

INSPECTION REPORT

ENDON HIGH SCHOOL

Staffordshire

LEA area: Staffordshire

Unique Reference Number: 124401

Headteacher: Mrs L V Spedding

Reporting inspector: Dr D A W Biltcliffe
1025

Dates of inspection: 5th - 8th February 2001

Inspection number: 188745

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr P Stretch
Dates of previous inspection:	17 th - 23 rd May 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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9034	Mrs J W Biltcliffe	Lay inspector		Attendance
13452	Mr H Meggitt	Lay inspector		Partnership with parents
5038	Mr H Heller	Team inspector	Special educational needs	Pupils' attitudes and values; school's care for pupils; leadership and management
27201	Mr C V Ashworth	Team inspector	English; drama	
1262	Mr R Heath	Team inspector	Mathematics	
4607	Dr D E Ward	Team inspector	Science	
31129	Mrs J Goodman	Team inspector	Art	
11190	Mrs W M Burke	Team inspector	Design and technology; information and communication technology	
12470	Mr B M Greasley	Team inspector	Geography	Curriculum
8873	Ms C Evers	Team inspector	History	Efficiency / staffing, accommodation and learning resources
4829	Mr I H C Waters	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
8645	Dr J D Ward	Team inspector	Music	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; assessment
13217	Mr M D Butterworth	Team inspector	Physical education	
30749	Mrs H Boyle	Team inspector	Religious education	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This comprehensive school is smaller than average. It currently educates 695 boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 16. The overall social and economic background of pupils is above average. The overall attainment of pupils in national tests just before entry to the school is well above average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is about one third of the national average, but the proportion with formal statements is close to average. There are four pupils from families of ethnic minority heritage, but none at an early stage of learning English.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Endon High is a good school. It has many strengths and few weaknesses. Pupils' overall standard of attainment is above average by the end of Year 11. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Pupils make sound progress during their time in school. The school's leadership and senior management are committed, hard-working and effective. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils' overall level of attainment is usually higher than in most similar kinds of schools.
- Pupils usually do better in science, design and technology, and geography in GCSE than in most of their other subjects. Nearly all subjects are performing well.
- The overall standards of pupils' learning, attitudes and behaviour in the school are high.
- Teaching is good overall. About a quarter of the teaching is very good indeed.
- The school's provision for pupils' moral, social and cultural development is strong.
- Leadership and management are effective and committed at all levels.
- The school supports a very wide range of extracurricular activities, especially in music and sport.
- The school produces very good results with the amount of money it receives.

What could be improved

- The school does not measure pupils' attainments and progress consistently enough in Years 7-9.
- It has not taught sufficient religious education (RE) in Years 10-11 for a number of years.
- It does not provide enough teaching of information and communication technology (ICT) in Years 10-11.
- Statements for pupils with special educational needs are poorly managed.
- The school still does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.
- The lack of toilet facilities on the remote playing fields is a serious deficiency.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has improved, and generally to a good level, nearly all the weaknesses identified at its last inspection in 1996. For example:

- pupils generally receive an appropriately broad and balanced curriculum; most statutory requirements are met;
- most of the teaching weaknesses observed in 1996 have been improved or eliminated; and
- appropriate use is made of teaching and other resources in the school.

Little progress has, however, been made in ensuring that statutory requirements are met for religious education in Years 10-11 and that a daily act of collective worship is provided for all pupils. A few health and safety issues remain to be resolved.

Pupils' overall standard of attainment in GCSE examinations is broadly similar to what it was at the last inspection. The school's teaching has continued to improve. Since 1996 the school has shown a good capacity overall to improve its practice. Its senior management is committed to sustained improvement across the school.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	all schools			Similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	A	A	B	C	<i>Well above average</i> A <i>Above average</i> B <i>Average</i> C <i>Below average</i> D <i>Well below average</i> E

The school's results in the national tests for 14 year olds in 2000 were well above average in all of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Boys and girls do equally well in the last two subjects, but girls are ahead of boys overall in English. The results in 2000 were also well above the average for schools of a similar kind. Standards have risen over the 1996-2000 period broadly in line with the national trend. By the end of Year 9 the standard of work in the school is above average in most subjects. Pupils generally make satisfactory progress in their studies from Year 7 to Year 9.

Results in GCSE were above the national average in 2000 for the proportion of pupils achieving at least five grades A*-C and for average points scored. They were well above average for the proportion achieving five or more grades A*-G, continuing the high level of attainment of the previous few years. The upward trend in results over 1994-1999, at a faster rate than the national rise, dipped in 2000. The overall standard (as measured by "points scores") was above that generally achieved in schools of a similar character in 1998 and 1999, but in line with most others in 2000. The strongest subjects in GCSE in 1996-1997 and 1999-2000 [1998 national comparators are not available] were science, design and technology, and geography. English and art were weaker subjects, but improved in 2000. Pupils usually achieve a sound rate of progress overall between the ends of Year 9 and Year 11.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils generally display very good attitudes. The vast majority are well motivated, friendly, mature and open-minded.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Usually very good. The school is a very orderly community.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships amongst pupils and with adults are positive. Pupils usually work together with considerable sensitivity.
Attendance	Good. Pupils are punctual, too, for school and lessons.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years
in the lessons seen overall	good	good

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

Teaching was at least satisfactory in 99 per cent of lessons, good in 43 per cent and very good (or better) in 23 per cent of those seen. One per cent of lessons had unsatisfactory teaching, though some other lessons had unsatisfactory features. In well-taught lessons pupils make good progress through suitably challenging work, a brisk pace and firm class control. Unsatisfactory teaching is characterised by low intellectual demand, a slow pace of work or the weak management of classes. The teaching of English and mathematics - as of most other subjects - is good overall.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides the usual, wide range of courses, supplemented by three after-school classes, but teaches too little ICT and RE in Years 10-11.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Generally sound teaching and specialist provision in small classes for English and mathematics. The school makes substantial, all-round provision of good quality for pupils with physical disabilities.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	These are good overall: the greatest strength is provision for pupils' social education and the weakest (though still satisfactory overall) for their spiritual development. The school has a distinctive, positive ethos.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides a high quality of care. Pupils feel secure and valued.

The school provides a broad curriculum, with imaginative, after-school features and a very good range of extracurricular (including residential) activities. The low amount of time for religious education in Years 10-11 is long-standing. Information and communication technology is considerably under-taught in Years 10-11 to those pupils who do not take the GCSE course. The school successfully puts a high emphasis on the way it cares for pupils. There are, however, a few deficiencies in toilets, showering and dust extraction. The school does not have enough accurate information about pupils' progress in Years 7-9. It has effective links with parents, generally provides a good range of information about its work to them and is held in high regard by most parents.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher's leadership and management are dedicated, energetic and forward-looking. Senior and middle managers generally work closely together and implement the school's policies efficiently and effectively.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are strongly committed to the school's development and organise their business purposefully. A few statutory requirements are not met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The planning, monitoring and review of the school's work have improved to a good level since 1996. Most relevant systems are in place or firmly planned.
The strategic use of resources	Financial planning, management and monitoring are secure and well targeted.

The school's sound aims are translated effectively into practice. The school's management, at all levels, displays a clear commitment to continuous improvement. Staffing levels are appropriate. The stock of buildings on this tight site is in the process of being upgraded. The new library is a great asset. The separate playing fields waste time and have no toilet or other facilities, a major deficiency. The levels and quality of learning resources continue to improve as a result of high spending, but deficiencies remain. The school takes the principles of "best value" seriously.

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 school encourages pupils to work hard. • Pupils make good academic progress. • The high quality of most teaching. • The good standard of pastoral care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The frequency and consistency with which homework is set. • The poor behaviour of a few pupils. • Information about pupils' progress.

Inspectors agree that the school's staff encourage pupils to give of their best. The school enables most pupils to make suitable progress. The quality of teaching is good overall. Pupils feel confident in the watchful pastoral care they receive. During the inspection suitable homework was set and marked. The vast majority of pupils behave extremely well; only a small minority display occasional lack of self-control or are prone to chatter. Inspectors judge that the school provides enough outline information for parents about the content of the curriculum, but that it does not provide sufficient specific information about their children's attainments and progress. Overall, however, parents and the wider community (rightly) have a very favourable view of the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. The standard of attainment of pupils in the school varies quite widely, but is above average overall at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4. The proportion of pupils in this school reaching the expected levels of attainment in the national tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations is much higher than the national average. The level of attainment in the Year 9 tests has risen broadly in line with the rise nationally since the last inspection of 1996. From 1996 to 1999 the overall level of attainment in GCSE was above the rising trend nationally, but pupils' overall attainment dropped in 2000 to about the level it was at the time of the last inspection.
2. When pupils come to the school in Year 7, most evidence suggests that their overall level of attainment is well above average. The proportion of pupils reaching the national yardstick of at least Level 4 in the national tests taken at the end of primary education, for example, has been substantially above average for the whole of the 1996-2000 period. The proportion reaching the higher Level 5+ over the same period has been higher still – usually between 150 and 175 per cent of the national average. Most other tests administered early in Year 7 tell a similar story. In the last two years nine out of every ten pupils in this school have started their secondary education with an overall standard in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science at least at the national benchmark of Level 4. The school has a greater proportion of high-attaining pupils starting in Year 7 than most comprehensive schools.
3. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 (Key Stage 3) in 2000 the proportions of pupils who achieved the national standards of at least Level 5 or Level 6 were well above average in all of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. When compared with national averages, the proportion of pupils in this school gaining the higher Level 6+ has been, in four out of the last six years, considerably higher than the proportion gaining Level 5+ indicating clearly that the school has more high attainers than the national norm. On the average "points" that pupils scored, their attainment was well above average during the whole of the 1996-2000 period in all three subjects (except for the "average" rating of English in 1996 and for the "above average" ratings for English in 1998 and science in 1999).
4. Girls are consistently ahead of boys overall in English by the end of Year 9: both groups have, however, been ahead of the national performance by their sexes since 1997 - and by a similar amount. The performance of boys in the subject in this school has risen slightly faster than that of girls since 1996. Both boys and girls perform similarly overall in mathematics and science, although girls have been marginally the stronger overall. Teachers' assessments of pupils are usually similar to the test results pupils achieve.
5. When pupils' average points scores in the Key Stage 3 tests for 2000 are compared with those in schools which have a similar background (as measured solely by the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals), pupils in this school performed much better than the group average. Their attainment, too, of the higher Level 6+ was well above the group average in all of English, mathematics and science. The position was fairly similar in 1999 and an improvement all round on the performance of 1998.
6. In the five other (non-core) subjects formally assessed at the end of Key Stage 3 in both 1999 and 2000, teachers judged that much higher proportions of pupils than normal reached nationally expected levels in design and technology, geography, history, information and communication technology (ICT) and modern foreign languages. The assessments were particularly high in design and technology and in ICT. Inspectors concur with these judgements.
7. As pupils move through the school from Year 7 to the end of Year 9, external test data suggests that they make broadly satisfactory progress overall. In work seen during the inspection pupils made sound progress overall - including both those who are particularly talented and those who have special educational needs. The school does not, however, have sufficient robust and valid data for pupils' attainments across all subjects at the ends of Years 7, 8 and 9 in order to judge their academic progress with high reliability.

8. In GCSE examinations in 2000 pupils' overall level of attainment was above average - both for pupils' average points scores and for the proportion of them gaining five or more grades A*-C. The proportions gaining five or more grades A*-G or at least one A*-G grade were well above average and continued the high level of attainment of the previous few years. Over the period 1994-1999 there was a rising trend in the school's average points score. The points' average dropped back, however, in 2000 to around the school's level of 1995-1996. This drop resulted in the trend of the school's results in the core subjects falling below the rising trend nationally over the 1994-2000 period. This slight fall in 2000 is at least partly explained by the fact that a small minority of boys (who, overall, represented about 60 per cent of the cohort) turned in particularly poor performances. In addition, the overall performance of this year-group earlier on in their school life had been lower than most others.

9. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more of the higher (A*-C) grades over the 1994-2000 period was 54-65 per cent (highest in 1999 and lowest in 2000) against a national average of 41-47 per cent. Normally just over two-fifths of pupils in this school (though almost three-fifths in 1999) achieve a grade in the range A*-C in all of English, mathematics and science: these proportions are higher than what is typical nationally.

10. Pupils' overall level of attainment in the core subjects in GCSE in 2000 was above the national average in English and mathematics, but well above average in science. The results in English and mathematics show a rising trend, whilst those in science (despite the high performance) have a slight downward trend. When pupils' performances in the subjects they took in 1996-2000 [except for 1998, when national comparative sets of data for this school were not available to inspectors] are compared with one another, pupils did significantly better in all these years in science, design and technology and geography, but worse in English literature and worse in 1996-1999 (but not in 2000) in English language and art. The proportion of the top A* and A grades achieved in the school in 1999-2000 was high, at about double the national average. No pupil achieved the highest A* grade in 2000, however, in graphics, geography or religious education (RE).

11. Girls in this school have achieved a much greater proportion of the higher A*-C grades in GCSE than boys in the last six years: the gap in the proportions gaining five or more of these grades has varied between 14 (in 1998) and 25 percentage points (in 1996) and is greater than the gap nationally. The gap shows no sign of lessening and was 17 percentage points in both 1999 and 2000. The overall difference between the sexes increases a little over Years 10-11, because there are more girls than boys who tend to work hard and concentrate well – although this is not true in all subjects. Based on pupils' average points scores at GCSE, both boys' and girls' results have, however, been above average (and in 1997-1999 well above average) overall.

12. When the school's average points scores at GCSE are compared with those in schools with a similar "free school meals" background, this school's performance was above the group average in 1998 and 1999, and broadly in line with it in 2000. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-C was well above the group average in 1998 and 1999, and close to average in 2000. In all of the three core subjects pupils' attainment was in line with the group average in 2000.

13. Statistical evidence indicates that pupils' overall rate of progress between the end of Year 9 and the taking of GCSE in Year 11 is broadly satisfactory. In lessons and other work seen during the inspection pupils made sound progress overall in their studies in Years 10-11. The school fell short of its three main targets for GCSE in 2000. Its targets for 2001 are slightly higher than those for 2000, but are realistic and attainable.

14. In work seen during the inspection pupils' overall standard of attainment was above that typically found nationally amongst pupils of similar ages. The overall level of attainment, adjusted for age, is similar throughout the school. Pupils' attainment is, however, of an average level in art, physical education (PE) and religious education (RE) at the end of Key Stage 3. It is below average in German in Year 10 (no cohort has yet gone through to GCSE in the subject) and in RE by the end of Key Stage 4, because pupils have had relatively little time to study the subjects. In all other National Curriculum subjects and in key stages other than those mentioned above pupils' overall level of attainment is above average.

15. In English, pupils' overall level of achievement is above average in all aspects of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Pupils generally read with appropriate fluency, intonation and understanding. The quality of writing varies from the highly competent and sensitive to brief and poorly structured prose, but is above average overall in content and presentation. Most pupils speak clearly and audibly and are capable, when given the chance, of discussing issues at length. With few exceptions, pupils listen very carefully to their teachers and to one another.

16. In other subjects across the school pupils' standard of reading is good. They read texts, worksheets and a range of other material with appropriate understanding. In geography and history, for example, they skim texts with confidence and in many subjects extract apposite evidence for research purposes or to illustrate a point of view. Pupils often read aloud programs' instructions in information and communication technology (ICT) to encourage fluency and understanding. Pupils' familiarity and confidence with specialist subject vocabulary are considerably enhanced, as in mathematics and in design and technology, by the prominent display of key technical terms.

