	31 (30)	37 (37)	28 (30)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	117	125	247

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	70	107	116
	Girls	80	123	125
	Total	150	230	241
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	62 (57.4)	95 (93.3)	100 (?)
	National	46.6 (44.6)	90.0 (89.8)	95.8 (95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	41 (38.4)
	National	38.0 (37.0)

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

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	5
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	18
White	1,216
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	2	0
White	34	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	66.0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	413

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.0%
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.3
Key Stage 4	18.7

Financial information

Financial year	1999 – 2000
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	£
Total income	2,714,408
Total expenditure	2,714,450
Expenditure per pupil	2,188
Balance brought forward from previous year	123,350
Balance carried forward to next year	123,298

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,240
Number of questionnaires returned	616

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	26	62	10	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	31	60	5	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	27	59	5	1	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	16	56	19	6	4
The teaching is good.	21	68	5	1	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	18	51	18	3	10
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	34	50	8	4	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	50	46	1	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	15	51	19	4	11
The school is well led and managed.	33	52	6	2	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	28	59	7	1	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	21	56	11	2	10

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

ENGLISH

61. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, test results suggest their attainment is broadly average. Pupils' attainment as measured by national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 was above the national average as was the proportion of pupils reaching levels 5 and 6. Attainment was also above that of similar schools. Taking the four years 1996-1999 together, the performance of girls in English was above the national average and that of boys well above.

62. At the end of Key Stage 4 GCSE results in English in 1999 were significantly above the national average for both boys and girls though the proportion of pupils achieving the highest grades A* and A was below average. Results were similar in 2000. Performance in English Literature was significantly above the national average for both boys and girls, as was the number of pupils gaining A* and A grades. Literature results show an improvement that was maintained in 2000 though the proportion of pupils entered is significantly smaller than the national average.

63. By the end of Year 9 standards in English are above average and by the end of Year 11 they are well above average. Pupils' listening skills are particularly good and they pay very careful attention to their teachers at all times. They respond to questions readily and often answer at length, displaying thought and perception. They have the confidence to ask questions of their teachers and seek clarification. Teachers have high expectations and all pupils are made to feel that their contributions are valued. Pupils speak fluently using clear, confident, well-modulated voices. They are taught to listen politely to their peers and take their turn in discussion. Excellent examples were seen in a top set Year 7 lesson, where pupils were engaged in preparing and making group presentations, and in a bottom set Year 11 class, where pupils listened to a short story and then discussed its language and content.

64. As the majority of work in all years is literature based pupils learn to handle it with increasing confidence. Various tasks are designed to make pupils pay close attention to text. A middle set in Year 8 was investigating how an author, by careful choice of language, made his characters three dimensional. A top set in Year 11, studying "Of Mice and Men", was able to make links to other literature and times, including Shakespeare and Dickens.

65. Pupils read well and are able to use appropriate language to describe literary techniques. They are encouraged to pursue their own individual reading. This was seen in a Year 9 class where attention was focused on 'private readers' for the first five minutes of the lesson. The Reading Century Challenge has been devised as a way of encouraging reading. Though an excellent concept, the support that can be offered by the school library is inadequate. The range of fiction is interesting and chosen for its appeal to both boys and girls but the number of books available is inevitably constrained by the size of the building.

6. As pupils progress through the school they write with increasing confidence, particularly noticeable at Key Stage 3. Presentation skills improve, choice of vocabulary becomes more adventurous and pupils write at greater length, usually in paragraphs. Punctuation is generally good, but a number of pupils tend to make basic spelling errors. The work is wide in scope and includes letter writing, literature comprehension, newspaper articles, poetry, diary extracts and work on the history of language. Writing in Key Stage 4 shows marked development across the two years. Much of the language work stems from the literature component and results in effective sustained writing and evocative use of language. Pupils in both key stages and at all levels are aided in their writing by worksheets that reinforce the task and support learning.

67. The school has recently appointed a literacy co-ordinator who has made a cross-curricular audit and drafted a development plan. Some good practice has been identified, in particular the use of writing frames and key words. Various examples of these were noted during the inspection, particularly in art, history, geography and RE. Priorities have been identified including the introduction of a whole school marking policy and the development of a cross-curricular approach to spelling.

68. When pupils enter the school in Year 7 they are taught English in mixed ability classes for the first half term. Screening takes place and pupils are then set according to ability. A range of assessments is used to review setting every half term. A small group is taught in the SEN unit but most pupils join mainstream classes by the end of Key Stage 3. Those who remain in the unit have specific learning difficulties; teaching is matched to need and pupils make appropriate progress. All staff teaching English are aware of pupils with SEN needs and lessons are planned accordingly. Differentiation is usually by outcome but specific support is targeted where necessary. The availability of more in-class support teachers would benefit the department. Extension work is available to challenge the highest attainers in each set.

69. Pupils achieve well in English. They come to lessons expecting to work hard and to succeed. They lose no time in getting down to work and stay on task for the whole of the lesson. Relationships are excellent: pupils are polite to their teachers and supportive of their peers. At Key Stage 3 learning is good. Pupils learn and practice new skills and take pleasure in their success. Presentation skills are good, particularly when writing for a specific audience. Year 9 work on Titanic, displayed on most classroom walls, was imaginative, attractive and enhanced by the use of ICT. At Key Stage 4 learning is very good. Pupils in a bottom Year 11 set were producing work equivalent to GCSE Grades D and E. In all lessons pupils are expected to work and think hard. A Year 11 middle set lesson, designed as revision for the 20th Century poetry paper, provided pupils with a number of challenging tasks which they achieved.

70. Teaching is good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. There were no unsatisfactory lessons. Teachers are confident and demonstrate good subject knowledge. They have consistently high, but realistic, expectations and will only accept pupils' best efforts. Lessons have clear aims and place work in context, directing attention back to previously gained knowledge, and forward to new objectives. Lessons proceed at a good pace and pupils are engaged in a variety of tasks. No time is wasted. There is a sense of urgency in the classroom; a need to move forward and to achieve new goals. Relationships in the classroom are good. Teachers are quiet and controlled in their delivery and pupils respond accordingly. Teachers show awareness of pupils'

needs; encouraging, challenging and supporting them as appropriate. Good use is made of white-boards and overhead projectors to focus attention on tasks. Teaching is at its best when pupils are encouraged to think, are empowered to learn from each other and are working to attain their own targets as observed in a Year 7 lesson where pupils identified direct speech as an area they wished to improve. Instructions for homework are clear and pupils know what is expected of them.

71. Management and leadership of English are very good. The newly appointed head of department leads a team of committed teachers all of whom work to the same high standards. Plans for monitoring staff and supporting the newly qualified teachers are very sound. This is a department that is moving forward with a number of new initiatives in place as, for example, a marking policy and Key Stage 3 target setting. Areas for improvement have been identified but, for these to become reality, the department should now produce a development plan. The majority of teaching takes place in a purpose built English block that is light and spacious with a pleasant atmosphere. Impressive display work, mainly pupil generated, contributes to the ethos. It is unfortunate that, in order to accommodate numbers, some pupils are taught in rooms isolated from the area and sometimes inadequate. At present only the top sets follow GCSE Literature courses. Ways of extending this opportunity to other pupils should be explored. Top sets at Key Stage 3 lose one lesson a week to Latin. This is not ideal.