17. The standard of writing is above average overall. Pupils generally structure their writing competently, usually helped (as in science and geography) by a variety of techniques to give order and direction to what they wish to communicate. Some very good examples of extended, analytical writing are produced in history, amongst other subjects. The presentation of work is better than often seen. In mathematics and in design and technology, for instance, high emphasis is placed on a neat and logical layout. Spelling and punctuation are better than average in most subjects, often reflecting the importance that individual teachers give to these matters. In modern foreign languages, in contrast, a significant number of pupils are careless with the use of accents and do not systematically complete corrections. Mathematical investigations are often well written up: these include hypotheses, detailed information and diagrams that indicate how conclusions have been reached.

18. Most pupils are good listeners. Their overall standard of speaking is above average in audibility and expression. They are generally confident and thoughtful in expressing a point of view both formally in class and informally in conversations. In most subjects pupils discuss issues convincingly: in RE, for example, they are very ready to explain their points of view and in mathematics are routinely expected to explain their thinking. A greater proportion of pupils than usual give developed answers (as, for example, in history) and respond enthusiastically to follow-up questions. Pupils' command of technical vocabulary is better than average and is helped considerably by the extensive display within subject departments of frequently used words and phrases. Presentations of high quality are often made by pupils - as, for example, in English, mathematics, on child development courses and in ICT.

19. In mathematics pupils' overall standard is above average and effectively supports their learning in other subjects. Many pupils, nevertheless, have weaknesses in their knowledge and understanding of basic mathematical facts. Calculators are, in the main, used well, but pupils reach for them too readily to carry out simple calculations, a weakness also identified in 1996. The representation and handling of data are well done in mathematics, science, design and technology, and geography. Too many pupils, however, are insecure in handling mental mathematics.

20. Attainment in science is above average throughout the school: girls in particular achieve well in reaching the highest grades in GCSE. Most pupils' basic knowledge, understanding and recall of recent classwork are secure. The majority use scientific vocabulary and manipulate formulae soundly.

21. The overall level of attainment in ICT is above average throughout the school on the specialist taught courses. It is at a lower, average level on the modular ICT course in Key Stage 4, because of the low amount of timetabled teaching. Pupils are generally very proficient on keyboards. They are particularly strong on such aspects as importing images, animation and multi-media presentations.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

22. Pupils generally show very good attitudes towards the school and the provision it makes for them. They are well motivated, friendly, mature and open-minded. Their natural sociability and warmth help to make the school a very welcoming place in which to learn. Pupils come to school with a readiness to work that allows teachers to ask the best of them. They are equally keen to take advantage of the numerous sporting and other extracurricular opportunities that the school provides. Pupils with special educational needs are generally well motivated and show good concentration. They demonstrate strong self-esteem and express themselves confidently with adults and their peers.

23. In lessons pupils' behaviour is predominantly good. It is very good in two-fifths of lessons. In only a very small proportion of classes (around three per cent) is behaviour unsatisfactory. This is usually associated with a lack of pace in teaching and learning or insufficient stimulation in the material presented to them; as a result, pupils show signs of restlessness.

24. The school is a very orderly community. This climate is achieved largely through pupils' self-restraint and cooperation, although the work of the upper-school prefects plays a quiet but significant role. There is very little evidence of damage to the school's fabric or property. Lockers, toilets and private belongings are, generally, well respected. Whilst some examples of teasing or bullying were reported, these are generally rare and tolerated neither by staff nor by pupils, who have a responsible approach to resolving conflict. Pupils understand the effects on others of their own actions and expect this sensitivity to be reciprocated.

25. Pupils form positive and constructive relationships with others and work naturally and effectively in groups. They are friendly and mature in their approach to teachers and other adults, showing interest in, and respect for, visitors to the school. The lives and achievements of other peoples attract their interest. They are very capable of understanding the values and beliefs of those who live in different societies and cultures from their own.

26. In many aspects of school life pupils show a marked capacity to take initiative and exercise responsibility. The School Council is supported by staff, but is organised and led by pupils of all ages. Its business is well managed and gives consideration to relevant issues in a serious and thoughtful way. In a meeting that took place during the inspection between the School Council's members and the authority's catering officer and cook, the queries and concerns raised by pupils were debated with great care and consideration. Pupils demonstrated the ability to listen to a range of arguments, to offer alternative views and to respond positively - even where their own suggestions could not be adopted. This was a model of sensitive debate that many adult organisations would find difficult to emulate.

27. The Student Network is another example of pupils' concern for one another. This provides confidential support and guidance for pupils encountering difficulties. The Year 10 and 11 pupils who provide this service take their training and duties very seriously and make a substantial contribution to the welfare of fellow students. Pupils also take on such other roles in the school as prefect, school librarian or careers support work. The rate of exclusions is in the low to average range for a school of this size. The action to exclude pupils is only taken after a carefully graduated series of alternative sanctions has been exhausted.

28. The attendance of most pupils is good. In the 1999-2000 academic year pupils' overall attendance was 92.4 per cent, slightly above the national average of 91.3 per cent. The level of authorised absence in the same year (7.4 per cent) was close to the national average of 7.7 per cent. The amount of absence without good reason (0.2 per cent) in the same year was low and well below the national average of 1.1 per cent. Attendance has been sustained at this level since the last inspection in 1996.

29. Although the school's prospectus makes no comments to parents about the importance of good attendance and punctuality, the school puts a high degree of emphasis in practice on these matters. Examination of attendance records indicates that most of the small amount of unauthorised absence in the last academic year was accounted for by seven pupils in Year 11 (including one with 63 days of such absence). Most authorised absence is owing to pupils' illness or the taking of holidays in term time. Attendance in the Autumn Term of the current academic year was 93.7 per cent, reaching a high of 96.3 per cent in Year 7 and a low of 91.2 per cent in Year 11.

30. Most registers are accurately completed and tidily kept. The school has thorough and effective computerised systems for recording and analysing pupils' attendance and for pinpointing problems. There is no evidence that truancy is a problem for the school, although the school does not have regular, formal ways of cross-checking for its existence. Pupils' punctuality for school and for lessons is good.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

31. The quality of teaching is good overall and is one of the major strengths of the school. It is at least satisfactory in virtually all lessons - satisfactory in about one third of lessons and good in over two-fifths of them. Additionally, over a fifth of the school's teaching is very good. It is occasionally outstanding. Overall, two-thirds of the school's teaching is good or better. Only two lessons out of the 175 inspected had teaching that was predominantly unsatisfactory. The school has a substantial core of very good teachers. The quality of teaching is very similar throughout the school.

32. Teaching has improved since the last inspection in 1996. Then 92 per cent of the teaching inspected was judged to be at least satisfactory, well over half was said to be good and about 12 per cent was very good. The proportion of good (or better) teaching is about the same, but the very good (or even better) teaching has doubled to 23 per cent. Only one per cent of teaching is now assessed as being unsatisfactory. This is a good achievement by the school.

33. Teachers have good knowledge of the subjects they teach. The majority are steeped in their subjects - a feature that is particularly noticeable in geography, history and ICT. In only a very small number of cases where teaching is conducted outside a teacher's specialist areas do slight weaknesses in knowledge sometimes creep in. As a result of this high level of specialist knowledge, teachers are generally confident in delivery, give full coverage of relevant points and draw on substantial personal expertise. Most go beyond the simple imparting of information to ensure that pupils gain insight into the subtleties of their subjects. Many are skilled at making well-timed and relevant interventions or injecting appropriate snippets of information that increase pupils' knowledge and interest. In a lesson in building studies, for example, a teacher gave a very clear exposition and demonstration of the uses of different kinds of wood and of appropriate methods of jointing structures.

34. Appropriate attention is paid overall to the teaching of basic literacy and numeracy. In most lessons teachers give pupils clear guidance on how to structure their written work - as, for instance, by means of notes, worksheets, lists or writing "frames". The display and use of key specialist terms is a prominent feature of many lessons. Neat presentation and handwriting are generally emphasised. These are sometimes further enhanced by intensive use of ICT for redrafting and producing final, polished versions of work. A weakness in a significant minority of lessons, however, is that the misspelling of key words by a cross-section of pupils is not identified and drawn to the attention of the whole class. Competence and interest in numeracy are well promoted. Interest in mathematics is heightened by, for example, the chance to take part in mathematical competitions in Key Stage 3 that is taken up by a large proportion of pupils.

35. Lessons are generally well planned. In many lessons the objectives and learning steps of each stage are clearly identified, timed and explained to pupils. This results in pupils learning with confidence and interest, knowing clearly what they have to do and making good progress at a brisk pace. In an English lesson in Year 11, for instance, the teacher provided analysis sheets that gave a clear framework of questions and ideas and led to incisive discussion and confident writing. In a mathematics lesson in Year 8 the teacher arranged well-organised practical activities that ensured that pupils formed a good understanding of "probability". In the best lessons teachers are very clear about precisely what they wish pupils to learn and carefully plan the most effective ways to secure rapid understanding.

36. The majority of teachers set suitably high standards for pupils. They want pupils to be interested and inquisitive. In the best lessons they not only stimulate pupils' intellectual or creative curiosity, but keep pushing pupils to extend the boundaries of their thinking. They do not automatically accept the first answers given, but are skilled at ruminating, probing issues, asking supplementary questions and generally making pupils think hard. In an English lesson in Year 9, for instance, the teacher's incisive questioning enabled pupils to explore critically the nature and boundaries of different literary styles. In a history lesson in Year 7, pupils with special educational needs had to think hard about the reasons why wooden castles have not survived: pupils were not spoon-fed, but had to make significant effort to solve the problem for themselves before the teacher led a cogent discussion of their views.

37. In a minority of lessons that are otherwise satisfactory, however, pupils are insufficiently stretched. Sometimes too little ground is covered owing to the leisurely pace of teaching or time is wasted on superficial tasks. Occasionally, faster pupils finish their work and do not have follow-up tasks to hand. More often, teachers do too much of the work for pupils - undertaking pupils' thinking or researching for them, expecting only brief answers, providing tasks or questions that lack sufficient intellectual rigour, or not following up shallow initial responses with more penetrating questions and debate. In these lessons teachers tend not to expect pupils to explain their thinking.

38. Most teachers use a broad range of effective teaching methods. They review previous lessons crisply and introduce new ideas clearly, so that pupils understand the importance and direction of lessons. In nearly all cases whole-class teaching is effective, because teachers strike a suitable balance between covering new ground, discussing issues arising and checking pupils' understanding. Most give an appropriate amount of time to pupils to work problems out on their own or with others in a group and then collating ideas together with the

whole class. In some very good lessons every step along the way was thoughtfully planned, carefully timed and briskly explored.

39. Another notable feature is the encouragement that some teachers give to pupils to explain and refine their views, to incorporate substantial use of specialist vocabulary or to take the lead in recording the views of the whole class on a whiteboard. In such lessons pupils participate with enthusiasm and great interest. The ends of lessons were suitably concluded in most cases (though occasionally rushed) by a summary of what had been learned in the preceding hour.

40. Teachers' skill in managing and controlling classes is, in nearly all cases, very strong and a notable feature of lessons. The vast majority of teachers quickly establish a purposeful atmosphere of calmness in lessons that enables pupils to concentrate well and learn without interruption. In these lessons relationships between teachers and pupils are warm and respectful and marked by good humour and understanding. Pupils have the confidence to put forward their views and to ask about what they do not understand. In a few classes, however, teachers do not sufficiently control the chatter or (very occasionally) the disruptive behaviour of a small number of pupils.

41. Time is normally used well in lessons and suitable resources are provided. Most teachers assess pupils' work carefully and provide encouraging comments that indicate how work can be improved further. Some whole-class assessment is very brisk and particularly effective. In part of a series of very high quality lessons in ICT, for example, the teacher carried out a very rapid written test, allowed pupils to mark one another's answers, checked quickly for accuracy and immediately entered the data onto his computer. A few books, however, have little or no diagnostic comment or indications of how improvement can be achieved in work.

42. Teaching is strong throughout the school. It is satisfactory overall in science and PE in Key Stage 3 and throughout the school in modern foreign languages and RE. It is very good in history and in the specialist ICT courses throughout the school. In all other subjects and key stages it is good. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is generally good, but always at least satisfactory, as a result of which these pupils generally make good progress. Nearly all subjects have at least some teaching that is very good, and about a third of it is of this high quality in Years 7 and 11. Enthusiasm and commitment are the hallmarks of most teaching. Homework is generally set appropriately to reinforce or extend what has been learned in school.

43. Most pupils make sound progress in their studies both in lessons and over longer periods of time. In over three-fifths of classes during the inspection pupils showed a sound level of commitment and in a further one third a satisfactory degree of progress. Pupils make a similar rate of progress as they move through the school. More girls than boys, in most but not all subjects, make good progress, especially in Key Stage 4, because they tend to concentrate better and work a little harder. Some boys, too, show little initiative in "going the extra mile" in effort or searching for information.

44. There are many reasons why most pupils learn very positively in this school. The quality of teaching is good. The vast majority of pupils show considerable interest in their work, are well behaved and are keen to do well. Most show a good degree of commitment and enthusiasm. High-attaining pupils and those who have special educational needs usually make sound progress.

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

45. The school provides a curriculum that successfully offers a good range of learning opportunities and mostly meets the needs of all pupils at the school. The breadth and balance of the curriculum are satisfactory, with the exception of ICT and RE in Years 10-11. In Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9) all subjects of the National Curriculum and RE are taught; drama is taught in Year 7. Pupils study one modern foreign language in Year 7 and two in Years 8 and 9 - a significant improvement since the last inspection. All pupils study personal, social and health education (PSHE), including teaching on sex and anti-drugs education, throughout these years.

46. In Key Stage 4 (Years 10-11) all pupils study the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The option of studying biology, chemistry and physics as separate sciences has recently been introduced and is taken by two groups of pupils. An appropriate range of eight optional subjects is offered for GCSE examinations: these include ICT and PE, as well as building studies (for the Certificate of Achievement). The school also offers pupils the opportunity to study Latin, dance or RE for GCSE examinations outside normal

school hours. There are firm plans to introduce an ICT course for the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in September 2001. All pupils study a wide-ranging programme of PSHE and participate in a modular, "entitlement" course that includes ICT, PE and RE. A suitable work-related programme is followed by six pupils for whom the full range of GCSE subjects is not appropriate. These pupils are sensibly disapplied from the full National Curriculum entitlement.

47. The school meets all statutory curricular requirements except those for ICT and RE in Years 10-11. The time allocated within the modular entitlement course for ICT is inadequate to cover all aspects required by the National Curriculum in sufficient depth. There is also insufficient time within the same modular course for teaching fully what is required by the locally Agreed Syllabus for RE. This deficiency in RE was reported at the time of the last inspection and insufficient progress has been made in addressing this issue. There are effective arrangements for teaching an appropriate programme of sex education.

48. The school's total teaching time of 25 hours is in line with the minimum recommended by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). The time allocated for teaching music has improved significantly since the time of the last inspection and is now adequate. Insufficient time is, however, provided for teaching the separate science courses in Years 10-11 in the required depth to meet GCSE standards. The time taken for pupils to reach the playing fields from the school significantly curtails the time available for the teaching of games.

49. There is a clear and thoughtful policy for raising standards in literacy as part of the National Literacy Strategy. The policy has been effectively implemented across all subjects with a focus on key words and on techniques for improving reading and writing skills. The National Numeracy Strategy to raise standards of numeracy has been fully and successfully implemented in mathematics and is beginning to be developed in other subject departments.

50. All pupils have the opportunity to study the full range of subjects offered. This represents an improvement since the time of the last inspection, as English and mathematics are now offered to all pupils for GCSE examinations. Pupils are grouped for teaching in Years 7-9 in broad "bands" across most subjects in the school. Judgements about pupils' performance and their allocation to bands are not finely tuned to take account of pupils' attainment and aptitude in all subjects. There are sometimes considerable imbalances in autumn-born and summer-born pupils. The imbalance of boys and girls within groupings that was reported at the time of the last inspection has been successfully addressed.

51. The school has in place most of the elements required by the Code of Practice for pupils with special educational needs. Provision for these pupils is largely made through subject departments, with additional in-class support from learning support assistants (LSAs) for statemented pupils. In English and mathematics two specialists take most lower-attaining groups. There is no additional in-class teaching support in other subjects and only a limited reading programme (usually off timetable) for individuals or small groups; the classes of lower-attaining pupils are, however, generally smaller than the rest. A small amount of tuition is provided by the local authority for individuals with dyslexic problems, but this is insufficient. Good provision is, however, made, both in buildings, physical care and adaptation of the curriculum, for pupils with physical disabilities. The four pupils concerned benefit greatly from their experience of mainstream education, which is also a positive experience for the whole school.

52. A new school policy has been recently adopted for gifted and talented pupils. The implementation of enrichment activities varies across subjects. It is insufficient in science and RE; satisfactory in English, design and technology, geography, history and modern foreign languages; good in art, music and PE; and very good in mathematics. The best practice seen - as, for example, in art and mathematics - is exciting and innovative. The school has also initiated, from Oct 2000, an enrichment programme for about 20 pupils in Years 9 and 10. This extracurricular provision includes such generic activities as "thinking skills" and also entails cooperation with contributory primary schools and post-16 institutions.

53. The procedures for curricular planning are good. Parents are kept well informed about what their children study through three well-designed curriculum booklets for each of Years 7-9 and another booklet for Years 10-11. Consultation about any proposed changes is wide-ranging: governors and staff are involved in these through regular meetings and parents through the school's newsletters. There is, however, no

comprehensive system of monitoring the effectiveness of the curriculum across the school. A detailed consultation is taking place to rectify this situation. The coordination and the quality of the schemes of work are good in most subjects.

54. A very wide range of extracurricular activities enhances the curriculum. Successful out-of-school residential visits are arranged to France and Germany and within the United Kingdom. Pupils regularly visit theatres and undertake geography fieldwork in the local area. There is a lively *Young Enterprise* group. Musical activities include the choir and orchestra. There is a major performance at the school each term and a very successful performance at Christmas.

55. Sports teams take part in a well-organised programme of inter-school fixtures in a wide range of sports. There are regular opportunities for practices at lunchtimes. Approximately 30 per cent of pupils participate in competitive sports and there is a strong and willing commitment from seven members of staff.

56. A good programme of study support is provided. This encompasses a homework club, opportunity to use the library after school and a number of subject clubs. Pupils regularly participate in the National Mathematics Competition and three pupils attend mathematics master classes at Keele University.

57. Provision for careers education and guidance is good. A well-organised scheme of work is taught effectively within the PSHE programme. This is supplemented by speakers from local colleges, visits to exhibitions, a bi-annual careers convention held at the school and visiting theatre groups. Impartial guidance is given by the careers service, which appropriately concentrates on those pupils deemed to be in greatest need. All pupils are (unusually) interviewed personally by the headteacher and "drop in" clinics are arranged regularly for pupils to meet a careers officer.

58. All pupils in Year 11 participate for one week in well-organised work experience. There is an adequate programme of preparation, but opportunities are missed to strengthen pupils' knowledge of job applications, selection and workplace procedures. During the placement all pupils are visited by a member of staff and complete a diary. There is a satisfactory careers library, which is easily accessible, and supporting computer programs are available in the ICT rooms.

59. There are good links with the local community. Pupils are involved in Endon well-dressing and the Millennium Playground Project. The jazz band regularly contributes to local events. Close relationships are maintained with contributory primary schools to provide a smooth transition to secondary schooling. Representatives from local post-16 colleges visit the school as part of the careers programme and there are particularly effective subject links in English, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. Links with institutions of initial teacher training are strong and the school regularly hosts the training of a group of student teachers.

60. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good overall. Its provision for their spiritual development is satisfactory. Although RE is not a strength of the school, pupils do have opportunities in the subject for reflection - as, for example, in connection with their study of Buddhism and the associated practice of meditation. Some assemblies include direct elements of spirituality, such as consideration of an individual's relationship with God. Clear opportunities are, however, missed in some assemblies to provide a spiritual atmosphere to which, for instance, music and other expressive media could contribute.

61. The school's provision for spiritual education has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils visit places of worship, such as Lichfield cathedral, and take part in seasonal celebrations at a local church. In some daily lessons pupils experience a spiritual dimension. In music, for instance, this is expressed in unaccompanied part-singing, in art through the study of Christian symbolism and in history by an introduction to great medieval cathedrals.

62. Pupils' moral education is promoted well. Firm messages about right and wrong are given out in assemblies, in RE and in lessons on personal, social education and health education (PSHE). Staff set good examples of courtesy and employ firm discipline. An effective prefect system enables younger pupils to learn from good role models. There is a well understood system of graduated sanctions and rewards. Praise

postcards which are sent to parents and accumulated merit prizes are a strong feature that are widely appreciated.

63. From time to time pupils are given talks by people from the local community. These have included a survivor of the holocaust, a doctor and a nurse. Amongst other matters, these visitors deal with such significant issues as abortion and racial hatred. In lessons pupils frequently deal with moral issues. In geography, for example, they discuss the implications of goods they buy cheaply as a result of low-paid labour in developing countries. In PE they learn and practise fair play and respect for rules. In a history lesson in Year 11, pupils were required to think deeply about the whole range of issues surrounding the practice of apartheid in South Africa.

64. Provision for pupils' social development is very good. Pupils experience a wide range of friendships in form, year and banded groups. They benefit from the very good provision of extracurricular activities that are especially strong in music and PE. The prefect system enables pupils to take responsibility. Pupils also have the opportunity to become librarians, representatives on the school council or counsellors. The "student network", with its trained counsellors from Years 10 and 11, offers peer support to pupils who wish to share personal problems. Both the school council and student network provide social experiences of high quality for pupils. The school has already appointed a coordinator for education in citizenship in anticipation of future curricular requirements. Visiting speakers on community and wider issues have included the local member of parliament.

65. The school makes good use of its facilities outside lesson times to provide further social experiences for pupils. On wet or very cold days pupils are allowed to meet in classrooms. The school has organised lunchtimes effectively to enable pupils to eat and converse in a pleasant atmosphere. The vast majority of pupils respond to this provision in a very mature and responsible way. Pupils have opportunities to socialise in less familiar surroundings, when they take part in the very good range of school visits. These include an unusually large number of residential visits – as, for example, in connection with geography, modern foreign languages or music.

66. In several subjects pupils work especially well together in planned learning activities. In science, for instance, they work in pairs and groups on experiments and investigations, and in music and PE they benefit from the very regular collaborative work in their practice of skills and preparation of performances.

67. Pupils' cultural development is soundly promoted. The school has enjoyed visits from practising artists, including workshop leaders from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. These artists have provided ideas and enthusiasm that carry over into daily lessons and contribute to pupils' learning across subject boundaries. Pupils have, for example, composed poetry in connection with their study of migration in geography. Artistic, historical and religious links occur through projects such as the Endon well-dressing and the design project for a stained glass window for a local church. Within daily lessons pupils learn about people from cultures that are different from their own. In English they study texts from a wide cultural range; in geography they learn about the life of the rain-forest people; and in music they study Indian classical music as well as jazz and reggae.

68. The school has various formats for regular assemblies for its pupils. These include two assemblies for all pupils, interspersed with PSHE lessons, on Tuesdays. The school continues, however, to fall short of meeting the legal requirement to provide a daily act of worship for all pupils, because the tutorial time that is an alternative to a formal assembly on most days does not include any act of collective worship.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

69. The school provides a high quality of care for its pupils. They feel secure and valued, and see the staff as a positive source of guidance and support. They look with particular confidence to year heads and form tutors, whenever they encounter difficulties. These teachers discharge their pastoral duties with evident care and responsibility.

70. In spite of this generally good provision of care, there are a number of areas which fail to meet requirements. There are no toilets on the playing fields, which are about a quarter of a mile away from the school. The showers in the PE provision are open-plan and offer no privacy for pupils. Some of the toilets lack

soap and drying facilities. In two of the science laboratories there are trailing electrical leads (a danger pointed out in the 1996 inspection report, but still not rectified). In a design and technology teaching area, dust from wood-cutting is potentially hazardous. The medical room is cramped and unsuitable for anything more than a short stay. It is general practice to ask pupils to line up before lessons in separate lines for boys and girls. No clear purpose is advanced for this segregated arrangement.

71. The school's arrangements for ensuring health and safety are generally sound. Policies are thorough and incidents carefully logged. Reviews of health and safety are regularly conducted across the school. Child Protection arrangements are in line with the policies of the local Area Child Protection Committee and staff are made familiar with the necessary procedures. The school has put in place effective measures for promoting good attendance and behaviour and for eliminating bullying. These are underpinned by well-framed policy statements that are clear and explicit.

72. Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE) is generally good. Teaching programmes are well planned and carefully structured, covering all relevant areas of this work. The quality of teaching of this programme, undertaken by most of the staff in their capacity as form tutors, is predominantly sound and often good. There is some monitoring of this teaching and of pupils' responses, although it is not organised in a systematic way. A wide review of this provision is currently under way, partly to ensure that the imminent requirement to include citizenship within these programmes is smoothly managed.

73. Pupils generally receive effective guidance and personal support throughout their time in school. This is coordinated by the five year heads and their teams of form tutors. The effectiveness of the year heads' work is limited by the lack of suitable accommodation and of time available for their duties. The detailed monitoring of individual pupils' academic progress, however, is not fully in place. The school lacks, at present, a secure and comprehensive system through which such progress can be consistently tracked and recorded, particularly in Key Stage 3.

74. It did not prove possible during the inspection to ascertain whether provision made for pupils with statements of special educational need meets the requirements specified in those statements. Only a very small number of statements were able to be made available for scrutiny towards the end of the inspection, partly because of the absence through illness of the school's special needs coordinator. The files inspected were poorly organised and often deficient in significant information, including evidence of the statutory annual reviews of statements. There was, furthermore, a serious lapse in the security necessary for such confidential information, since files were kept in unlocked cabinets, accessible not only to staff but also to pupils. The individual education plans (IEPs) produced for pupils with special educational needs are of sound quality, but the arrangements for circulating them to teaching staff are inadequate.

75. The school's assessment policy, which has been recently reviewed, gives satisfactory guidance on the assessment, marking, recording and reporting of pupils' work. Within subject departments the quality of day-to-day assessment of individual pupils' work is at least satisfactory overall and often good. It is unsatisfactory in RE, because pupils' levels of attainment and the progress they make are not clearly recorded. In ICT and PE the marking of pupils' work is very good.

76. Overall, subject departments achieve internal consistency in assessment and relate their assessments of pupils' attainments satisfactorily to the levels indicated in the National Curriculum in Years 7-9. In this respect, there has been an improvement since the previous inspection. In Years 10-11, assessments relate firmly to the requirements of external examinations. Although the school does not give predicted GCSE grades to pupils and parents, the results of mock examinations provide an indication of standards so far achieved and advice on where improvement may be made.

77. The school has a good range of data about pupils' attainment and ability early in Key Stage 3. It makes unsatisfactory overall use of this data to measure accurately pupils' rates of progress and the school's overall performance through Years 7-9. The school does not have sufficiently defined criteria to ensure that pupils' progress can be tracked accurately. There is also a lack of clarity about the criteria for allocating pupils to banded teaching groups.

78. The format of annual reports to parents is presently under review. Samples of reports from the previous school year do not generally give a clear enough indication of pupils' attainments and progress. There is inconsistency both across and within departments in the way grades and percentage marks are shown. Written comments in the reports are, in general, insufficiently detailed in representing pupils' attainment, progress and targets for improvement. In the pre-inspection questionnaire a significant minority of the parents who responded expressed dissatisfaction with the information they receive in respect of their children's progress.

79. Records of Achievement - which are completed in Year 11 - are well presented and give a satisfactory indication of academic standards attained and pupils' successes in a wide range of school-related activities. The school is introducing, for all year groups, specific files to provide cumulative information on pupils' long-term progress. At the time of the inspection there was insufficient evidence, as indicated earlier, to make a full judgement on the quality of assessment procedures and practice for pupils with special educational needs.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

80. The school has effective links with parents, who hold it in high regard. Parents are pleased with the progress their children make, the quality of teaching and the standards that the school promotes in encouraging and fostering the all-round development of their children. The high level of regard and reputation of the school in the community is evidenced by the increasing number of applications by parents for places in the school – applications that significantly exceed the number of places available.

81. A particular strength of the school is the curriculum and course information provided to parents. Three well-prepared booklets describing the curriculum to be covered in Years 7-9 are issued to parents and contain helpful notes outlining how parents can support their children in the home-school partnership. These booklets provide a useful addition to the Year 7 induction programme. They also emphasise the need for parental involvement in children's education and support the purpose of the home-school agreement.

82. The school's prospectus provides a wide range of information about the aims and activities of the school. The GCSE options booklet is well prepared and informative. Parents also indicate that they find the school and teachers approachable and helpful. The *Student Planner* further enhances the dialogue between teachers and home: these booklets are generally well used, regularly checked and provide both pupils and parents with a useful opportunity to discuss children's day-to-day progress. The homework timetable issued for each year group is appropriately balanced. A good amount of tutorial time is allocated to monitor the use of planners and the level of homework.

83. In contrast, the levels of homework, information about pupils' progress and the closeness of links with parents were regarded unfavourably by a significant minority of parents on the pre-inspection questionnaire. During the week of the inspection a reasonable amount of appropriate homework was set, but the addition of coursework can induce overload. The school has a typical range of ways to forge links with parents and regards such contact as significant in its work. Inspectors share the view of some parents that information about pupils' attainment and progress is often imprecise.

84. There is a high attendance at parents' consultation evenings and this presents teachers with some difficulty in allocating everyone sufficient time. The school also has a policy of contacting parents directly if there are concerns or specific issues that need careful attention. Formal reports to parents are written to a common format. This is helpful to parents and whilst the effort pupils make is clearly reported, the reporting of attainment and progress are inconsistent.

85. Information about the school's activities, achievements and associated matters is communicated to parents through the detailed and comprehensive monthly newsletter. The publication covers such topics as team and individual achievements, school events and articles about school trips and visits. The newsletter is additionally used to remind pupils and parents about school rules, make requests for help, seek opinions and issue questionnaires on relevant topics. The school has well established and active links with local newspapers. Articles about the school appear regularly in the local press, so helping to raise the profile of the school in the communities it draws upon.

86. The school's wide range of extracurricular activities attracts support from parents, whose welcome involvement helps to sustain such activities as trips, sports matches, the annual school shows and concerts. There is a Parent Teacher Association, but this struggles to attract wide and regular support. The association does, however, run the 50:50 Club which raises significant and valued funds that are well used by the school.