72. All Year 7, with the exception of Music Plus pupils, enjoy one period of drama a week. In Years 8 and 9 drama is incorporated into English lessons. Drama is a popular option at Key Stage 4 and GCSE results in 1999 were significantly above the national average for all pupils and for girls. Though results fell slightly in 2000 there was an increase in the percentage gaining the highest grades. Both written and practical work in drama reflect excellent teaching borne out in examination performance. Pupils of all abilities are made to aim high and work in a mutually supportive atmosphere; they demonstrate enjoyment and involvement. The school needs a dedicated drama space; when the main hall is not available lessons have to move to less appropriate areas.

73. Standards of achievement and teaching have both improved since the last inspection. At Key Stage 3 the improvement can be described as good and at Key Stage 4, very good. Reading for pleasure is now more widespread. Pupils are encouraged to aim high in all lessons. Target setting is in place in Key Stage 3 and individual needs are identified and monitored. Some pupils, particularly at Key Stage 3, still demonstrate weaknesses in spelling. The use of ICT is much more obvious in course work and on wall displays, but the department would benefit from easier access to computers, ideally one per classroom. In all the work seen there was no noticeable difference between the standard of class work and homework. The use of drafting and re-drafting as a teaching tool is an issue that the department still needs to address.

MATHEMATICS

74. Standards in mathematics are high. In 1999 Key Stage 3 results were well above the national average and that of similar schools. Results showed a good improvement in 2000. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades A*-C in GCSE examinations in 1999 was also well above the national average with a slight improvement in 2000. In

national examinations boys' attainment is slightly better than that of girls which reverses the national trend. The standards of work seen during the inspection were very good; there were some excellent examples of classwork and some very good examples of coursework. Pupils are working to a level appropriate to their level of attainment and are stretched academically by high teacher expectation.

75. The standard of teaching is high. Teaching in all lessons observed at Key Stage 3 was good or very good. At Key Stage 4 teaching was always satisfactory or better with most lessons good or very good. Teachers' planning is sound and the mathematics syllabus is covered effectively at both key stages. Teaching methods are traditional but effective. Lessons generally start with question and answer sessions where confident pupils are keen to demonstrate their knowledge; nonetheless, less assured pupils are usually drawn into discussion and are able both to learn and to demonstrate their learning well. Pupils' responses and, in the longer term, examination results show that the teaching strategies are effective. There are, however, occasions where alternative mathematical methods and intuitive ideas are not fully explored. Strong classroom control by all members of staff leads to very effective management of pupils. The pace of lessons is usually good and is appropriate to pupils' attainment and age. There are regular progress tests which, along with teacher assessments, are used to inform effective setting procedures. In an attempt, however, to create sets of equal attainment and also to ensure that low attaining groups are small, the department creates some classes that are very large, putting a strain on teaching resources.

76. Homework is taken very seriously; it is usually used to consolidate classwork and is regularly set and marked. Some use is made of detention for those pupils who don't complete work on time. Although written comments on both classwork and homework are not always diagnostic, pupils often have effective verbal feedback. Pupils make good progress throughout the school. In Year 7 pupils spend a term consolidating work from primary schools but still make good progress by the end of the academic year. Numeracy work is effectively reinforced for pupils in Year 7. Higher attaining pupils make very good progress, forming an accelerated group in Year 8 with the aim of taking GCSE a year early in Year 10.

77. Pupils work hard in mathematics lessons, show a high level of commitment and take a pride in their work. Their interest in the subject is high and their attention is generally very good although some low attaining pupils' concentration can waver towards the end of a lesson. There are very good teacher-pupil relationships in the classroom, leading to the development of the positive and mature attitudes shown by most pupils in the school. Pupils respect their environment and both exercise books and textbooks are properly cared for. Pupils are polite when asked for information and respond with maturity. When working in class, however, there is a tendency for pupils simply to "follow the rules" simply because most lessons emphasise methodology rather than intuition. Fully independent work only materialises in coursework and when tackling AT1 (using and applying mathematics). Pupils are well aware of setting arrangements and, at Key Stage 4, of the tier of their examination entries, test results keeping pupils appraised of their progress.

78. Pupils are assessed on entry to the school for attainment in mathematics and English. Those who are weak in both subjects are taught in a separate unit for pupils with SEN. The teaching groups in this unit rarely exceed 14 pupils. At the end of each

year all pupils in the unit are given the same mathematics examinations as their main school counterparts. Some pupils with SEN make good progress and return to mainstream classes. Those for whom mathematics progress is slow remain in the unit where they benefit from a very low teacher-pupil ratio. To support these arrangements, better communication is needed between the mathematics department and the SEN unit.

79. The mathematics department is strong, confident and well balanced in terms of age and experience. The department is effectively led and managed and the teachers operate well as a team. Mathematics staff have shared aims and philosophies, similar teaching styles and work hard for success. All are capable of teaching mathematics to GCSE higher level and beyond. There is very clear guidance for staff in the departmental handbook and the scheme of work is very detailed and precise. With very good results at Key Stage 3 and at Key Stage 4 the department is currently meeting all its targets. The development plan, however, is disappointingly bland. There are processes now in place for monitoring, evaluation and the development of teaching in the subject and procedures continue to be refined. Newly qualified teachers are regularly observed teaching; other members of staff are observed both formally and informally by the head of department. The department's use of new technology is variable. Available facilities are over-subscribed by other curriculum areas and would anyway prove difficult for use by large mathematics classes. No use was made of computer facilities in mathematics lessons during the inspection and it is rare for the department to use them at all. Pupils are, however, encouraged to use computer technology when completing coursework tasks. Some mathematics work (such as spreadsheets and databases) is taught in discrete ICT lessons with discussion of syllabus content between the two departments. Graphical calculator facilities are available for the exclusive use of the mathematics department; such equipment is primarily used with accelerated GCSE groups.

80. There are four main mathematics classrooms, all well decorated with appropriate wall displays and examples of pupils' work. Some classes, however, are taught in non-specialist rooms away from the central area. These vary in quality. The size of some rooms is inadequate for many classes putting a stress on working relationships in the classroom. Some mathematics classes are peripatetic as, for example, one lower attaining group that has three lessons in three separate rooms; were it not taught by a highly experienced member of staff this might lead to instability for pupils. The department has sufficient resources to equip all pupils with individual textbooks. These may be supplemented with other textbooks and photocopied commercially produced resources. Despite the fact that some of the alternative materials are out of date, staff make effective use of all the resources available.

81. Currently there is no whole school policy on numeracy though good use of numeracy skills was observed in science and geography. The school has recently appointed a member of the mathematics team to run an audit across all departments. Documentation for this project is well developed and indicates that an effective numeracy policy should soon be in operation.

82. Since the last inspection there have been improvements in communicating learning objectives to pupils, recording pupils' progress and the monitoring and assessment of staff. These areas were identified as weaknesses in the previous inspection in 1996.

SCIENCE

83. Standards achieved are significantly above expectations by the end of each of the two key stages. The results of the 1999 national tests for 14-year-olds were close to the national averages and the average points score was also in line with the national one. It was almost in line with the average of schools having similar proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals. Over the three previous three years, the average points score has been above the national one with no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. In 2000 results improved very markedly. The 1999 GCSE results in double science were above average with both sexes performing similarly overall although boys gained a higher proportion of A* and A grades. The results in the separate sciences were also above average. The proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades was well above the averages of schools having similar proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals and also those schools where pupils performed similarly in the national tests two years previously. The GCSE results in 2000 were similar to those of 1999. All of the pupils on the Certificate of Achievement course gained merits or distinctions.