87. The school runs occasional "workshops" for parents. These have covered such topics as drugs, standards of attainment and parenting. The sessions have been well attended and positively received by parents. Parents have particularly welcomed the opportunity to share their concerns and feelings with other parents who may be experiencing similar difficulties with their children.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

88. The school's aims and values are broad and relevant. They have also been considered and endorsed by the wider school community. The very positive ethos evident in the school strongly reflects these aims and values. Leadership, at all levels, ensures that pupils enjoy an environment of positive relationships, wide opportunities for learning and motivation to high achievement.

89. Over the past three years the headteacher has made a substantial contribution to the school's development and improvement. She is dedicated, energetic and forward-looking. She has confronted key issues and identified appropriately significant targets for action. These have included such aspects as the improvement of teaching accommodation, the review of key staffing roles and job descriptions, the widening of curricular opportunities and the open inclusion in the school of pupils with physical disabilities. She sets high standards and challenges staff and pupils to aspire to the best, partly through her personal commitment and direct involvement in teaching and learning.

90. The senior management group of headteacher and two deputies maintains effective communication and consultation with other groups of managers and generally ensures the efficient implementation of the school's well-framed set of policies. Plans now being implemented are broadening this senior management group and allowing new targets to be addressed - such as the coordination of pastoral functions and the refinement of the school's information systems. Formal structures for consultation are enhanced by the generally positive personal relationships across the school. The quality and effectiveness of staff with responsibilities for the subject and pastoral aspects of the school's work are good overall. They have a positive impact on curricular planning and monitoring, team-working and the quality of teaching.

91. The governing body is an effective group, strongly committed to the school's progress and improvement. Its membership brings to the school a wide range of skills that are deployed very effectively to advance the school's objectives. It has an appropriate range of committees and its business is purposeful and well organised. In a few important areas, however, the governing body does not fully meet its statutory requirements. These relate to gaps in the curriculum in Years 10-11, the provision of daily collective worship and the management and security of information about pupils with special educational needs.

92. The headteacher has undertaken monitoring of the teaching of all staff. There has, additionally, been some self-review within departments. Firm plans are in place to improve this monitoring process as part of the recently adopted system of performance management.

93. The quality of planning for the school's development has improved significantly since the last inspection. The overall process is well managed and provides regular opportunities for consultation and review. Targets are well defined and broadly costed, with relevant criteria for success in place. This whole-school process is mirrored by departmental plans that are generally of good quality.

94. The school's financial management and planning, which had weaknesses at the time of the last inspection, are good and effectively support its educational priorities. The governing body is well informed about the school's spending patterns. It monitors expenditure carefully and now takes an active role in financial planning, an improvement since the time of the last inspection. Within a tight budget and an income that is low by national standards, the school appropriately carries forward a small surplus to allow for contingencies and for planned spending. There is effective and efficient financial control and administration by the headteacher, the

administrative officer and clerical staff. The last external financial audit identified a small number of minor accounting and recording weaknesses. These have been satisfactorily dealt with.

95. Spending by heads of departments is carefully monitored. Departmental funds are now allocated through a formula that is known to all heads of department, an improvement on the system reported at the time of the last inspection. The school has made appropriate and effective use of funds for staff training and of other specific grants and funds. It makes good use of such new technologies as e-mail, the Internet and the electronic registering of pupils' attendance. The school takes best value into account when purchasing services: the issue of the best provider for the cleaning contract, for example, was discussed at length by the governors.

96. The proportion of the school's budget spent on teaching staff is broadly average. The provision of teaching staff is generally good. Almost all lessons in the school are taught by specialists. At the time of the inspection, however, a non-specialist supply teacher was taking science lessons on a long-term basis to cover for a teacher on maternity leave. There are sufficient experienced teachers for pupils with special educational needs. Technical support is sufficient. The number of hours worked by the administrative staff is below the average for a school of this size. The ratio of pupils to teachers is above average. The total teaching time of 25 hours per week meets the minimum recommended by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). Teaching time is wasted, however, by the need for pupils to spend nearly 15 minutes of their games lessons in walking to and from the playing fields.

97. There is a satisfactory programme of induction to the work of the school for teachers new to teaching. Opportunities for the professional development of staff are used appropriately and there has been some effective in-house training. The good overall standard of teaching and learning in the school indicates that the school is capable of being an effective provider of initial teacher training.

98. There has been some improvement in the range and quality of accommodation since the time of the last inspection. The new library is a large and pleasant room. Provision for pupils in wheelchairs is now good. There is access via ramps or a lift to almost all of the buildings on the site. The recently completed physiotherapy room and toilet for disabled people provide very good facilities.

99. There remains, however, some unsatisfactory accommodation. There is insufficient accommodation for science, the music room is too small to allow a range of activities, and the need to use the main hall and dining hall for PE and drama is unsatisfactory. These rooms are not suitable for such use. Those lessons using the dining hall that finish before, or start after, lunch are disrupted by the setting out and clearing away of chairs and tables. The rooms for the special educational needs coordinator, used for teaching English, is gloomy and cramped. Storage facilities are poor in art, geography, history and PE. The office accommodation for the administrative officer is cramped, has no natural light or fresh air access and, because of its location, is difficult to keep private. It is also at some distance from the accommodation for the rest of the administrative staff.

100. A building programme, due to begin within the next few months, promises to replace some of the teaching accommodation at present in mobile classrooms. It is also planned to result in more science rooms. The playing fields, at least a six-minute walk from the school that involves the crossing of a busy main road, lack any changing or toilet facilities. This is a serious deficiency.

101. The school's spending on learning resources is broadly average, but is planned to rise in the next financial year to above average. The provision of resources is largely satisfactory. There is, however, a shortage of textbooks for pupils in science, art, geography, Key Stage 3 history and modern foreign languages. There are insufficient headsets for aural work in modern foreign languages and the equipment for use in aural examinations that take place in the school hall is inadequate. The provision of resources for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory.

102. The centrally provided ICT facilities have been improved substantially since the time of the last inspection and are now good. Although the number of computers is slightly below average, most are up-to-date and of good quality. The provision of ICT in departments is now generally satisfactory, but is unsatisfactory in English, mathematics, art, design and technology, PE (where there is no ICT hardware) and overall for pupils

with special educational needs. There is no hardware for pupils' use in the geography and history departments, but they have relatively easy access to centrally-provided facilities.

103. The library provision is good and provides suitable facilities for pupils to work independently. Its stock of books is supplemented by nine computers with Internet access and CD-ROMs, three video players and a good range of videos. One quality newspaper is taken each day. The librarian works in the library, however, only in the afternoons; this limits the availability of the library as a "drop-in" facility

104. Overall, taking into account the good quality and range of education provided for pupils, the good overall quality of teaching and the sound progress pupils make as they move through Years 7-11, set against the well below average amount of money the school receives for its work, the school gives very good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

105. To improve and build upon the good quality of education that pupils already receive, the governors and senior management of the school should:

- (a) measure accurately pupils' rate of progress and the school's overall performance in Years 7-9 by:
- collating, to one valid criterion across all subjects, information about pupils' attainments in school at least at the end of each of these years;
 - using the information gained to assess individual pupils' progress accurately and guide their future work coherently; and
 - ensuring that judgements about pupils' performance and allocations to "bands" take adequate account of pupils' attainment, ability and age together (## 7 50 73 77).
- (b) meet statutory educational requirements by ensuring that:
- religious education is taught to all pupils in Years 10-11 for an adequate period of time to cover the requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus. This is a serious deficiency that was identified as a weakness at the last inspection in 1996 and has not been adequately remedied (## 14 47 250 255-256);
 - all pupils in Years 10-11 receive sufficient teaching of information and communication technology to cover all the required aspects of the National Curriculum in sufficient depth (## 21 47 207 217);
 - statements for pupils with special educational needs are held securely, filed carefully and appropriately reviewed and updated (# 74); and
 - all pupils experience a daily act of collective worship (# 68).
- (c) provide toilet facilities for pupils and staff on the school's playing fields that are some distance from the school's main site (## 70 100 247).

In addition to the key issues above, other less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the school's future plan of action. These are indicated in paragraphs 17 19 23 30 34 37 40 41 43 48 51 59 60 70 73 75 78 83 84 99 101-102 and in subject paragraphs.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	175
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	93

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	22	43	32	1	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons. The percentages do not add up to 100 because of "rounding".

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7-Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	695	n/a
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	40	n/a

Special educational needs	Y7-Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	15	n/a
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	49	n/a

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	6
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	14

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.4
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for 1999-2000.

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
	2000	68	66	134

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	52	52	57
	Girls	58	56	50
	Total	110	108	107
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	82 (83)	81 (78)	80 (71)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	46 (50)	57 (57)	49 (29)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	49	50	58
	Girls	57	55	56
	Total	106	105	114
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	79 (84)	78 (77)	85 (76)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	54 (40)	54 (54)	54 (26)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

Percentages in brackets refer to 1999.

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
	2000	75	52	127

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	36	71	75
	Girls	33	51	51
	Total	69	122	126
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	54 (65)	96 (98)	99 (99)
	National	47 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

Figures in brackets refer to 1999.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	41.4 (44.0)
	National	38.4 (38.0)

Figures in brackets refer to 1999.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	1
White	686
Any other minority ethnic group	5

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	11	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)	35.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	19.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7–Y11

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	235

Deployment of teachers: Y7–Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	80.3
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Average teaching group size: Y7–Y11

Key Stage 3	27.7
Key Stage 4	22.9

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	1,513,244
Total expenditure	1,485,893
Expenditure per pupil	2,157
Balance brought forward from previous year	22,140
Balance carried forward to next year	49,491

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	695
Number of questionnaires returned	137

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	38	52	7	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	46	46	5	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	49	10	3	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	54	13	8	1
The teaching is good.	31	59	6	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	28	49	18	5	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48	41	9	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	56	39	1	2	2
The school works closely with parents.	32	48	13	6	1
The school is well led and managed.	31	54	9	2	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	40	49	5	3	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	34	51	5	3	7

Other issues raised by parents

There were additional comments from parents on 20 of the 137 questionnaires returned. Amongst the positive views held by parents were:

- the school's promotion of high standards of effort and good academic progress;
- the high quality of most of the school's teaching; and
- the care taken to encourage pupils and the good standard of pastoral care.

Amongst the few concerns expressed by parents were:

- homework being set infrequently or inconsistently;
- the poor behaviour of a small minority of pupils; and
- too few opportunities for parents to learn accurately about their children's academic progress.

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

ENGLISH

106. On entry to the school in Year 7, the proportions of pupils who had already reached the benchmarks of Levels 4 or 5 in National Curriculum tests in their primary schools was well above the national average over the 1996-2000 period. The school's results in the national tests in English at the end of Year 9 are also well above average. Pupils' overall level of attainment in these Year 9 national tests in 2000 was well above average when compared with schools of a similar character and was broadly in line with the same pupils' achievements in mathematics and science.

107. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' overall standard in all aspects of language work is above average. Speaking and listening skills are strong. Most pupils articulate their views clearly and use a wide and appropriate range of vocabulary. Pupils in a Year 7 class, for example, explored the possible endings of a short story with lively discussion and expression. Lower-attaining pupils express themselves clearly: pupils in Year 9, for instance, considered speech and actions in a scene from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* with suitable vocabulary and insight.

108. Pupils of all levels of attainment read with expression and feeling. Most explore shades of meaning in texts carefully and look critically at writing through the aspects of setting, structure, style and language. They often use appropriate terminology with assurance. A Year 8 class, for example, analysed a poem from an anthology normally intended for use with Years 10 and 11 and produced incisive and thoughtful interpretations.

109. Pupils write in a variety of styles throughout the school. For the most part, they demonstrate a clear understanding of their audience and purpose, and structure their work accordingly. Most pupils have a sound grasp of spelling, punctuation and grammar, although errors in these areas weaken the work of lower attainers. Most pupils demonstrate sound analytical skills when writing about works of literature.

110. Pupils make sound progress in their learning in Years 7-9. Class discussion and extensive work in pairs or groups help pupils to reflect on what they have read and to learn more about how writers achieve their desired effects through their choice of language. Pupils improve the planning and organisation of their work steadily as they progress through the key stage. They give appropriate emphasis to the use of texts to support their views, when writing about literature.

111. Results in GCSE English Language have been above the national average since 1996. There was a general trend of improvement from 1996 to 1999 and then a slight dip in the results in 2000. The 2000 results were, nevertheless, higher than the results of 1997 and 1998. Results in English Literature were above average in 1998 and 1999 and in line with the national average in 2000. In recent years pupils' performance in English has tended to be a little lower than in most of their other GCSE subjects, but this was not true of English Language results in 2000. In both language and literature girls overall performed better than boys by a considerable margin.

112. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' overall level of attainment is above average. Pupils have good speaking and listening skills. In a Year 10 class, for example, pupils held a mock public meeting to discuss powerboat racing on a stretch of river, with pupils speaking for the many groups involved. This led to oral work of a very high standard, as pupils presented their viewpoints with maturity, authority and appropriate language and style. Lively discussions of texts and issues help pupils to develop their confidence and competence in both speaking and listening.

113. Pupils respond to a wide variety of texts appropriately and use textual references carefully to inform their writing about literature. Most pupils write clearly and effectively on a range of literary texts, explore their inherent dramatic possibilities and make effective analyses of media material. Whilst discussing a Roald Dahl short story, for instance, Year 10 pupils contrasted its features with the conventions of a story by Conan Doyle which they had also read. A Year 11 group explored the meaning of good and evil in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* thoughtfully in both speech and writing. The extended writing of most pupils is of a good standard and texts are explored in considerable depth. Higher-attaining pupils write with insight and maturity of style.

114. The written work of most pupils is well considered and accurate. Lower attainers make errors of spelling and syntax but, nevertheless, convey their ideas clearly and thoughtfully, if relatively briefly. The written work of most pupils is fluent and employs a wide vocabulary. Presentation is almost always good.

115. Pupils generally make sound progress in their work in Years 10-11. The most able produce work that is mature and insightful. The majority make sound progress in developing the quality of their writing and in the confidence with which they express ideas, both orally and on paper. Pupils with special educational needs and the gifted and talented make satisfactory progress.

116. Teaching is good overall, and was very good in a fifth of the lessons seen. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed. Teaching is always well planned and generally well paced, so ensuring that pupils remain interested and on task. Aims and objectives are usually shared with pupils, so that they know what they are aiming to achieve. Teachers generally show incisive questioning skills - as, for example, when the teacher's probing questioning led a Year 8 class to explore in great depth the social and moral aspects of a poem. In another lesson a Year 7 class learned well about Haiku poetry because of the teacher's ability to use questioning to help pupils refine their ideas.

117. Teachers often ensure that pupils are given an appropriate amount of responsibility for their own learning; much work is done in groups or pairs. In a Year 10 lesson, for example, the criteria for success in oral work were explained to the class and they then had to assess each other in the next lesson. Teachers circulate well as pupils work and give a very good level of help to individual pupils.

118. In the few lessons where teaching is just satisfactory the pace of learning tends to lapse and some pupils drift off task. There is, on occasions, an insufficiently wide range of graded material to match the different levels of attainment within a class. Marking is generally good: comments are helpful and show pupils how they can improve. Occasionally, however, marking is bland and, whilst still positive, does not indicate clearly what pupils should do to improve. Homework is set regularly and is used appropriately either to consolidate or extend class work.

119. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are good. They are almost always interested and come to lessons ready and willing to learn. They are sometimes extremely enthusiastic, as when a Year 8 class explored the poem *Charlotte O'Neill* or a Year 7 class tried to predict the ending of a short story they had been studying in sections. This enthusiasm is channelled into productive, thoughtful enquiry and response. Pupils are often very mature and meticulous in their work. This was seen in a Year 10 group, for example, who had prepared for a public meeting and spoke eloquently and forcefully to convey their ideas. This lesson was also one of many that demonstrated a very good level of collaborative work amongst pupils. Very occasionally, when the pace of lessons slackens, a minority of pupils slip off task and lose positive attitudes to work.

120. The department is well led. Although two permanent teachers in the department were absent at the time of the inspection, the department continued to show clearly its dedication to pupils. A system of monitoring teaching and learning has been started and promises to be very effective. The department has an effective internal system of tracking pupils' progress from entry to the school and is thus able to set and monitor individual targets for pupils. The schemes of work used are broadly satisfactory. They are, however, rather brief and lack reference to teaching and learning outcomes and methods; they are about to be reviewed and rewritten. There is little structured use of ICT in the department, partly because of problems of access to the computer suites in the school.

121. Drama is taught as a separate subject in Year 7, but not in Years 8 and 9. As a result, it lacks a coherent structure for development. This anomaly is soon to be resolved by absorbing drama into the English curriculum, where it is taught as part of the National Curriculum entitlement. The small amount of drama seen was of good quality and well taught.

122. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. The weaknesses identified then have been satisfactorily resolved. All pupils in Key Stage 4 can now take GCSE examinations in the subject. All but one small group enter both English Language and English Literature, with the result that the school enters a much larger percentage of its cohort for literature each year than is normal. This helps to

explain the slightly lower overall level of the literature results. Pupils now have a good knowledge of their National Curriculum levels in Key Stage 3, as they are tested and reported on at least five times in the three-year period. These levels are still, however, not indicated on the reports sent home to parents.

123. In other subjects across the school overall standards of reading, writing, speaking and listening are good and above average. There is a whole-school literacy policy and most departments place emphasis on the development of these skills. Reading is generally fluent and done with appropriate expression. Comprehension levels are good. In several subjects - as, for example, in design and technology, geography and history - extended reading requirements ensure that pupils explore beyond the subjects' immediate information needs.

124. Written work is generally well presented across all subjects. It is appropriately planned and structured. Competence in spelling and punctuation is also generally good. Key words are prominently displayed in many subjects to help accuracy in using subject-specific language. Spelling, grammar and punctuation are corrected on a regular basis in most subjects. In several subjects the drafting of work is used to improve accuracy. Most subjects put an appropriately strong emphasis on speaking and listening: pupils talk in groups, hold "public meetings", give presentations in mathematics and on the child development course, and articulate extended points of view in subjects such as RE.

MATHEMATICS

125. The proportion of pupils who achieved either the basic standard or higher levels expected of 14 year olds in the 2000 national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 was well above average. Based upon the average points scored by pupils, the school's results were well above the average both for all schools and also for those schools in similar social circumstances. The results have improved steadily over the years and have been consistently well above average. Boys and girls perform similarly overall, each well above their respective national averages.

126. The proportion of pupils who achieved grades in the A*-C range in the GCSE examinations in 2000 was above the national average. A larger than average proportion of pupils achieved the highest grades (A* or A); the proportion who achieved grades A*-B was close to the national average of 26 per cent. The results over recent years have generally improved steadily, in line with the national trend. Based upon the average grade achieved by all those in the school who were entered for the examination, pupils made better progress in mathematics in 2000 than in most of their other subjects.

127. By the end of Key Stage 3, the standard of work of a larger than average proportion of pupils is at least at the level expected of 14 year olds. A significant proportion achieve higher standards. Good teaching helps pupils to think mathematically and to present their work in ways that are logically correct. These factors help high-attaining pupils in the top sets to achieve high standards in, for example, solving routine problems, manipulation of algebraic expressions and generalising about the patterns and relationships they find in extended investigation. The gifted and talented pupils show flair in such work, justifying their hypotheses through systematic lines of enquiry and by rigorous analysis of their data.

128. The top sets of Year 9 generally make fast progress through the programme of study. It could be faster. Occasionally pupils practise new skills and techniques in a given, challenging time or, because they demonstrate firm understanding, are not required to do unnecessary repetition. These practices were used in two such sets of pupils in Year 9, who learned thoroughly the skills of solving linear simultaneous equations and quadratic equations but who, nevertheless, could have made faster progress by having more demanding time constraints placed upon them. Occasionally, very high attainers finish quickly and are told to wait for the others to catch up.

129. A large proportion of pupils in Key Stage 3 work at a steady pace in lessons and, with help, make satisfactory progress. The achievement of too many pupils, however, is limited by slow or poor recall of previously learned skills and techniques and by insufficient understanding of earlier work. For example, during a good lesson in which pupils learned to use the standard trigonometrical ratios, the set of questions done orally lacked the necessary pace to ensure good levels of concentration to promote the quick recall of basic facts; the subsequent written work lacked a challenging target in a specified time.

130. Low-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress in Key Stage 3 over a broad range of the subject. For example, a group of such pupils in Year 8, by skilful teaching of a very well prepared lesson, learned the basic ideas of algebra. By matching two common shapes to the outlines of a number of composite diagrams made from these shapes they learned not only to simplify simple algebraic expressions, but also developed well their insight into elementary geometry. The appropriate level of challenge in the work sustained their interest and motivation throughout the lesson.

131. During their first year in the school pupils make sound progress. A good emphasis is placed upon numeracy. Pupils show confidence in their ready recall of basic number facts and methods of mental calculation. Lessons often begin appropriately with a short session designed to raise confidence and accuracy in these skills. During one such lesson in Year 7, pupils revealed collectively a wide knowledge of imperial and metric measures. Individually, however, most pupils showed many gaps in their knowledge or hesitant recall of, for instance, the relationships between gram, kilogram and the metric tonne, and between these units and their imperial counterparts.

132. Pupils' achievements in Years 7 and 8 are sound overall. In each year, for example, they improve their skills in solving equations of increasing complexity, raise their knowledge of geometry, increase their methods of representing and interpreting data and deepen their understanding of probability. Standards are raised further by the school's encouragement of the unusually large number of pupils in these years who enter national mathematics competitions. Nevertheless, pupils' achievements could be raised further by quickening the pace of learning, particularly in the middle sets.

133. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' attainment is above average. Virtually all pupils are entered for the GCSE examination and most prepare for the intermediate tier. About one in five pupils enter for the higher tier and strategies are firmly in place to double this number. Higher-attaining pupils gain a good working knowledge of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry and data-handling and use their skills to solve problems successfully. The gifted and talented show flair in completing extended investigations of mathematical problems. One such small group had developed their knowledge of differential calculus to find the dimensions of a box that gives the greatest volume when made from a square of cardboard – a method normally found in A-level mathematics courses.

134. Pupils in the middle sets gain a sound understanding of the skills and knowledge expected for the intermediate tier. For example, they manipulate algebraic expressions competently, to an appropriate standard, and solve the required equations. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of pupils could reach higher standards. These pupils learn many basic skills and techniques, but lack confidence in applying them in unfamiliar situations. Many have little sense of urgency or determination to make better progress. Additionally, in some lessons, despite being often required to explain their thinking and describe their methods of solution to others, the teaching fails to develop sufficiently their independence in tackling new problems. In consequence, the attainment of these pupils in GCSE examinations is below what it could be. Low-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress in a limited range of the subject, matched to the foundation tier. They generally achieve an average level of competence, especially in numeracy.

135. Progress in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory overall. Pupils in the top sets, however, made very good progress in, for example, understanding the basic properties of angles subtended at the centre and at the circumference of a circle by an arc. By skilful teaching, they used a computer program to discover the results before going on to prove them by mathematical argument. Other top-set pupils, in response to very good teaching, achieved a firm understanding of the effect of varying the parameters a , b and c on the graph of the function $y = ax^2 + bx + c$. Pupils in the other sets and those with special educational needs make sound progress in a broad range of the subject to an appropriate level.

136. Pupils' response to the teaching they receive is good and often very good. Their attitudes are positive and cooperative. Most pupils work hard at the tasks set. Almost all take pride in their work and present it neatly and logically, using mathematical symbols and terminology correctly. The standard of presentation of many of the extended investigations is often enhanced by the judicious use of ICT. The school's considerable effort to promote mathematics through, for example, competitions, master classes and weekly challenging problems or puzzles is a significant factor in forming positive attitudes in pupils. Equally, the frequent requests by teachers for pupils to explain their answers to the class raise their confidence and improve attitudes.

137. Behaviour in lessons is usually very good. Pupils generally show respect for teachers and respond positively to admonition. A small minority of pupils, however, readily become disruptive or uncooperative, especially when they think they can escape the vigilance of the teacher. Most pupils form constructive relationships with their teachers and peers, and enjoy sharing humour. They work well together on group tasks and frequently help one another to clarify misunderstandings.

138. The teaching is good overall, and in one lesson in four seen it was very good. It has improved further since the last inspection. Teachers are well qualified and have a good range of relevant experience. Their good subject knowledge and high expectations of what pupils can do generally ensure that they plan lessons that match the needs of pupils well and lead to good learning. A top set in Year 10, for example, responded well to the challenging questions that required them to rearrange formulae of increasing complexity and to the brisk pace expected by their teacher. Nevertheless, in one such lesson, most pupils reached for a calculator too readily and missed the simplicity afforded by a solution using fractions. Occasionally, a few opportunities are missed where questions do not contain that extra "twist" to extend learning yet more. In the main, however, many good opportunities are provided to pupils at all levels, especially in Years 10-11, to tackle appropriately challenging and varied mathematical problems in lessons, competitions and master classes.

139. Methods of teaching include clear demonstrations and explanations of mathematical skills and techniques. In many lessons good questioning and well-managed discussion, where pupils are required to explain their thinking, develop their understanding and confidence securely. In contrast, in a few lessons, teachers are too eager to tell pupils what to do or, by closed questions, lead pupils to the right answer without them having to think much about it. This results in some pupils having too high a dependence on their teachers. In a few lessons pupils make good progress because teachers alternate short bursts of teaching, during which well-posed questions help pupils to clarify their understanding, with tasks to be completed in a given time. This strategy is not used often enough as a means of increasing the rate of learning.

140. Skills and routines are practised thoroughly. Pupils are taught to use them to tackle problems in everyday settings, especially in Years 10-11. Practical work is used effectively to help pupils to understand new ideas. Pupils in a top set in Year 8, for instance, learned Pythagoras' theorem well by dissecting and cutting out the squares on the two shorter sides of a triangle and rearranging them to make a square on the hypotenuse.

141. Very good opportunities are provided for pupils to investigate mathematical problems that require them to decide on lines of enquiry, justify their thinking and hypotheses and to reach general conclusions from their working. The scheme of work contains a rich resource for such problems: some of the shorter ones are particularly suitable to arouse pupils' interest at the start of lessons and establish a positive climate for learning.

142. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. Teachers' high expectations of good behaviour and effective strategies for handling misdemeanours ensure a calm climate for learning. The pace and progress in lessons are generally good, but could be raised further in a few classes by, for example, giving pupils tasks to do in a specified time. Resources, particularly computers and graphic calculators, are generally used well.

143. During lessons teachers make good, ongoing assessments of pupils' understanding; many misunderstandings are quickly clarified with individual pupils. Formal written assessments are made with sufficient regularity. Pupils' work is marked regularly and both attainment and progress are assessed. Brief encouraging comments are frequently added and occasionally ways of improving work are also indicated. Homework is set regularly and is generally tackled successfully. The department is very well managed and organised and is enthusiastically led. Morale is high and teachers have the interest and commitment to continue to develop and improve their teaching of the subject.

144. Pupils' general standard of numeracy is good and supports their learning in other subjects effectively. In science, for example, pupils handle numbers well and use calculators correctly. They use sensible degrees of accuracy and relevant units of measurement, with correct abbreviations. In design and technology pupils estimate and measure with reasonable accuracy and know the names and properties of common shapes. In modern foreign languages good use is made of everyday situations involving money and measures. In science, design and technology, geography and history pupils draw and interpret appropriate graphs and, where necessary, recognise relationships between variables. Most pupils, however, rely too heavily on calculators to perform simple calculations that should be done mentally (a weakness identified also in the last inspection). A significant number of pupils do

not have a ready recall of basic number facts or secure methods of mental calculation - as when several pupils in a class worked out incorrectly that 5.3×10 was 50.3. Overall, however, numeracy is of a good standard.

SCIENCE

145. Pupils' overall level of attainment in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2000 was well above that achieved nationally. When compared with schools of a similar kind, this school's results were in the top quarter of these schools nationally. Similar results have been achieved over the last five years. Progress during Key Stage 3 is sound, when pupils' national test results on entry to the school in Year 7 are compared with those achieved at the end of Year 9.

146. In double award GCSE science in 2000 the proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C was well above the national average. Boys and girls do equally well, although girls usually gain more of the higher grades. These results represent satisfactory progress over the two years leading up to the examination. In recent years just over three-fifths of pupils have gained grades in the A*-C range. Overall, pupils do better in science than they do in most of their other subjects.

147. In the GCSE examinations in 2000 all pupils entered for double award science were awarded at least a grade G. In recent years the school has entered all pupils for this double- award examination, but intends to enter a group of high-attaining pupils for the separate sciences of biology, chemistry and physics in 2002.

148. Throughout the school, pupils enjoy their practical and investigative work and achieve a good standard in it. In a lesson in Year 7, for example, pupils' curiosity was well engaged and their understanding enhanced in an activity that used sand and peas to demonstrate the filling of internal spaces in solids. In such lessons pupils are often intensely interested in what they learn.

149. Middle-attaining groups gain much knowledge and understanding from experimental work, particularly when they explore a range of possible outcomes. In one lesson in Year 8, for instance, in which pupils investigated chemical change, they were given a range of possible outcomes, but reached their own conclusions after testing their predictions. High-achieving groups are often actively encouraged to express their own views and their lessons have a particularly good climate for learning. In a lesson in Year 9, for instance, these pupils studied the function of human lungs and sought explanations to a depth required in Key Stage 4 studies.

150. In Key Stage 3, pupils with special educational needs and those in lower sets generally make good progress, especially when their learning is planned in small steps. Children with physical disabilities are fully integrated in practical studies. The small size of classes in the lower sets of Key Stage 4 allows a good level of individual attention to be given to pupils. The result is that pupils make considerable gains in their learning - as was well illustrated in lessons on atomic structure with pupils in Year 10. These pupils value the specially prepared teaching materials, but often have difficulty in retaining knowledge from one lesson to the next.

151. Throughout the school, in line with national developments, teachers are increasingly refining the scale and scope of investigative activities. This is particularly noticeable in Key Stage 4. In investigations undertaken in Year 11, for example, pupils have good opportunities to reflect and build upon their initial thoughts, predictions and findings. They usually take full advantage of these opportunities to act in a thoroughly scientific manner.

152. Partly as a result of carefully prepared materials, pupils acquire an above average competence in all aspects of the manipulation of scientific data by using graphs and formulae. Pupils generally have high proficiency in using formulae, but the layout and presentation of graphs and the tabulation of results are not to the same high standard. For example, pupils often do not label the axes in graphs or omit the units of measurement. In a Year 10 lesson on sound, however, pupils demonstrated a thorough understanding of the time taken by sound to travel in air and carried out the relevant calculations in a very able manner.