84. Pupils enter the school with attainment levels that are about average. Progress and learning are usually good and often very good in lessons. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils have acquired a good knowledge and a secure understanding of the subject matter in each of the attainment targets. Year 7 pupils soon learn how to observe and measure accurately and record appropriately. By the end of a lesson most of the lower attaining pupils in a Year 9 group had learned how to work out formulae of compounds. Most Year 9 pupils competently plan investigations and ensure a fair test is carried out. They make accurate predictions and many of them can analyse and evaluate their results. Higher attainers perform calculations on how forces affect direction of movement. They identify parts of the body and describe functions of them using correct vocabulary. The good progress continues throughout Key Stage 4. Year 11 higher attainers in one lesson applied their knowledge and understanding of metal reactions well and very quickly understood the principles underlying the purification of copper by electrolysis. Middle attainers calculate the numbers of sub-atomic particles from data and use the information to derive ionic formulae. Most accurately calculate speed and interpret speed-time graphs. Lower attainers explain changes of state in terms of particle movement and construct simple food chains. A group of Year 11 lower attainers soon learned about the everyday effects of refraction and a few, with prompting, could explain them. Practical skills develop to above expected levels. Pupils have the numeracy skills enabling them to process their experimental results and present them in various graphical forms. They increasingly use correct terminology and units as they get older. They take great care with their written work and standards of presentation are above average.

85. Pupils have very positive attitudes. They arrive promptly and well prepared for lessons and quickly settle. They are keen to succeed and respond well to teachers' high expectations of conduct and behaviour. It could have been unsafe in some lessons where pupils were doing practical work under cramped conditions had the teacher not been able to rely upon their exemplary conduct. The quality of the pupil-teacher relationships promotes confidence and pupils willingly ask and answer questions. They co-operate very well in groups working productively and safely without constant close

supervision. Their attitudes to homework are good and many spend more than the expected time in completing tasks.

86. Attainment in GCSE examinations has improved significantly since the last inspection and at a faster rate than the national one. The quality of teaching has also improved since then. New courses have been introduced in both key stages including a scheme of proven worth nationally to accelerate the development of thinking skills for the younger pupils. Early indications are that this is meeting with success. There are now more opportunities for pupils to develop ICT skills. Practical skills are now well developed at both key stages. Assessment procedures are now comprehensive and accurate and much use is made of the information in setting targets for both groups and individuals.

87. The quality of teaching is good overall. A little is unsatisfactory and it is very good or excellent in over half of the lessons. Most teachers exploit their very good knowledge of pupils in establishing positive relationships and skilfully questioning them. They know their subject well and make it comprehensible by using examples to which pupils readily relate. Some immediately capture pupils' interest by telling them of their own personal experiences. Others immediately focus pupils by giving a quick test. Lessons are usually well planned with lively informative exposition and a good variety of activities. Management of pupils is almost always very good and teachers ensure that practical work is carried out in a safe, orderly manner. In most lessons pupils are kept busy throughout. In one lesson the teacher quickly settled the pupils, gathered them around the front bench and promoted class discussion to recall the work done in the previous lesson. There was much skilful targeting of questions to tease out information and to encourage pupils to put forward ideas. They did so readily with the teacher developing them and sensitively correcting misconceptions. Procedures for practical work were competently demonstrated and appropriate guidance given regarding safety precautions and potential difficulties. The pupils co-operated extremely well working safely and productively in small groups. They knew what they were doing and what they were trying to find out and were accurately recording their observations. A further class discussion followed in which pupils understood the explanations and conclusions. Pupils were fully engaged and enjoyed the lesson. However in another lesson there was little pupil-teacher interaction with much delivery of information by the teacher at too fast a rate with little questioning to check understanding. Instances of inattention were not immediately corrected and some pupils did not know what they had to do in the practical activity. This was not organised well and some groups were too large resulting in individuals not being fully involved. The time allowed was too long and pupils were repeating skills already acquired. There was a lack of pace and challenge and consequently few pupils made any progress.

88. Pupils with SEN make good progress. Most are taught well in small groups with suitable tasks and there is sometimes extra effective in-class support. In other lessons teachers are well aware of pupils' difficulties and give individuals help whenever possible. Gifted and talented pupils make good progress as a result of grouping arrangements and the quality of the teaching. Homework often reinforces work done in lessons and sometimes provides opportunities for pupils to show initiative and develop research skills. Some extended pieces of written work on penicillin and others on environmental issues were of a high standard. Most teachers mark work thoroughly and promptly and write informative comments which help pupils move forward.

89. The curriculum has added breadth with GCSE courses in double science and in separate sciences. There is also a Certificate of Achievement course which is successfully motivating those pupils for whom it was introduced. There are sufficient appropriately qualified teachers with a good balance of experience. They are deployed effectively making good use of their specialisms and expertise with particular groups. Technical support is of a high quality. The department is very well led and effectively managed by a competent and enthusiastic head well supported by two very able subject heads. All staff work hard as a team with a commitment to high standards and continuous improvement. Informal monitoring of teaching has taken place and formal procedures are to be introduced shortly. Strategies to disseminate the good teaching practices throughout the department are informal. Support for the talented newly qualified teacher is very good and much appreciated. There is not enough accommodation and a significant number of lessons are not taught in laboratories. Some of the laboratories are too small and most need refurbishment. Some do not have mains services on central benches resulting in crowding in some class practical sessions and consequential adverse effects on learning. Pupils do not have text books for use at home and there is not enough ICT equipment to provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to gain 'hands on' experience. The success achieved in addressing issues highlighted in the last inspection report is indicative of the capacity for further improvement. The amount of technical support has increased to a level where it is just adequate. There has, however, been little improvement in the accommodation.

ART

90. Teacher assessment shows that pupils' standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 are good. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades A*-C in GCSE examinations in 1999 was well above the national average. Girls' results are significantly better than the national average and higher than those of boys. The performance of boys in the achievement of higher-grade passes has declined over the past three years. Standards overall were maintained in 2000.

91. In the work seen, standards of attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 were very good. Pupils in Year 7 were capable of working objectively when making a coloured drawing of sweets and cakes in a still life study. They had a good understanding of colour and used pastels and chalks to good effect in their work. In a Year 7 graphics group, pupils were able to analyse and discuss aspects of design. They discussed various types of packaging and understood its value in marketing as well as its role in protecting a product from damage. Year 8 pupils showed a knowledge of Cubism and were capable of developing their own Cubist compositions through the study of everyday objects such as a teapot and cups. Work shows greater perceptual depth when pupils use first hand observation as a basis for their work. This was observed in a Year 9 class when studies made of Hereford Cathedral were developed, through a series of stages using card relief, plaster of Paris and clay, into a three-dimensional decorative light. ICT is well developed, as observed in a Year 9 lesson, where pupils demonstrated good skills when creating an animated sequence using cartoon characters. SEN pupils achieve very good attainment levels for their ability as, for example, when developing drawings of buildings into good quality lino-prints. At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' standards of attainment overall are good and girls' attainment very good. Recruitment for art through the Year 9 option scheme results in some groups containing an above

average number of SEN boys. This has an effect upon standards achieved at the higher grade levels. In Year 11, high standards of work were observed in work that had been initiated through observational studies. This is strongly in evidence in many of the girls' projects, where work was found to progress through a number of stages based on sketchbook studies. The weakest boys' work is that based wholly on subjective images, such as characters from computer games. Work in Year 10 is generally very good with less difference in the standards achieved by boys and girls. Pupils use paint with confidence, have a well-developed understanding of colour and use this knowledge to improve the composition of their work. This skill was used effectively in a Year 10 class where pupils used their knowledge of the work of surrealist painters in a project on metamorphosis. Three-dimensional work is strong; many pupils choose clay or other three-dimensional materials as a medium for their final product. One pupil researched the work of Leonardo Da Vinci and developed a clay sculpture based on one of his pen and ink drawings.