153. During the inspection there were few occasions observed when lessons made significant contributions to the school's overall approach to literacy. In the few lessons when they were asked to read aloud, for example, pupils were fluent and conversant with the scientific words they encountered. Overall, however, the

department puts insufficient emphasis on the spelling and meaning of fundamental scientific vocabulary as a means of sharpening pupils' knowledge and understanding. Laboratories do not display basic key words to reinforce and back up the use of them during lessons.

154. The presentation, style of layout and attention to detail in pupils' work are satisfactory overall. Some pupils word process their projects to a high standard. For GCSE work pupils are encouraged, for instance, to present tabulated data by means of spreadsheets. This policy is paying dividends by producing a proficient look to work. Higher standards of handwritten presentation depend overall, however, on the department-wide adoption of the best practice seen.

155. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are good. The vast majority respond instantly in class, during discussions and when approached as individuals. Pupils of all levels of attainment say that they enjoy their science lessons.

156. In all the lessons observed teaching was at least satisfactory and was good overall in Key Stage 4. In one in every five of the lessons seen it was good and in one in every seven very good. Teachers are well qualified. Staffing has been stable since the last inspection. At the time of this inspection, however, the absence of a permanent member of staff was being covered by two temporary teachers, one of whom operated outside his specialism.

157. Teachers are secure in their knowledge and understanding of the subject. They are usually enthusiastic about the lessons they teach and convey this interest strongly to pupils. The style of many lessons is determined by the desire to convey this knowledge as clearly and directly to pupils as possible. The result overall, however, is to rely on a relatively narrow range of teaching approaches that does not always engage the interest of pupils.

158. Lessons are soundly planned around the extensive collection of teaching materials that has been carefully prepared over many years. The booklets and other support materials sensibly reduce pupils' unnecessary copying of diagrams and tables. On occasions, teachers rely too much on these materials, with the result that pupils' independent interpretations of phenomena are restricted. Overall, however, pupils appreciate the support these booklets offer them for revision purposes.

159. Throughout the school, the department undertakes end-of-module testing of the units into which it has separated the national programmes of study. The marks from these tests are centrally collected, but are insufficiently used to judge the progress of each pupil, for diagnostic purposes to aid subsequent teaching, or to check for learning weaknesses. Nor are these judgements about progress adequately compared with the pupils' attainment in national tests. The departmentally prepared booklets contain useful checklists of what is to be learned. Their content is occasionally used to reinforce important scientific features - as, for example, by short tests at the beginning of lessons or by quick questions around the class - but these strategies of teaching are not a regular feature of the department's approach. Whilst there is a policy for the marking of exercise books, it is not adhered to consistently, since there are wide variations in the quality and detail of the marking of exercise books.

160. Teachers are raising their competence in ICT through a national training programme. Three industry-standard computers and a collection of CD-ROMs have recently been acquired. Suitable homework is usually set; this sometimes requires pupils to access the Internet

161. The department is effectively managed and led. All teachers contribute to the development of the department's extensive stock of teaching materials. The weaknesses identified at the last inspection have been addressed satisfactorily. The department is efficiently serviced by two technicians. One teacher in the department has the responsibility of liaising with the principal contributory primary schools. This has usefully led to the development of some common approaches to investigative work and writing.

162. Two of the laboratories have been suitably refurbished. The other two have inadequacies in electrical supplies that require trailing leads to be used to island benches. In the lessons observed, pupils coped well with this problem, but it continues to pose a hazard. There are insufficient laboratories for the number of science

groups in Years 10 and 11, although a building programme is planned to replace the two older laboratories with three new ones.

163. Many of the textbooks in the department pre-date the introduction of the National Curriculum and insufficiently supplement in-house teaching materials. Data-logging equipment, too, is in need of replacement. Although there is little extracurricular activity directly related to the wider scientific development of pupils, science staff contribute to the extracurricular life of the school.

ART

164. On entry to the school in Year 7, pupils have an overall standard that is just below national expectations. At the end of Key Stage 3, however, pupils achieve an overall standard in line with what is expected nationally. At the end of Key Stage 4, the percentage of pupils gaining grades A*-C in GCSE was below the national average over the 1997-1999 period. In 2000, however, the proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the A*-C range was well above the national average.

165. In Key Stage 3, pupils of all levels of attainment research and experiment satisfactorily, as they develop their ideas and create final pieces of work. They identify satisfactorily the qualities of work by a range of artists such as Hockney, Frink and Chagall. Finished pieces of work often incorporate ideas from their studies of artists' work. The work of all pupils shows increasing control and accuracy, as they proceed through Key Stage 3. By the end of Year 9, pupils' observational work shows a sound understanding of composition. Higher-attaining pupils use tonal qualities well to develop form in paintings. All pupils undertake extensive research and use imaginative ways of presenting information - as, for example, decorating folders with relief sculptures.

166. By the end of Key Stage 4 the overall standard of work is above average. All pupils produce an impressive quantity of work and use sketch books effectively. They take pleasure in collecting information and experimenting with materials. Three-dimensional work reaches a good standard and shows pupils' enjoyment in exploring surfaces and mark-making techniques. Large, energetic compositions show a range of individual responses to suggested themes. Pupils' achievement is generally good throughout the school. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls, nor in the progress of pupils of different levels of attainment.

167. Throughout the school pupils behave well and concentrate in lessons, with the exception of a small minority of boys. Pupils respond willingly to questions, both in class and in conversation with teachers. Homework is completed regularly and pupils develop the habit of independent research. In Years 10-11, pupils regularly spend time working in the art rooms at lunchtimes and after school.

168. Teaching is good throughout Years 7-11. Pupils are given clear objectives, so that they understand the purpose and relevance of tasks and activities. Teachers' useful demonstrations of technique enable pupils to develop skills in handling a range of media in two and three dimensions. Their planning ensures that pupils have the opportunity to relate knowledge and understanding of artists' work to what they produce themselves. For example, pupils design and construct imaginary insects after looking at the paintings and sculptures of artists who use the same theme. The use of materials is well organised, encouraging pupils to keep the art rooms tidy.

169. Teaching methods and techniques such as whole-class discussion, the evaluation of artists' work, displays of specialist words and extensive use of specialist terms contribute significantly towards the development of pupils' literacy. Pupils' numeracy skills are targeted in the department's schemes of work. Teachers test pupils on their artistic knowledge and understanding and undertake detailed analyses of data to identify both gifted and talented pupils and those with special educational needs. This information is used to provide pupils with appropriate learning opportunities and materials. The regular monitoring of the achievements of all pupils, together with frequent written and oral assessments of their work, is helping to improve the standards of work achieved within the department. This is evident especially in Years 10-11: GCSE results improved significantly in 2000, compared with those in previous years.

170. There are a few examples of the use of ICT in art. Some pupils use the Internet or CD-ROMs to search for information. A project on op art includes some optical pattern work, based on the paintings of Bridget Riley,

that pupils have produced on the computer. There are, however, few opportunities for pupils to gain consistent experience in the use of ICT in creating art work. Teachers invest considerable effort in developing their own ICT skills, but there is insufficient ICT equipment in the department for pupils to have adequate opportunities to use it.

171. Teachers ensure that pupils are familiar with a wide range of work by artists from both western and non-western cultures. The resultant range of pupils' work includes such large-scale work as card sculptures and decorated *papier mâché* bowls and smaller scale work such as prints and graphic images. The curriculum is enriched by visits to art galleries in Years 10-11 and by the production of art and design work for the local community - such as the production of stained-glass window designs for a church and the involvement of pupils in local traditions such as well-dressing. The department has collaborated with other departments in arranging visits from practising musicians, storytellers, visual artists and poets: these often have a cross-cultural dimension and bring together pupils from different year groups.

172. The department is well managed. There is good communication between teachers, resulting in a clear direction and distinctive ethos for the subject. Much useful time has been spent in developing effective monitoring and assessment procedures and in reviewing and improving schemes of work.

173. Learning resources such as books, ICT and audio-visual equipment are barely adequate to meet the demands of the curriculum, but teachers have spent a considerable amount of time developing a useful and extensive range of illustrations of artists' work. The art rooms are colourful and attractive. Although classes can be accommodated comfortably in Years 10-11, overcrowding occurs during lessons in Years 7-9 owing to larger class sizes. Storage facilities within the department, identified as inadequate at the time of last inspection, have not yet improved. Renovation of the main art room - including an increase in storage space - is, however, scheduled to take place in the near future.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

174. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' overall level of attainment is above average. Almost all pupils achieve above the expected level for their age. Teachers' assessments of pupils' work over the 1998-2000 period show that there has been a significant improvement in pupils' attainment to reach this high standard.

175. From the evidence of design work and practical projects, pupils' attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 is above average and reflects accurately teachers' formal assessments in 2000. Pupils' folders of work in electronics, food and textiles show an above average standard overall. Written work in folders is well presented, generally accurately spelled and legibly handwritten. In an example of the best work seen in lessons pupils showed great care in planning their cutting lists and preparing wood for making stools. Orthographic drawings are of at least an average standard in the higher band whereas, in a Year 9 lower band, oblique-view drawings of a matchbox showed a very wide variation in attainment and competence.

176. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' performance in their chosen specialism is generally above average. Over the period 1998-2000 the proportion of pupils gaining grades in the range A*-C in GCSE was well above the national average, whilst that of pupils gaining grades A*-G was above average. A similar balance of results was obtained in home economics, although more higher grades were obtained in design and technology. In two of these three years girls performed better than boys overall in design and technology, and in all three years they also did better in home economics. Pupils' overall level of performance in the subject was above what they achieved in most of their other subjects over the last few years.

177. Current work in the GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11 in graphics products and resistant materials is above average overall. Year 10 pupils, for example, demonstrate high standards of drawing competence in rendering thick and thin lines, when drawing houses. The child development studies of Year 10 pupils reveal good levels of knowledge and understanding of the early years of life. Year 11 pupils carry out careful research and show strong design potential when producing a model for their chosen cosmetic product. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 demonstrate good levels of knowledge and understanding in their theoretical work on food. Girls are generally better organised than boys and more able to do more than one thing at a time in both food and graphics products. This improves their efficiency and leads to better progress overall.

178. Pupils generally learn well in Years 7-9 and even better in Years 10-11. Progress is good in such tasks as designing and making a cushion in Year 7 and the making of a hammer in Year 8. In the latter case pupils learn the properties of hot and cold metal, as they use hand and machine tools to shape the material. Pupils in wheelchairs are helped to experience the processes, although prevented by safety reasons from forging hot metal. Pupils in Year 9 make good progress as they learn to work accurately in preparing wood for constructing a table. Pupils in Year 10 made very good progress by using a time-plan to monitor their own progress, when preparing a low fat meal. Pupils made very good progress in acquiring knowledge and understanding in Year 11 by, for instance, taking notes and relating their new learning firmly to past experiences, as they watched a video about the chill-food chain developed in a commercial enterprise. A small number of pupils in Years 10 and 11 study for the Certificate of Achievement in building studies, thereby gaining very useful experience in such aspects as carpentry and plumbing.

179. The use of ICT is limited by poor access to computers, although in both key stages pupils use computers for homework research and for presentation. All pupils in Key Stage 3 experience control technology. Year 9 pupils use the computer room and CAD/CAM facilities to produce a mobile-phone design. A previous higher-band group in Year 9 was very successful in this venture and had their designs milled for them by a local college of further education. Their designs represent a considerable achievement and exemplify a project that is well suited to gifted or talented pupils.

180. Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are very good throughout the school. Pupils generally listen well and work at a good pace. In one Year 11 class, for instance, concentration levels were impressive. Relationships between adults and pupils are very good. Pupils naturally help one another, whether setting up a job at the turning lathe or sharing facilities in the kitchen. They enjoy working together in groups.

181. The quality of teaching is strong. It is always at least satisfactory, was good in two-fifths of the lessons seen and very good in about a third of lessons. Teachers are well qualified and have complementary subject knowledge and understanding. They make a very good team. The two teachers who (at short notice) have taken over the food studies programmes work well together and support pupils effectively. Work is well planned across the department. Marking is thorough and consistent. Relevant homework is set regularly: this represents an improvement and good progress since the last inspection. Assessment is related carefully to National Curriculum levels. These are not currently shared with pupils, although plans are in progress to do so in the near future. The reporting of pupils' progress to parents is confusing, because reports contain few clear messages of what pupils can currently do or what their targets should be in the short or longer term.

182. The leadership and management of the subject are good. Documentation is thorough and underpins departmental practice well. The subject is well supported by an experienced technician. There are plans to bring food studies within design and technology. The subject meets statutory requirements. The provision made for pupils' moral, social and cultural development is good.

183. Accommodation is well used, but not ideal for current needs. There is inadequate space within the graphics room for modelling purposes. The circular saw is housed within a teaching room and the resultant, airborne dust is a potential risk to health. There are inadequate facilities within the main school for displaying the high quality, three-dimensional work produced in the school. A number of health and safety issues have still to be addressed effectively - including the provision of colour-coded chopping boards for food preparation.

GEOGRAPHY

184. Pupils' overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the national expectation for the subject. When teachers assessed pupils' work at the end of Year 9 in 2000, results indicated that pupils' attainment was well above the national average. Overall, girls attained higher levels than boys. During the inspection, pupils worked at an overall level above the national average.

185. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' overall level of attainment is above the national norm. The GCSE results in 2000 represent a decline from the previous year, particularly at the higher A* and A grades, since results were well above the national average in 1999, but close to the national average in 2000. Nevertheless, pupils' performance in this subject is consistently above what they achieve in most of their other subjects in school. Girls gained more higher grades than boys. In the last four years GCSE results have remained static

overall at well above the national average, though with wide variations in performance at the higher grades. The department analyses GCSE results carefully. Clear and appropriate strategies have been implemented to raise standards, particularly those of boys, still further.

186. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the subject. They describe types of landscapes accurately and clearly explain how they are formed. They understand the essential features of cities, use geographical models to show how they grow and give sound reasons for the ways in which environments change. Pupils use the knowledge they have gained effectively - as, for example, to give reasons for changes taking place in the rainforest in Brazil or to explain why people live on the slopes of volcanoes. Geographical terms are understood and used successfully in written work in Years 10 and 11. Pupils have a sound knowledge of what places are like, enabling them to gain a clear understanding about people's ways of life. In one lesson in Year 9, for example, pupils displayed a good knowledge of the landscape, climate and employment opportunities of Southern Italy. They used this knowledge successfully to make rapid progress in understanding the advantages and disadvantages of living there, and why many young people move away from the region.

187. Pupils quickly and effectively extract information from both written and visual resource material to complete exercises and for research. All pupils have a good knowledge of the methods of geographical enquiry, of how to collect and analyse data, and of drawing appropriate conclusions. They use these skills well, for instance, in mapping, comparing and explaining the differences in residential areas in Leek as part of their GCSE coursework assignment. Written work is generally fluent, well structured, presented with care and with few spelling errors.

188. Oral skills have improved since the time of the last inspection: the majority of pupils speak fluently and can sustain a discussion. They construct and analyse a wide range of graphs effectively. In one lesson in Year 11, for example, pupils used computers to analyse indicators of development, produced a classification of these developments and drew a specialised map to show the pattern of levels of development in different parts of the world.