92. Art teachers are well qualified and have a good command of their subject. A mainly new team is led by a capable and astute head of department. Staff bring a broad and varied range of expertise to the subject including ICT skills and textile printing. These two areas, when fully introduced, will extend the range and quality of the art curriculum particularly at Key Stage 4. Teachers use their knowledge and expertise to good effect within the classroom and lesson preparation is excellent at all stages. Teachers know pupils well and plan their lessons to meet individual requirements. This is seen to be most effective in the preparation and delivery of individual education plans (IEP's) for SEN pupils. There is consideration for the development of language and vocabulary in lessons as, for example, in a discussion that contrasted 'opaque' and 'transparent' painting techniques. SEN pupils make very good progress. There is a good response to lessons and pupils' attitudes towards art are very good. Pupils' homework is of a very high quality, appropriate in subject matter and used to support on-going project work. Pupils are kept on-task and time is used efficiently. Teachers' time management is extremely good and content of all lessons is very good. Teachers have good presentation skills and vary their strategies to meet learning requirements. There is, for example, a good use of open-ended questioning techniques to develop positive thinking skills. Well-constructed assessment procedures make a significant contribution to the development and progress of pupils' work. Self-assessment takes place on completion of all major projects. Evaluation techniques are developed within class, as in Year 10 where pupils evaluated and discussed each other's paintings. The department has established very good links with the local Art College and some Key Stage 4 pupils have spent a week working with college staff. Extra-curricular visits to galleries and museums have a marked effect upon the quality and range of pupils work; plans to introduce an artist-in-residence programme will add further value at both key stages. The quality of ICT at Key Stage 3 needs to be extended into Key Stage 4 and future planning should include provision for more ICT resources.

93. GCSE results at the higher grades have improved since the last inspection when they were reported to be good and above average. The provision for ICT has improved at Key Stage 3 and is now a strength. Limited resourcing, however, restricts regular in-class use of ICT at Key Stage 4. Each of the art rooms has a point for Internet connection and the department has one PC that is used mainly for research purposes. The department has gained the services of a knowledgeable and conscientious part-time technician since the last inspection. The deficiency in reference books, CD-ROM provision and photographic slides of artists' work has been addressed though, the

demands of a successful department require a continuous review of these resources. A projector has been allocated to the department and there is provision of blackout.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

94. At the end of Year 9 standards of attainment in DT are above the national average. Teacher assessment shows that almost three-quarters of pupils achieve level 5 or above. Girls generally performed better overall than the boys. Both boys and girls, however, performed less well in 2000 than in 1999.

95. The Key Stage 3 course provides a good base of knowledge, skills and understanding that covers the all DT requirements. Through Key Stage 3, pupils are introduced to the design and making process by working in a range of materials including food, wood, metal, textiles and, to a lesser extent, acrylics. In Year 7, pupils were observed designing and making hand held games having considered the properties of a range of wood based materials and evaluated their suitability for certain uses. Despite the early stage of their DT experience, they demonstrated a good level of understanding and were able to explain the design process and basic construction techniques. Other Year 7 pupils working in textiles were competent in the use of tools and materials whilst making a soft sculpture fish. Year 8 pupils demonstrated equal competence for their stage of development and good understanding of the need for safe practice whilst working in metal. A Year 9 group making doorstops showed good attention to detail and the need for careful preparation. Pupils in both food and textiles classes produced items of a quality higher than might be expected of similar age pupils nationally. The majority of Year 9 pupils making a compact travel roll had evaluated their designs and were investigating methods for completing their work using a combination of hand and machine methods. Having decided on a final design, they were able to articulate the potential problems they might encounter. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the design process and good skill development. Both practical and design work show a quality above that expected for this stage of pupils' development. The use of ICT by pupils at Key Stage 3 in DT is encouraged and used well where appropriate.

96. Results in GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 show that standards of attainment in 1999 were well above the national average. Standards were maintained in 2000. There was a difference in the performance of boys and girls in DT in 1999 with girls performing better than boys. Pupils with SEN perform well in the subject. The quality of the work seen both in lessons and through scrutiny of work is good. Pupils in all aspects of DT show a good level of knowledge and understanding. Year 10 pupils completing a pastry task demonstrated a competence that enabled them to produce high quality and innovative designs which, given the stage of the course, were above expectations. Pupils observed in a Year 10 textiles class were investigating different techniques to complete an evening bag project. They worked with a high level of confidence using both manual and automated methods of finishing. Their ability to translate designs to finished items was good. Pupils taking GCSE graphics prepared their presentation to a high standard making effective use of the ICT facilities available. They have a good understanding of the examination requirements and generally produced portfolios of a standard that were well above average. In resistant materials the quality of finished products is good. Pupils produce working drawings of a sound

quality and translate them well into accurately constructed products. They understand the need to consider the function of the items and the requirements of the consumer. In developing their designs they show good understanding of the properties of the various materials available and of joining methods.

97. The quality of teaching in all areas of DT and across both key stages is at least satisfactory, most is good and almost a third is very good. Teachers manage pupils well and provide effective individual support. Their good subject knowledge is reflected in the quality of planning and the attention paid to delivering the whole design process. They have high expectations which results in a positive response from the majority of pupils. The emphasis placed on skills development ensures that pupils are able to meet the requirements of the subject area, as tasks become progressively more complex and challenging. Assessment, especially oral assessment is well used to provide pupils with immediate feedback to enhance their learning. In lessons observed where teaching was less effective, staff were often over critical and addressed pupils in a manner that prevented them from expressing their views freely. On occasion, classroom organisation did not create the most suitable environment for safe and efficient learning. There is an awareness of health and safety procedures of which pupils are reminded, although at times these reminders are not always noted or enforced.

98. The majority of pupils show a keen interest in all aspects of DT and work very hard. In one textiles lesson, for example, there was virtual silence because all pupils were totally engrossed in their individual projects. Equally, in a Year 10 food lesson, the interest and industry were impressive as pupils, aware of time deadlines, focused on the task. Year 7 pupils working on hand held games were also fully committed and showed great enthusiasm for the activity. All pupils show respect for others and for the equipment with which they are working. They take their work seriously and behave in a mature and safe way when in areas of potential risk. Pupils observed were keen to explain their work with evident pride. They have good relationships with each other and with most teaching staff. The department has procedures for assessment that fully involve pupils in making a judgement about their level of achievement. Record sheets are issued to pupils for each project and these are well used to record what they feel they have achieved. Responses are verified by the teacher and reviewed at various stages. Although assessment information is gathered, the analysis and use of this data is still at an early stage of development.

99. DT is successful in terms of standards and outcomes at both key stages. There is close liaison between the overall head of department and staff with responsibility for managing food, textiles and, to a lesser extent, the provision of ICT modules within the Key Stage 3 core course. Efficiency and cohesion in the management structure could, however, be further developed. Monitoring of teaching is in its infancy and as yet no programme of observation has been established. Within the individual subject areas there is a clear commitment to succeed and a shared enthusiasm for DT that manifests itself in good results across the constituent parts. Time allocation is adequate for the current provision although the inclusion of ICT as a module within Years 8 and 9 does impact on the amount of work that can be achieved in the DT subject, for example in control technology. Development plans are in evidence although the level of detail included is limited. Overall resources and accommodation are adequate to deliver the current curriculum. The recent acquisition of CAM equipment is yet to be fully commissioned. ICT equipment is available in CDT. Discrete provision of ICT is not available for food or textiles but proximity to bookable ICT rooms does provide a

solution. The one very competent technician employed in the department provides excellent support for CDT and textiles. There is, however, insufficient technician time to support food technology and fully service the subject. This leads to additional pressure on teachers and an inappropriate use of teacher time.

100. Since the last inspection standards have remained high with a better balance between skills and knowledge and understanding. Teaching remains a strength in the department with effective management being evident in all areas. Technician support has improved but further time is necessary. Developments that have taken place in ICT provision and the introduction of CAM equipment will enable the department to continue to enhance the already effective provision.

GEOGRAPHY

101. Pupils' overall level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is well above the national expectation. When teachers assessed pupils' work in 1999 at the end of Key Stage 3, results indicated that pupils achieved levels well above the national averages, with girls achieving higher levels overall than boys. In the year 2000 results showed an improvement on the levels achieved in 1999 with pupils reaching a very high standard.

102. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' overall level of attainment is well above the national norm. In 1999, results in GCSE were substantially higher than the national averages with almost half of the pupils gaining the highest A* and A grades. Boys and girls achieved similar results. This very high overall standard was maintained in 2000. Pupils' performance in geography at GCSE was above that achieved in most other subjects. Results have shown a substantial improvement since the previous inspection. The department reviews these results annually and has implemented strategies for improvement in the future.

103. Pupils have a good knowledge of the subject that they can use effectively to deepen their understanding. They know what places are like and where they are. In one lesson, for example, pupils in Year 10 had made previous use of computers to gain good knowledge of the people, cities, landscape, climate, and the reasons for frequent flooding in Bangladesh. During the lesson they used this knowledge, and information from a video, very effectively to deepen their understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the methods suggested to reduce flooding in the country and to protect people from its effects. Pupils understand why cities have grown and developed and how landscapes are formed. They understand the links between people and their environment as, for example, how deforestation affects erosion, and the effects of volcanoes and earthquakes on peoples' lives.

104. Pupils extract information effectively from a range of resource material to complete exercises and for research. They have good geographical skills and use them effectively in answering geographical questions and deepening their understanding of geographical ideas. Pupils in Year 9, for instance, showed a very good use of atlas skills to apply the geographical idea of 'core and periphery' to the country of Brazil. Pupils have a good understanding of geographical enquiry, collecting and analysing data and drawing appropriate conclusions. Written work is accurate with well-structured pieces of extended writing and generally good grammar and spelling and use of

geographical terms. Numerical work is good. In one piece of work pupils in Year 8 used statistics to construct three climate graphs accurately which they compared and gave appropriate reasons for the differences and similarities they found.

105. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and work is generally matched to their needs. They work hard and listen carefully and have a sound basic knowledge of the subject but find explanation difficult.

106. The quality of teaching at both key stages is good and some is very good. Explanations are clear, well structured, well illustrated, and questioning is well directed due to teachers' good knowledge of the subject particularly at Key Stage 4. Teachers are always well prepared and organised so lessons start briskly and proceed smoothly at a good pace. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives, with a good variety of well-structured activities carefully designed to reinforce understanding and gain the interest of pupils. In one lesson, for example, pupils in Year 11 were studying sources of energy. They quickly discussed the value of wind to provide power, researched the advantages and disadvantages, then used this knowledge to study a proposal to build a wind farm in the local area. After studying local newspaper reports for and against the proposal they wrote a letter to the newspaper expressing their own point of view. Lessons are pitched at an appropriate level, expectations are high, and pupils are challenged to develop their understanding of a topic and achieve high standards.

107. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good, a good working atmosphere is created in the classroom, and teachers provide positive and well-informed support. Marking is of excellent quality, it is up to date, with grades awarded to clear criteria and with positive comments explaining mistakes and giving advice to help pupils improve. Key word lists, an emphasis on accuracy and structure in written work, and opportunity for using comprehension, research, and numerical skills, help pupils in developing their basic skills. Homework is set regularly and is purposeful.

108. Pupils learn well and make good progress in the subject as they move through the school. They work hard, at a good pace, and have the capacity to concentrate and persevere with lengthy pieces of work. Books are maintained in good order, pupils take pride in their work, and presentation is invariably good.

109. Pupils have a positive attitude to the subject, they are attentive, well behaved, involved in the work, and most are confident and willing to ask for support and answer questions. They co-operate effectively with each other and are responsible and caring. In one lesson, for example, pupils in Year 10 who were studying aid were keen to take the opportunity of being involved in charity work supporting street children in Tanzania.

110. The scheme of work is carefully thought out, well structured, and fully complies with the national requirements. There is a good programme of fieldwork, including a well-organised residential field visit to the Isle of Arran. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to use the computer for research, presentation of work, and statistical analysis. The procedures for assessment and recording the results are very good but the information is not used systematically to support the progress of individual pupils or for reviewing the curriculum.

111. Leadership of the department is very good. There is a clear sense of direction and a full commitment to raising standards still further. Planning for the future is well

focused, the organisation of the department is good, and policies are well thought out. There is some monitoring of the work of the department, but this is not fully developed. Accommodation is excellent and the environment is enhanced with good displays of pupils' work. The hard working and committed staff work very effectively as a team. The department responded well to the previous report and has the capacity to raise standards still further in the future.

HISTORY

112. The quality of history teaching is usually good or very good. Teachers are confident about the subject matter and lesson planning is thorough with all requisite resources to hand. In the best lessons, there is a clear statement of what the pupils should know and understand by the end of the lesson. These objectives are clearly explained to pupils at the start of the lesson and then revisited at the end to remind them of lesson targets. From Year 7 onwards, pupils are taught to support any conclusions by referring to the factual evidence. Comprehension and research skills are developed and assessed through designed assignments, which target specific historical skills and attitudes. Teachers manage pupils well and set good standards for behaviour. They encourage pupils firmly but courteously to observe the normal classroom routines. Teachers use appropriate teaching techniques, presenting pupils with well-paced lessons and a mix of activities to sustain interest and motivation. During the inspection week, the methods used varied little and there is scope to make greater use of paired and group work to develop the wider key skills of working with others and problem solving. Teachers have high expectations and often use challenging questioning techniques to encourage broad participation in oral sessions and revise and revisit previous areas of knowledge. Teacher presentations and explanations are clear and concise. Pupils know what they are expected to do. There is some good story telling and occasional dramatic presentation that excites an enthusiastic response, encouraging pupils to appreciate the conditions and attitudes of people in the past. More could be done however, to help pupils compare the past with modern circumstance.

113. Teachers know their pupils well. They try to provide effective individual support even where there are very large classes. Pupils' work is marked carefully using a well-designed marking scheme. Pupils know how well they are doing and additional written comment gives basic guidance on what they have to do to improve. Pupils are taught wholly in ability groups and the common curriculum is presented in an appropriate manner. The department has developed learning tasks that target different levels of ability but these could be refined further to challenge the higher attainers to use more sources and develop the skills of selection. Teachers have a good knowledge of the specific learning needs of SEN pupils and work very hard to provide them with support and guidance and ensure active participation. This goes some way towards compensating for the minimal provision of in-class support from SEN learning assistants. Pupils across the range of age and ability are challenged by the history lessons and most appear to enjoy the experience.

114. This very good teaching interacts with extremely positive pupil attitudes to promote a good standard of learning. Pupils are attentive, co-operative and very responsive. They concentrate well and stay on task. In most cases, their behaviour is

exemplary. Relationships with the teacher and with each other are very good and pupils are not afraid to ask for help when they do not understand what to do. When questioned they respond and teachers value all contributions. The general working ethos in lessons is positive, relaxed but focused on the task in hand.