189. Teaching is of a consistently good standard overall. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject. Their explanations are well structured and clear. They skilfully use appropriate illustrative examples and well-selected photographs, maps, texts and other visual material to ensure that pupils have a firm understanding of topics. Lessons are very well planned. They have clear objectives and a wide variety of well-sequenced, relevant and purposeful activities. Resources of good quality maintain pupils' interest and enable them to develop a sound understanding.

190. The beneficial result could be seen, for example, in a lesson in Year 7. Here pupils studied the relationship between people and volcanoes, rapidly reviewed previous work with a "heads and tails" exercise, and quickly worked through two short, well-devised and structured exercises, using carefully selected data and maps based on a study of Mount Etna. Through skilful questioning the teacher maintained pupils' interest and helped them to understand why people live in such dangerous places. Pupils then used their knowledge effectively to discuss the best ways in which people could avoid the threat that the volcano poses to their lives.

191. Lessons are very well prepared and organised, with the result that they start promptly and move forward at a brisk pace. Work is pitched at appropriate levels and materials are carefully matched to the needs of pupils. For instance, the teacher adapted the teaching style in one lesson for low-attaining pupils in Year 8 by using good visual material, appropriate text and well-directed questioning to gain pupils' interest. The teacher then supported pupils in completing a series of short activities, using skilfully modified materials that enabled the pupils to make good progress.

192. Teachers know the pupils well and relationships are good, with the result that a brisk pace is maintained in lessons and there is a busy working atmosphere. There are insufficient challenge and rigour, however, in lessons with higher-attaining pupils. This is particularly the case when teachers accept the first, often brief answer to a question or when materials are not available to extend and enable these pupils to gain a deeper understanding. Marking is up to date and purposeful homework is set regularly.

193. Pupils listen attentively, understand rapidly what is being explained and generally assimilate information from a range of sources very quickly. Pupils in Year 8, for example, were asked to work as a group to prepare and present a report from the point of view of one of the groups with an interest in the rainforest of Brazil. They quickly undertook the task, organised the work for the members of their group, efficiently extracted the information they needed from the resource material and successfully prepared a report to present to the rest of the class. Pupils arrive promptly for lessons, settle to work quickly and generally work hard at a good pace, maintaining concentration throughout.

194. Pupils are invariably well behaved and have a positive attitude to the subject. They maintain their books in good order and present work carefully. The majority of pupils are willing to make a positive contribution to lessons. They work effectively in pairs or in groups and listen to one another's point of view.

195. The scheme of work is well thought out and fully complies with national requirements. A good programme has been developed for the use of ICT in the subject. There is good access to computers in rooms nearby, although none within the department. A strength of the department is the well-organised programme of fieldwork for all pupils in Years 7-10. This is well integrated into the scheme of work and provides good opportunities for pupils to learn a range of skills and techniques, reinforce their understanding and acquire a solid foundation for later examination coursework. The curriculum makes a useful contribution to pupils' moral, social and cultural development. The procedures for assessment are satisfactory. There are end-of-year examinations, but there is not enough regular and systematic assessment and recording to chart and support the progress of individual pupils.

196. The leadership of the department is good. The subject has a very clear sense of direction and well-focused planning for the future. The department is well organised and has a shared commitment to succeed. There is, however, no systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of the department's policies or teaching. Staff are well qualified and experienced and are appropriately deployed. Accommodation is good, apart from storage. Resources are of sound quality and are adequate, but there are not enough textbooks for pupils to have one each in lessons or for homework. The department made a sound response to the last inspection report. It has the commitment and the capacity to improve and raise standards still further in the future.

HISTORY

197. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' overall level of attainment is above that expected nationally. Most pupils begin Year 7 a little above the national average. Teachers assessed their pupils as being well above the national average by the end of Year 9 in 1999 and 2000. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was above that seen nationally and a larger proportion than usual of both boys and girls reach the highest standards. Pupils with special educational needs achieve appropriate standards and make good progress. The vast majority of pupils reach a standard at the end of Year 9 that is at least consistent with their earlier attainment.

198. Pupils in Years 7-9 generally understand the causes of past events and successfully explain the reasons for actions taken by people in the past - as, for example, in their work on why William I needed to build castles following his victory in 1066. They use a range of sources successfully to describe the past. Pupils in Year 9, for instance, used text sources, statistics and artefacts to explain the reasons why people in Germany in the 1930s supported Hitler. They have a good understanding of why people in the past may have held views that are different from those of today. The highest attaining pupils successfully evaluate the reliability and usefulness of historical sources - as, for example, in work on sources dating from the time of the Great Plague. Many pupils write well at length - as, for instance, in accounts by pupils in Year 7 of the impact on Pompeii of the eruption of Vesuvius.

199. Pupils taking the GCSE course in Key Stage 4 reach an overall standard that is above the national average, a standard similar to that reported at the time of the last inspection. In 1999 the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades was significantly above the national average. Boys' attainment was much higher than the boys' national average. Results in 2000 were lower, although still in line with the national average overall. This decline was due in part to a small number of boys who performed badly and largely reflected the overall lower prior attainment of the boys who took the examination. The percentage of pupils gaining A and A* grades has

been above average for the past two years: in 2000 over half the girls who took the course gained an A or A* grade.

200. The overall standard of work seen in Key Stage 4 was above the national average. Pupils taking GCSE have good knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. Their understanding of the apartheid system in South Africa was in many cases very sensitive and extensive. In work on why apartheid was supported by whites in South Africa, pupils were able to explain the reasons for this support and to demonstrate that they understood why people held such views. Many could explain why attitudes changed over a period of time. Pupils' level of achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good.

201. The very effective teaching is a strength of the department and the school. It is never less than satisfactory and three-quarters of that seen during the inspection was very good. Teachers know their subject very well at all levels and communicate it effectively. As a result, pupils acquire good knowledge and understanding about the past. Lessons are well planned, taking good account of pupils' abilities, and proceed at a brisk pace.

202. Teachers have appropriately high expectations of pupils. They set suitable work that challenges the highest attaining pupils and ensures that they work at a demanding standard. In a lesson on support for Hitler in the 1930s, for example, the teacher guided pupils effectively towards the problem for historians of using hindsight when trying to explain events in the past. The work set for pupils with special educational needs is suitably challenging for their ability. In a lesson on castle-building in the eleventh century pupils were presented with problems to explain - such as why there are no wooden castles surviving from the period.

203. An appropriate variety of teaching methods - including individual study, work in pairs or groups and whole-class discussion - ensures that pupils have good opportunities to learn in a range of different ways. Lessons are usually broken into a series of short activities, interspersed with short feedback sessions in which teachers check pupils' progress. Teachers use questioning very effectively in most lessons to ensure that pupils have understood the work, but also to deepen pupils' understanding by asking pupils to explain further and extend their initial answer. This technique enables higher-attaining pupils to reach the highest standards. Effective use is made of ICT. Pupils in Year 7, for instance, research changes in castle-building between 1066 and 1400 for a major project, using Internet sites. Teachers manage their pupils very well, with a firm but friendly approach. Pupils respond with respect and a willingness to work hard.

204. Most pupils show interest in, and commitment to, their work. Most clearly want to achieve good standards and work hard to do so. As a result, they make good progress in acquiring new knowledge and understanding. Pupils listen to their teachers' instructions and most concentrate well on their work. The behaviour of the vast majority is good and often very good. Pupils display a mature approach to working in pairs or groups - as, for example, in paired work using ICT and in sharing library resources for research.

205. The subject meets the statutory teaching requirements for Key Stage 3. The department is led and managed well. There is a clear commitment to maintaining the above-average attainment in public examinations and a very good ethos for learning in lessons. The system for assessment in Key Stage 3 is now satisfactory, an improvement since the last inspection. The arrangement of two rooms far apart is unsatisfactory, leading to problems of managing resources. The main history room does not have adequate storage facilities.

206. The number and range of textbooks have improved since the time of the last inspection and, although pupils in Key Stage 3 sometimes have to share books, the quality of the books is good. The department has a good range of resources for pupils with special educational needs. It does not, however, make sufficient use of the local environment as a basis for pupils' studies. The lack of any computers in the department for use by pupils is a weakness, but the department makes very effective use of the centrally provided ICT facilities to enhance pupils' learning.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

207. The previous inspection reported that there were insufficient computers and no technical support within the school and that this restricted the use of ICT. Further weaknesses were identified in the appropriateness of worksheets and the quality of assessment at Key Stage 3. These issues have been partially resolved. Whilst the school's quality of provision is much improved and expert technical support is now in place, the national educational use of ICT across the curriculum has also grown considerably over the last five years. The two computer rooms and the computers in the library are well used by pupils before school, at lunchtime and after school. On the other hand, only one computer room is available for subject teachers' use and there are few computers located in specialist teaching areas. The time provision for those pupils in Years 10 and 11 who do not take the GCSE course is inadequate to ensure full coverage of the National Curriculum for them. Statutory curricular requirements are therefore not met in Key Stage 4.

208. At the end of Key Stage 3 the overall level of attainment and competence in ICT is above average. Many pupils are familiar with computers through home usage and homework assignments ensure that they get adequate practice in acquiring appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding. The regular ICT lessons equip them well to word process, to handle data and spreadsheets and to use software for control and graphics. A particular strength of the school is the way pupils use sophisticated programs to make presentations of high quality to their peers.

209. The assessments of pupils' work made by teachers at the end of Year 9 have indicated that the proportions of pupils achieving Levels 5+ or 6+ were well above the national average. Inspection data supports this high assessment: pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are overall above the level expected nationally. These school assessments, however, are all made within the specialist ICT course and do not take account of how pupils use these skills in other subject areas. This is a weakness in the current system of assessment.

210. Pupils with special educational needs are considered fully in the planning of work. Those who are wheelchair-bound or have statements of special need receive very good support from classroom assistants. These pupils are enabled to be as independent as possible: when their physical disabilities pose difficulties, teachers and helpers ensure that they can study and contribute their ideas - as, for example, when researching the issues around fox-hunting. Technical words are displayed and used frequently. Such features of ICT as the wizard and spell-checker are used well to support and improve literacy.

211. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' overall attainment on the GCSE course is above average. The attainment of those on the modular course is, however, at a lower, average level. In the theory lessons within the GCSE course pupils gain a clear understanding about the use of computers in the outside world, become familiar with the language used and the problems that may be met, and are thoroughly versed in the need to be vigilant and to check systems. A strong feature of the course is pupils' involvement in their own assessment. The benefits from this are evident in the type of questions raised and the depth of understanding gained. Pupils on the modular course have access to powerful computer software and relevant tasks - as, for example, when researching a topic connected with one of their GCSE subjects. Time limits for the module, however, encourage teaching that spoon-feeds pupils rather than allows them to raise issues for themselves.

212. Over the 1998-2000 period the proportion of pupils gaining grades in the range A*-C in GCSE has varied from above to below the national average, whilst that of pupils gaining grades in the range A*-G was above average in 1998 and 1999, but average in 2000. In 2000 only one pupil was awarded the highest A* grade. Pupils' overall level of performance in this subject was below what they achieved in most of their other subjects in 1999 and 2000. Changes in staffing and a greater emphasis in the examination on the need for pupils to think for themselves have had a marked downward effect on results in the past two years. The current Year 11 pupils are, however, on target to attain suitably high results.

213. Throughout the school pupils enjoy their lessons. They approach their work with enthusiasm and rarely lose their concentration. They work at a very good pace and engage intellectually with the topics studied. Pupils in Year 7, for instance, concentrated well on revising and improving their presentations for a proposed Endon Airport. Good teamwork is evident in Year 8, as pupils learn to share research, enter text and merge

pictures. Year 9 pupils are well extended as they learn to mail-merge or use computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) to design a mobile phone. In specialist lessons pupils' achievement is good.

214. The quality of the specialist teaching of ICT is of a very high order and a considerable strength of the school: it is always at least good, was very good in over half of the lessons seen, and on one occasion was excellent. Teachers are knowledgeable and experienced in teaching ICT. They work very well as a team. The technician is a very good asset in lessons.

215. The high quality of this specialist teaching enabled one lower band group of pupils, for example, to make good progress in a lesson, whereas they had made only satisfactory progress when working with computers in another subject area. Very good understanding of young people's liking for popular culture is evident in the projects set - as, for example, when Year 11 pupils are asked to discuss Manchester United football club's costs, as part of their understanding and use of spreadsheets. Humour is a great leveller in these lessons and engages the interest of the majority of pupils: in the homework projection slide, for example, cartoon characters drew attention to the work set before "eating" the text.

216. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. Pupils know that the ICT rooms are open at any time and make full use of the facilities offered. Teachers in geography, history and modern foreign languages make very good use of computers, but other subject teachers have made slower progress in using this tool to enhance pupils' learning. All teachers are currently receiving ICT training.

217. The coordination of the specialist ICT teaching is very good and the department's documentation is thorough. Teachers and pupils are working closely together in the development of a school website. There is a gap, however, between intention and practice in two aspects of the subject: the use of ICT varies widely across subjects and is insufficient overall, and too little time is devoted to the planning and teaching of the National Curriculum entitlement in Key Stage 4 for those pupils who do not take the GCSE course. Computer resources are good, but not sufficient to meet needs fully.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

218. Pupils' overall level of attainment in French is above average by the end of Key Stage 3. Teachers' assessments for the end of this key stage in both 1999 and 2000 also indicated that pupils' overall level of attainment was above the national average. At Levels 5+ and 6+ girls' performance is higher than that of boys overall. German is introduced to all pupils as a second modern foreign language in Year 8: pupils' inevitably lower overall level of attainment is appropriate for the amount of time that the subject has been studied.

219. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' understanding of both languages is good. It is better in classes where teachers use the foreign language extensively and consistently. In a listening exercise from a cassette, for example, lower-attaining pupils in a Year 8 class (which included some pupils with special educational needs) identified successfully the articles of clothing for which they had previously learned the vocabulary. The standard of speaking is lower than that of listening and utterances tend to be short. Higher-attainers in a Year 8 French class, however, took part in paired work successfully, describing themselves and their partner with appropriate vocabulary.

220. In their written work pupils generally complete word lists and exercises to a reasonable standard. Passages of continuous writing are at appropriate levels: in French, for instance, Year 8 pupils understand and use the immediate future tense and higher-attainers in Year 9 use the perfect tense of verbs with *avoir* competently. Year 9 pupils in German use constructions with modal verbs. In Years 7-9 pupils demonstrate their knowledge of the working parts of verbs satisfactorily.

221. In 2000 the proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the range A*-C in French, in the full-course GCSE examination, was below the national average for all pupils. Girls were marginally below their national average, but boys, who formed two-thirds of all the candidates entered, were well below the national average for boys. This is in marked contrast to the previous year, when both boys and girls were above their respective national averages. In both years, however, girls performed better than boys overall. The proportion of pupils attaining grades in the A*-G range in 2000 in French was just above the national average. Pupils performed worse in GCSE in French in 2000, however, than they did in most of their other subjects. It should, however, be noted

that the school's GCSE board is currently reviewing the work of all the school's entrants for the 2000 examination: 12 pupils have so far had their grades revised upwards and the review continues.

222. At the end of Key Stage 4 the overall standard of attainment in French is above average. In German the overall standard is below average, but consistent with the limited amount of time pupils have studied the subject. The present Year 11 pupils are the first candidates to be entered for the GCSE in German since its introduction into the curriculum in Year 9 with a limited allocation of time. Pupils' understanding in both languages is generally good. Pupils' standard of speaking is broadly average overall, but pupils often depend on prompts to answer questions or to participate in role-play.