115. It is not surprising that the level of learning is good across the range of age and capability. There is sound development of historical and communication skills. There is a growing appreciation of the importance of contemporary source material. By Key Stage 4, most pupils appreciate that although all primary sources are of value to the historian, some are more reliable than others and that possible bias has to be taken into account when drawing conclusions. Presentation of work is generally good and the use of the report format is quite well established by the time pupils tackle GCSE coursework. By Key Stage 4, some pupils make very effective use of the Internet to extend their research and word processing with supporting graphics to improve the presentation of coursework.

116. End of Year 9 teacher assessments in history indicate an above average attainment when compared with the latest available national statistics. Scrutiny of work and observation in lessons confirm that these assessments are realistic. Pupil work indicates a developing understanding of time and a growing appreciation of the sequence of major events. Comprehension skills are well developed and many pupils can select and combine relevant material from given sources. A few higher attainers go beyond their textbook to find information. Others work more closely with given materials, extracting relevant information and drawing conclusions based on appropriate evidence. In a Year 8 lesson pupils tried to decide Henry VIII's religious beliefs by looking at conflicting sources of evidence. They found the task very challenging but many made basic judgements and supported them in a reasoned manner. In the best work, pupils readily identify the connections between historical events. A Year 7 lesson on the Roman army showed a dramatic appreciation of the circumstances in which the soldiers lived in the frontier regions of Britain. In Year 10, pupils choose one of two GCSE programmes. There has been some fluctuation but the results in both courses have been consistently either above or well above average for the last three years. Both boys and girls have outperformed the national figures although sometimes girls have done significantly better than the boys. This was the case this year, reversing the situation seen in 1999.

117. The department benefits from positive, thoughtful and considerate leadership. Operational routines work well. The budget is prudently managed. There is an obvious team spirit within the department with a clear and shared commitment to the subject and to the pupils. Departmental planning tends to be limited to operational matters and some longer term strategic planning is required both to influence and respond to the priorities in the school development plan. Such planning will help colleagues to target in-service training requirements more precisely. New assessment systems are now in place providing a more consistent appraisal of pupil performance. A planned new recording system has the potential to provide information about trends over time to inform the development of teaching and learning programmes. The department has improved since the last report, particularly in raising standards of attainment in national examinations.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

118. By the end of Year 9 standards of attainment are broadly in line with those seen nationally. Teacher assessment shows that the majority of both boys and girls are achieving at or close to level 5. Discussion with pupils and analysis of work suggests that standards are closely aligned to the national average. Girls and boys perform equally well by the end of the key stage. Pupils have a confidence that indicates that they are developing a good basic knowledge and understanding of the hardware and software with which they work. Pupils have the opportunity to use their skills across the majority of subjects in the school curriculum and therefore continue to improve competence. Through their work in Year 7 and the subsequent modules in Years 8 and 9 pupils begin to appreciate the value and uses of ICT. Most are familiar with databases, spreadsheets, desktop publishing and word processing and use them to good effect.

119. During Key Stage 4, where Year 10 pupils receive a discrete lesson, overall attainment does not reflect the standard expected of 15 year-old pupils and aspects of the new curriculum are not fully in place. Recent developments, however, will ensure that all aspects will be covered prior to the end of the autumn term. At the end of Year 11 pupils taking GCSE perform below the level of that expected nationally. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C in 1999 was below the national average. Results fell below the 1999 figure in 2000. Pupils at this stage are familiar with the main computer applications and most can make effective use of the main functions. They have a sound knowledge of word processing, evident across other subjects in the school. Pupils are able to use Word, Excel and Access with varying degrees of competence. Some, however, do not have a good understanding of the purpose of the work they are producing or fully appreciate the value of carrying out a task using ICT.

120. The majority of teaching in ICT is satisfactory and some is good. In the lessons observed, teachers demonstrated a good understanding of the subject and worked effectively with the software and the hardware. The programmes are planned to cover the requirements of National Curriculum at Key Stage 3, including Internet use and email. Teachers assist individual pupils effectively and keep the majority on task with little difficulty. In the better lessons observed, teaching was well planned with an appropriate level of teacher intervention at relevant points throughout the lesson. Pupils were managed well and kept busy on work that showed an appropriate level of challenge. The learning in these lessons was effective and enabled the pupils to progress at an appropriate rate. Those pupils identified as having SEN made progress in line with their ability and on occasions above that expected. Where unsatisfactory teaching was observed, it was distinguished by an overall lack of challenge, pace and poor methodology. Pupils were given tasks that did not extend their basic understanding of ICT or develop their practical skills. There was little evidence of planning to reflect and take account of the level of previous learning with the result that teaching did not meet the needs of all pupils. Where teaching strategies were limited, there was an expectation that pupils could concentrate for long periods of time without any meaningful interaction to enable them to test or consolidate their learning.

121. Learning overall is generally sound in both key stages. Some pupils are able to articulate their level of achievements. Others, however, have a limited knowledge of their learning and less understanding of the purpose of the work in which they are involved. The lack of differentiation restricts the learning of some; particularly those in

Year 10 who were receiving core entitlement and are taking GCSE ICT. In Key Stage 3 the lack of a co-ordinated approach to ICT across the curriculum means that pupils have inequitable provision unsupported by a cohesive assessment scheme.

122. In most lessons, pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. They show a keenness to work with computers and many are willing to explain their work. When permitted, they assist one another with the minimum of fuss. Most pupils recognise the value of the equipment they are working with and take care of it. They respond to teacher instructions, requesting, politely, assistance when required. Relationships between pupils are good.

123. All pupils in Year 7 have discrete provision of ICT that addresses the requirements of the National Curriculum. They all have e-mail addresses and make use of the Internet. Provision in Years 8 and 9 is through a module of DT time which serves neither department well as it restricts the subject range, especially in DT. Extra-curricular activities are offered in the department which some pupils take advantage of. Discrete provision in Year 10 allows pupils to extend their knowledge and understanding but it is not available to those pupils taking Music Plus or Latin. There is no provision in Year 11 for ICT; therefore any exposure to ICT comes through other subjects, where provision is varied.

124. At the time of the last inspection, ICT provision across the curriculum was not well planned. Standards in Years 10 and 11 were below expectations and little evidence was found of work across subject areas. There have been changes in the last four years. The ratio of computers to pupils has increased marginally and the quality of provision has improved. There are clusters of computers in science, music and DT and classes can be booked into computer rooms including the library. New provision has recently been developed. Although equipment is in place in most areas and planning for ICT is evident in most schemes of work, subject teachers are still developing their expertise with the help of ICT teachers and the excellent support provided by the technical staff. This should enable more sustained and relevant use to be made of the technology. Analysis of pupils' work across the school indicated appropriate use of ICT in areas such as DT, where pupils make use of the good central facility available in the department or have access to machines at home. Recent developments including connection to the Internet and the introduction of e-mail for all pupils will ensure that all aspects of the new programmes of study are addressed.

125. Although the school has the potential for effective cross-curricular ICT, this is not yet being achieved. Subject areas are developing an integrated approach to ICT but much, however, is still in the planning stage as a result of staff changes or difficulty of access. In history, art, DT, modern foreign languages, music, geography and science, pupils produce aspects of their work using ICT. Though good work was observed across the curriculum, there has been no recent subject audit though heads of department have been asked to indicate ICT content in their schemes of work. Currently no system exists to ensure that ICT achievement in subject areas is assessed and recorded to ensure a sound development of skills, knowledge and understanding from Years 7 to 11.

126. The co-ordination and management of ICT is distinctly split between the discrete provision of the subject and cross-curricular opportunities. The head of ICT works only within the department and makes a limited contribution to the development of ICT across the curriculum. The current ICT co-ordinator has other duties, which restricts the time

available to plan and monitor provision. Currently there is no monitoring of teaching within the department. Since the last inspection, resources have improved and are now broadly equal to the national average for 1999. Technician support is good and serves the school extremely well. Whilst there is good practice in a number of subjects, whole-school co-ordination of IT is under-developed. Specific grants have been used to equip the school with the infrastructure to network further hardware as it is acquired. While the school has moved forward since the previous inspection, there is a recognition that there is still much to do in order to ensure full entitlement for all pupils and raise standards.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

127. In the 1999 GCSE examinations the proportion of pupils in both French and German achieving the higher grades A*-C was well above national averages. Standards were maintained in 2000 with 100% of pupils in German gaining a higher grade for the third consecutive year and 40% achieving A* or A grades. In French over the last three years there has been improvement in the percentage of A*-B grades. Although boys perform less well than girls at the higher grades, their scores are still well above national averages. Some pupils are entered for the GCSE short course as an alternative to the full GCSE. All pupils gained grades with an improvement since 1999 in the percentage of C and D grades. A Certificate of Achievement in French is offered to a small group of pupils with learning difficulties. In 2000 all the pupils entered gained a Certificate, half of them at Distinction level. The examination performance of pupils in foreign languages is good in comparison with their other subjects and significantly better by national comparison.

128. By the end of Key Stage 3 the majority of pupils, including those with SEN, have National Curriculum attainment levels at least in line, but more frequently above, those expected for their respective abilities. At all levels, pupils' speaking and listening skills show the benefit of their teachers' use of the foreign language. Pupils use the language confidently in dialogues, class questioning and in everyday classroom situations as, for example, when asking for paper or apologising for being late. They can pick key information from tape recordings of native speakers. In German there is marked progress across Key Stage 3 and by Year 9 pupils are using some complex word order and cases in their written work. In both languages the progress is reflected in the key stage teacher assessments. The rate of progress across Key Stage 4 continues this pattern and pupils of all abilities reach standards at higher than national levels. In written work in both languages there is clear evidence of re-drafting and extended writing. In German pupils use an extensive vocabulary. The recurrence of elementary errors in some written work points to the need for a correction policy to encourage more rigorous checking by pupils. Oral topics are well prepared and delivered with confidence.

129. The teaching of languages is good and, in several lessons observed, was very good or excellent. Teachers have good language competence and challenge the pupils by using French or German almost exclusively, with good strategies to encourage pupils to use the foreign language in everyday classroom situations. This is a major factor in the attainments in oral and listening skills. Teachers' experience enables them to give good insight and preparation for external examinations. They show flexibility and adapt lessons when pupils encounter problems. Lessons and expectations are well matched

to pupils' abilities with demand for correct pronunciation and insistence on pupils using dictionaries for unknown words rather than asking the teacher. Homework is regularly set and marked, with supportive comments and often lengthy explanations of grammatical errors. Good relationships with pupils are a major factor in the positive attitudes that pupils have to modern languages.

130. Good pupil attitudes are seen in classroom behaviour. Classroom expectations are clearly understood and accepted. Lessons at Key Stage 4 have the mature work tone expected in the preparation for examination. Work on topics and computer-generated written work show a capacity for independent work. Across age groups there are high levels of participation and, at appropriate time, enthusiasm and enjoyment. Pupils collaborate well in partner work to capitalise on the opportunity to develop their oral skills. Inter-personal relationships are supportive.

131. Members of the department share a clear common purpose and work well as a team. Over the past three years, they have introduced an alternative French course with a new scheme of work, whilst revising some old schemes. The completed schemes are exemplary and include assessment, use of IT, dictionary work and differentiated tasks. These schemes support teacher planning and ensure a good range of learning experiences. Systems for assessment and recording are well established and there is good analysis of examination results. Further developments that could usefully support the department's targets are a policy for the correction of written work and the use of non-subject attainment data to monitor expectations, progress and any under-achievement. The department is very well led by a committed head of department. His work is complemented by that of the head of German and the contributions made by the whole team. Regular bulletins ensure good communication. The aspects of methodology in the departmental handbook merit regular review and discussion to sustain the quality of teaching. The head of department and the head of German monitor teaching. There is also monitoring of marking. There are many examples of good practice in the department which would benefit by support for in-service opportunities to develop mutual observations and lesson observation in other schools. The departmental development plan is a clear analysis of issues for action. The department makes a valuable contribution to the cultural life of the school through its well-established programme of visits and exchanges to France and Germany.

132. The department has successfully addressed the issues raised at the last inspection and has the strengths and commitment to sustain high standards and address the issues brought to their attention.

MUSIC

133. The standards attained by the pupils overall are above the national expectation and, in the case of a substantial number of pupils, are considerably higher. The pupils following the Music Plus course achieve particularly well, all passing short course GCSE in Year 9 and AS Level in Year 11.

134. In Key Stage 3 overall standards are above the national expectation and were good or better in three quarters of the lessons observed. Pupils have some understanding of the elements of music, they know how to set about composing simple

pieces and can recognise different instruments, styles and expressive qualities in the music they listen to. Where standards exceed expectations, pupils have a good technical vocabulary with which to talk about music, they can draft and redraft their compositions on the computer and understand how to refine them to make them musically more effective. They have a sure feeling for style and rhythm, can read notation with some practice and can play accurately and often fluently on the keyboard.

135. Pupils in the Music Plus groups achieve well above the national expectation. In a singing lesson, for example, Year 7 pupils were able to sing accurately from sight excerpts involving thirds, fourths and octaves. When given the opportunity, they showed good aural skills in replicating pitch and rhythm.

136. By the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils achieving GCSE grades A*-C in 1999 was very high in comparison with the national average and maintained the high standards of previous years. 100% of pupils achieved A*-C grades in 2000. Pupils taking GCSE have knowledge of a wide repertoire of music and can recognise features of style and form. They have a good technical vocabulary although not all are confident in using it when appraising their own and others' work. Their compositional skills are variable, but some show musical imagination and originality as well as an understanding of the conventions of composition. The more able pupils can work with more complex forms and structure, composing pieces for several instruments. Some of the pupils in Year 11 are preparing for the AS level examination and show in their approach to their project work a maturity beyond their years and a good ability to analyse their chosen work.

137. The standards reached in extra-curricular work are high. Ensemble groups, the choir, orchestra and swing band are well supported and produce good quality sound with precision, attack and dynamic range. Much of the Music Plus provision takes place in extra-curricular time or before school placing very considerable demands upon pupils.

138. Pupils have positive attitudes to music and enjoy their lessons. They are willing to work hard, to organise themselves quickly and to contribute in the many ways offered to them. They know what to expect when they come to the department and respond to the high expectations and lively teaching with good behaviour. Pupils are given opportunities in the lessons to make their own decisions and to create and compose their own work. They relish the responsibility given to them and work constructively and sensibly, even when not directly supervised.

139. The quality of teaching is good overall and is often very good or excellent. It is never less than satisfactory. In all of the teaching, the teachers have good subject knowledge and use it flexibly to match the material accurately to the ability of the pupils. They know their pupils well, have good relationships with them and know how to motivate them. The preparation is thorough, a good range of resources is used, including a variety of ICT. The teachers have high expectations of the pupils. They set a good pace for learning and challenge them appropriately. The lessons are well structured to offer a variety of activity and most lessons contain both performing or composing and listening or appraising. The teachers have an enthusiasm for their subject that communicates itself to the pupils.

140. Where the teaching is very good or excellent, real challenge is offered to the pupils, a high work rate is expected and a degree of scholarship is matched by sensitivity and musicality.