223. In their written work in French, pupils show a sound knowledge of the relevant vocabulary for topics and of the perfect tense. Higher-attaining pupils combine vocabulary and a range of different tenses competently - as, for instance, in their coursework. Other pupils choose vocabulary with reasonable success, but are not consistently accurate with their constructions. German coursework clearly reveals the limited time that pupils have had in comparison with those studying French. German word-order, particularly inversion, causes many problems.

224. There is room for greater accuracy in written work in both key stages, particularly in the use of accents. Pupils rarely correct their mistakes to improve accuracy. Written work is often presented with insufficient care. Taking all aspects of the subject into account, however, pupils, including high-attainers and those with special educational needs, generally make satisfactory progress.

225. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good overall and sometimes very good. Pupils respond well to chorus work in class, listen carefully and apply themselves well to tasks. They work well together in pairs. Relationships are good. Many pupils are well motivated and display interest in their work. They work well independently.

226. The quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and in half the lessons observed in Key Stage 3 they were good. The best lessons incorporate extensive use of the foreign language in class, thereby helping significantly to raise pupils' understanding. Teachers make very good use of resources, particularly the overhead projector, to revise previous work or to initiate new vocabulary, and the cassette recorder to consolidate vocabulary and develop aural skills. Lessons are well planned and have clear objectives. Paired work is used well to develop oral skills. Pupils maintain their concentration, are productive and work at a good pace. Teachers make good use of numeracy, both in writing and orally.

227. In a minority of lessons, however, there are weaknesses in teaching. Opportunities for pupils to practise speaking are limited or overlooked. Teachers sometimes complete tasks that could be undertaken by pupils, thereby restricting pupils' participation in class. Lack of challenge to pupils is noticeable, for example, after chorus work, when individual pupils are not required to repeat phrases or constructions to the teacher.

228. Relationships and the management of pupils are good in all lessons. Appropriate homework is set regularly, but the marking of pupils' work is irregular. There are few helpful comments in exercise books in Key Stage 3 to enable pupils to know how they can improve their work.

229. The department meets the statutory requirement to teach the National Curriculum programmes of study. Pupils have appropriate opportunities to use ICT in all years. The leadership and management of the department are very good overall. Effective monitoring of teaching and the implementation of the self-review scheme have resulted in appropriate priorities being identified and acted upon. The department, however, remains under-resourced. There is a shortage of textbooks, dictionaries and graded teaching materials, particularly for German. There are insufficient headsets for use with listening posts and no suitable loudspeaker for use in the GCSE listening examination in the hall.

230. Improvement in provision since the last inspection has been very good. All pupils now learn a modern foreign language and German has been introduced as a second foreign language. In the current academic year all Year 11 pupils are being entered, for the first time, for the full-course GCSE. More pupils than before are taking German in Year 10 and are choosing it as an option for A-level study. A wide range of visits abroad, an

exchange and *Key Skills Day* have been introduced. Pupils have increased opportunities to use ICT. Listening skills have improved. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed.

MUSIC

231. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 9 their overall attainment is above the national average. Pupils perform, compose and improvise using electronic keyboards as well as their “main” instruments and percussion. Most pupils develop reasonable fingering on the keyboard. They know the names of notes and understand how familiar scales and chords are formed. They read melodic lines and chords represented on staff notation, although many pupils rely on letter names to prompt them. In one lesson they showed a very good grasp of musical features that enable them to express moods - as, for example, tension and fear - through minor chords and ominous drum beats in their compositions based on “midnight in the graveyard”. Pupils also learn about music from a wide range of historical and cultural contexts. These include Elizabethan dance music, Indian classical music, jazz and reggae. Those pupils who learn individual instruments at school or at home attain especially high standards in class lessons.

232. Pupils’ overall level of attainment by the end of Year 11 is above the national average. In the 1999 and 2000 GCSE results, taken together, all 23 pupils gained grades in the range A*-C. Five of these gained A* grades. In work seen during the inspection the overall standard of performance, composition and listening was above the national average and a significant minority of the present Year 11 pupils attain standards that are well above average. In one lesson in which pupils practised their individual pieces and prepared compositions, for example, one pupil worked on a challenging piano piece by Liszt, whilst another worked on a composition for piano and voices, both recording and notating it on the computer. Pupils at this stage also acquire good aural skills: for example, they write down the melodies they hear, recognise changes of key and use correct technical language to describe what they hear. They also consolidate their knowledge of musical styles and composers from the main historical periods.

233. The quality of learning in Key Stage 3 is good overall. Pupils enter the school with above average levels of educational attainment, although their musical experience and skills are very varied. Many pupils are quick learners at music. This was especially noticeable in a lesson on rhythm, in which pupils learnt phrases both by ear and from notation and understood how to use these phrases in a long piece in complex rondo form. Unusually, pupils are grouped by educational ability for music: whilst this works well overall, the progress of some lower-attaining groups is slowed down by clusters of pupils, usually boys, who easily lose concentration.

234. Most pupils are interested in their lessons. Some classes are very enthusiastic. Especially good learning was observed in a class in Year 8 where pupils were given an outline version of *Jackass Blues*; they used it to learn to play the theme on keyboards and to add chords and style tracks, using both fingered chords and “autochords”. Many pupils use fingers well on the keyboard and most learn quickly how to operate the controls. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall.

235. In Key Stage 4 almost all pupils learn well and make good progress. In this stage the requirements of the GCSE course motivate the pupils well to reach the required standards in performing, composing and musical understanding. During the inspection, pupils in a Year 10 class formulated ideas for the introduction to a song. Many discovered unusual chordal and rhythmic patterns and sequences, demonstrating them to one another for general analysis and interest.

236. Overall, pupils’ attitudes to learning are very good throughout the school - and especially so in Key Stage 4, where they develop a mature approach to the subject. Attitudes are less good in a minority of classes, notably by some lower-attaining pupils in Year 9. Although these pupils tend to cause distractions for the whole class, the teacher’s careful attention to the design and pace of lessons, together with firm and consistent discipline, ensures that sufficient progress is made by the whole class.

237. Teaching is always at least good (and sometimes very good) throughout the school. This good teaching is characterised by a broad and secure subject knowledge and expertise. Frequently the teacher uses his own personal musical skills to demonstrate how a piece should be played or sung, or to direct pupils in their listening tests.

238. Good attention is paid throughout to the teaching of literacy and especially to the use and understanding of the technical language of music. Pupils are also taught to write clearly in the written texts that explain and describe their own compositions. Lessons are always prepared in fine detail, with each section carefully timed. Expectations that pupils will work hard and behave well are high. Pupils are managed effectively. A large team of visiting instrumental teachers makes a very good contribution to pupils' musical education.

239. The day-to-day assessment of pupils' work is good overall and incorporates some very good features. Criteria for gaining higher levels in units of work are displayed in the music room in language that pupils can understand; pupils understand these criteria well. Homework is set appropriately either to reinforce or to extend what has been taught in lessons. Homework also includes regular practice for those who receive instrumental lessons.

240. Accommodation for the subject is barely adequate for the numbers presently taking the subject. The main teaching room is far too small, especially for some of the large classes (up to 30) and for the orchestral and choir rehearsals. The department is well led and is managed with much enthusiasm. The new head of music has produced a very comprehensive handbook, some new schemes of work and carefully designed timetables for the large team of visiting instrumental teachers. About 130 pupils receive individual music lessons and a similar number are engaged in a very good range of extracurricular activities. These include orchestra, intermediate orchestra, choir and jazz band as well as a number of small rock groups. The jazz band plays at events outside school and regular concerts and productions attract large audiences. Music makes a very good contribution to the social and cultural life of the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

241. At the end of Year 9, attainment is generally average, but is occasionally above. Boys and girls attain equally well, although girls are better overall at gymnastics than boys. Some girls support their weight comfortably on their arms, resulting in performances that contain a much wider range of accepted gymnastic movements. In volleyball boys and girls consistently perform basic skills and make good progress in acquiring new ones. Girls show good awareness of the principles involved in health-related exercise: in Year 9, for example, they perform very well and show clear understanding of important principles. Boys, including those with special educational needs, have good basic passing, dribbling and shooting skills in basketball and use them effectively in games. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated into most lessons throughout the school and make good progress. Some show considerable skill in games. Where appropriate, equipment is well matched to pupils' needs.

242. By the end of Year 11 pupils' overall level of attainment is above average. The first pupils on the new GCSE course, who take the examination in summer 2001, are making good progress. The best written work is of very high standard and a significant proportion of pupils use ICT to produce homework. Both pupils' presentation of work and understanding of specialist terminology are good. In a lesson dealing with the use of drugs in sport, for instance, a Year 10 class made perceptive, relevant and interesting observations in discussion. Pupils research and record topics carefully in written homework. Both boys and girls on the GCSE course perform well in games: boys, for example, have a thorough understanding of different systems of defence and attack in basketball and how and why to change them. Pupils strike, throw and catch very effectively in rounders.

243. Teaching is satisfactory overall in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4. It is occasionally outstanding. Where it is excellent, the teacher has thorough subject knowledge, prepares in exemplary fashion, has high expectations of pupils and delivers lessons with abounding enthusiasm. This was exemplified in a lesson on health-related exercise with Year 9 girls and elicited an outstanding response from the pupils, who were deeply interested and highly motivated to improve their work. Detailed preparation, clear lesson objectives and substantial use of ICT also feature in the best teaching. In the good basketball lessons observed in Key Stage 4, the teacher showed good subject knowledge, gave clear demonstrations and had high expectations to which pupils always responded well. In a minority of lessons where the teaching has unsatisfactory features, the teacher is far too dominant, pupils respond predictably and, through poor organisation, are inactive for too long. In such lessons there are no opportunities for pupils to plan or evaluate their work and their attainment and progress are thereby considerably reduced.

244. Pupils' attitudes are good overall, but often very good and occasionally excellent. Pupils arrive promptly and are smartly dressed for the subject. Few sit out of lessons. They collaborate easily and effectively and are sensitive to one another's needs. They show a strong sense of enjoyment, motivation and concentration. Extracurricular provision made by the department is well attended.

245. There have been improvements in the department since the last inspection. A GCSE course has recently been introduced and is proving to be very popular. Information and communication technology is widely used for both administrative and teaching purposes. Teaching described at the last inspection as "largely didactic" is generally now suitably varied, although there are still some lessons where the teacher is too dominant.

246. Management and administration are good. Teachers in the department work well together, are closely involved in decision-making and have well-organised minutes of meetings. The subject is generally well documented. Policies are regularly upgraded, although those on the personal development of pupils and teaching methods lack depth. There are stimulating displays of instructional and informative material in the department. Some National Curriculum attainment targets are displayed in the department, but they are not linked to assessment grades to enable pupils to set their own targets.

247. Accommodation for the subject is very poor - with the exception of the satisfactory gymnasium. The ceiling of the school hall, used for many lessons, is too low, thereby preventing the full development of major indoor games. The dining hall, used for some lessons, has even more acute problems. Playing fields, at a considerable walking distance from the school, have neither toilets nor changing rooms - an unacceptable deficiency. They are very poorly drained and, like the take-off areas for athletics events, unusable for much of the time. The necessity of walking to the fields wastes a considerable amount of valuable teaching time; it causes especial difficulty in Years 10-11, because the timetabled allocation for the subject is already low. Storage space throughout the department is inadequate and creates difficulties. Despite its considerable use of ICT, the department does not have its own computer and printing facilities. The very poor level of facilities restricts the standards that are attainable in the department.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

248. Pupils' overall level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is broadly in line with that found nationally. Inspection evidence points to some improvement in standard since the previous inspection. The overall attainment of girls is higher than that of boys. In all lessons seen the achievement of pupils (and particularly that of the more able) was modest. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the richness and diversity of religion are satisfactory. They have a reasonable grasp, for example, of the influence of beliefs on the lifestyle of religious communities and individuals. This was well illustrated by pupils in a Year 9 class who appreciated, through religious artefacts, the significance and symbolism of Sikhism. Pupils' understanding of why religious beliefs are important to those who hold them is not secure. The majority of pupils (and particularly high attainers) use religious language well, but are less confident in applying religious insights to their own lives and those of others.

249. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 in the GCSE examination in 2000 showed the overall standard to be broadly in line with the national average in terms of the proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C, although the percentage gaining the highest grades was below average. It should be noted that this level of attainment has been reached solely as a result of studying through an after-school class taken in an entirely voluntary capacity by a member of staff. Despite this, there has been an upward trend in results since the previous inspection.

250. In work seen in Years 10-11 during the inspection pupils attained an overall standard below that expected by the Agreed Syllabus for their age. Their knowledge and understanding of religious teachings, beliefs and practices are unsatisfactory, and this is reflected in their below average understanding of the place of Christianity and other principal religions in shaping the lives of individuals and communities. Pupils have a limited grasp of religious language and concepts. They have a very rudimentary knowledge of such studies as Buddhism and about those committed to the monastic life. This restricted level of attainment is not a reflection of the quality of teaching or of pupils' attitudes towards the subject. It is largely because the school's allocation of time is both below the national average and well below that required for the Staffordshire Agreed Syllabus to

be studied in the depth necessary to reach an appropriate standard. This lack of provision in Years 10-11 precludes the majority of pupils from reaching a suitable level of attainment in the subject by the age of 16.

251. Pupils' progress and achievement in lessons are satisfactory overall in Years 7-9. There is, however, evidence of underachievement within some teaching groups. Higher-attaining pupils often make limited progress, because there is insufficient enrichment of the curriculum and few opportunities to pursue research in depth. Pupils with special educational needs make broadly reasonable progress.

252. Although all pupils make broadly satisfactory progress within the few lessons they receive in Years 10-11, the rotational pattern of the timetable impedes continuity in teaching and progress. Furthermore, many pupils underachieve in this key stage because the work they are set is not well enough matched to their needs and abilities. This weakness particularly applies to high-attaining pupils. Overall, pupils have insufficient opportunities to gather and present information or to discuss religious ideas and beliefs in depth.

253. Pupils show positive attitudes to the subject and behave very well. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good. The majority of pupils settle quickly to work and respond with interest to instruction. Their levels of concentration, listening and memorisation are above average. All pupils have a sensible, mature approach to learning and handle moral issues with sensitivity and understanding.

254. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall throughout the school. In the best lessons teachers set clear aims and objectives and manage pupils skilfully. They expect a high standard of work, maintain good discipline and set a brisk pace to lessons. Where learning tasks are appropriately varied, pupils respond with a high level of concentration and enthusiasm. Less successful lessons are characterised by a slow pace and little to arouse pupils' enthusiasm for the subject. In some lessons tasks are not sequenced or graded sufficiently to match the learning requirements of classes with different levels of attainment and understanding.

255. Some progress has been made since the previous inspection. Between the ages of 14 and 16 all pupils pursue a course that incorporates some elements of RE. In practice, however, this modular course lacks sufficient religious and spiritual depth. It also comprises only some seven hours of teaching time per year for each of Years 10 and 11, a significant shortfall in curricular time, and is insufficiently linked to the requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus. Provision for GCSE is currently unsatisfactory, because the course is only available as an extra examination course after school and has insufficient teaching time overall.

256. The school does not meet its statutory responsibility to make appropriate provision for the Agreed Syllabus to be taught to all pupils in Years 10 and 11. Overall attainment, and particularly that of boys, remains too low, especially at the end of Key Stage 4. Assessment and monitoring procedures have improved since the previous inspection, but still lack sufficient rigour.