141. Since the last inspection, standards of attainment, particularly at Key Stage 4 and the quality of teaching have improved. Music continues to make a very considerable contribution to pupils' cultural development and to the life of the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

142. The inspection of physical education was carried out at a time when the work of the department was severely disrupted. The refurbishment of changing accommodation was still not complete and consequently both specialist indoor teaching spaces were being used for changing. The effect of this significantly restricted the normal range of activities for inspection.

143. Overall standards of attainment are above average. At the end of Key Stage 3 the level of fitness and mobility of most boys is above the national norm. This was clearly seen in Year 9 rugby where, though games skills are sound, physical fitness is well-developed and most in the group have a good understanding of how it can be developed and sustained. Within the key stage many pupils are able to demonstrate a clear understanding of the need to prepare for physical activity and how that process should be effectively carried out. Some pupils show that, even after relatively short experience, their ability to perform dance sequences requiring creativity and control has developed well. By the end of Key Stage 4 the standards of fitness remain above national levels. This is evident in most groups across a range of games activities including hockey, netball, rugby and soccer. In examination groups, practical performance is good and particularly so in rugby. Many boys in a Year 10 group demonstrated clearly how a high level of knowledge and understanding of the principles and purpose of 'controlled mauling' has such a positive effect on their playing standards. Examination results over the last three years have fluctuated year on year though the proportion of pupils achieving A*-C grades has always been above the national average. There is a significant difference between boys and girls results, with boys performing better than girls, and the department should continue to monitor the situation in its effort to identify what causes this factor. Many Aylestone School pupils and teams have become high achievers and compete at district, county and national level.

144. The standards reached in PE are the direct result of high standards of teaching combined with a positive approach from the pupils. All teachers are very strong in their knowledge, understanding and experience of a wide range of activities. All work in an engaging and enthusiastic manner constantly and consistently setting tasks that challenge pupils to improve. This degree of challenge together with realistically high expectations of pupils of all levels of attainment is a feature of all lessons and this provides clear objectives for learning. The pupils in turn know what to do in order to improve and are consequently eager to work hard as individuals, in pairs or in groups to reach the targets set. They enjoy their work and almost all devote and sustain high levels of concentration and effort over long periods of time. The working relationships both between pupils and between pupils and their teachers are very good. Overall the quality of teaching is always good and often very good.

145. The requirements of the National Curriculum are fully met at both Key Stages 3 and 4. The department provides as broad and well balanced a curriculum as possible though the off site opportunities provided are expensive and reduce activity time to below normal levels for Year 11. The extra-curricular programme, with contributions from all specialist teachers and some non-specialists, is strong, popular and valued by pupils and parents. The procedures currently in place for assessment work effectively. The recently commenced initiative aimed at making use of new technology should raise the department's capacity to monitor pupil performance and report on it more readily and more regularly. The data collected for these purposes will then prove to be most useful in measuring the effectiveness of the programmes of study together with the effectiveness of teaching. Leadership within the department is good. The policies and programmes are well written and comprehensive. This ensures the smooth running of the department on a day-to-day basis and has made a significant contribution to the way in which staff and pupils have continued to work so effectively in difficult conditions. When refurbishment is complete the specialist accommodation for the subject will be much more satisfactory though extremely wet conditions have highlighted the need for a multi-purpose indoor space and/or an all weather outdoor surface. This provision would enable the school to reduce the costs of the off site activities and increase the time available at Key Stage 4.

146. Since the last inspection standards of attainment have been raised and are now much more consistent across both key stages. The quality of teaching is now a strength and lessons and learning always well-paced and purposeful. The management of the PE department is much more formal and committed to moving forward by further raising the overall standards of the subject. It now has a clearer awareness of how this can be achieved.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

147. The improvement in the work of this department and the quality of religious education provided for pupils is outstanding. The school has worked hard to meet the key issue from the last inspection concerning RE.

148. Standards achieved across Key Stage 3 are good for pupils of all abilities in relation to both national expectations and the attainment targets of the new Herefordshire Agreed Syllabus. Pupils are pushed to think reflectively and to learn effectively, so that most make significant progress by the end of Year 9. They learn the correct vocabulary for each section of work and also how to write for different purposes. In this respect RE is contributing well to their literacy skills.

149. Lessons have a good balance of learning *about* and *from* religions. Christianity is taught, as are key aspects of several other world faiths. Year 9 pupils have a good basic knowledge of Hinduism. They can also apply the Hindu understanding of life having stages with attendant responsibilities, to a general understanding of life having different stages and everyone having duties and responsibilities. RE is making a very strong contribution to all aspects of personal development

150. In Years 10 and 11, the teaching in the core course for all pupils is constrained by lack of time for the subject. The time allocated is fifty per cent of the time recommended both locally and nationally. Redress for this is in the school's planning where there is a firm commitment to introduce a short course GCSE in RE with the increase in time that this will require. In the short term the current situation means that although teachers are very effective in the fortnightly lessons, they cannot cover enough of the local syllabus for either attainment or learning to meet expectations.

151. The teaching in the core course is based on the aspects of the local syllabus most relevant to the pupils' needs for personal development. This includes some of the key fundamental questions about life and its meaning and ethical issues including sexuality and relationships. Pupils respond with lively interest and work well in these lessons. Much of their work is done in discursive ways and orally they display good understanding of the issues in question. Their written work is assessed so teachers can judge progress effectively, although their work is not externally accredited.

152. A GCSE course has begun in Year 10. Already the pupils are doing well and benefiting greatly from the seminar style teaching possible in a small group. Their attainment and progress are good.

153. In all years the behaviour of pupils in RE lessons is very good. They listen to the teacher and each other and persevere with the tasks set for them. Generally they enjoy the lessons and show respect for the subject and the teachers. To a great extent, the positive attitudes of the pupils reflect the high quality of the lessons they receive.

154. Teaching is very good. Teachers have a very good command of the subject and plan their lessons very well. Pupils are challenged well, and lessons are brisk and purposeful. Teachers manage their classes very well and the pupils are quite clear about how they should behave. This is achieved with a high level of mutual respect. Pupils know that what they say will be valued. Imaginative and varied activities are used in the teaching. This was well demonstrated with a Year 9 class of pupils with SEN. The overhead projector is used well to reinforce key concepts with many colourful pictures and artefacts as illustrations.

155. New schemes of work are being written to match the new local syllabus. These are of high quality. Levels of attainment are being introduced in line with the new requirements in Herefordshire. This gives RE parity with National Curriculum subjects for assessment. Pupils understand the levels and what they mean in terms of knowledge and skills and they are ready to strive to reach the next one. They are usefully involved in assessment and marking with occasional opportunities for self and peer group assessment. The new procedures are working well to enable progress to be carefully monitored, and also to encourage further progress.

156. There is a very good team of hard working and well-qualified specialists to cover all the teaching in this subject. This is a strength as is the quality of leadership. This is the second year in post for the subject leader. Much has been accomplished already and the commitment to high standards is clear. There is appropriate vision for future development. The planning includes development in the use of ICT skills in the curriculum and for curricular enrichment through links with local faith communities. Longer term planning includes the expansion of the core course for pupils in Years 10 and 11. When this is in place, the school will fully meet statutory requirements for RE.

157. Resources have been improved considerably by discarding much that was outdated and by the judicious purchase of new, high quality textbooks. This brings resources to an adequate level from a low base. Resources are augmented well by sheets produced in-house, such as homework task sheets, using the teachers' own ICT skills. Teaching takes place in two dedicated rooms that are bright and lively with good displays.