

INSPECTION REPORT

HYDE TECHNOLOGY SCHOOL

Hyde

LEA area: Tameside

Unique Reference Number: 106268

Headteacher: Mrs K D Spence

Reporting inspector: Dr D A W Biltcliffe
1025

Dates of inspection: 15th - 18th April 2002

Inspection number: 244352

Full Inspection carried out under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr C Daly
Dates of previous inspection:	25 th April – 2 nd May 1997

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13452	Mr H Meggitt	Lay inspector		Partnership with parents
5038	Mr H Heller	Team inspector	Special educational needs; English as an additional language; gifted and talented pupils	Pupils' attitudes and values; school's care for pupils; leadership and management
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1262	Mr R Heath	Team inspector	Mathematics	
4607	Dr D E Ward	Team inspector	Science	
17868	Dr E P Metcalfe	Team inspector	Art	
11190	Dr W M Burke	Team inspector	Design and technology	
12470	Mr B M Greasley	Team inspector	Geography	Curriculum
8873	Ms C Evers	Team inspector	History	Efficiency: staffing, accommodation and learning resources
4603	Mr A F Ryan	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
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; pupils' assessment
13217	Mr M D Butterworth	Team inspector	Physical education	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This average-sized, mixed comprehensive school has had Technology School status since 1996. It educates about 1036 pupils, aged 11-16. The school is growing in size owing to parental demand. The overall social and economic background of pupils is below average. The overall level of attainment of pupils on entry to the school at age 11 is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is a little smaller than usual, whilst that with statements of such need is broadly average. About 17 per cent of pupils come from families of ethnic minority heritage, but only seven pupils are considered to be at an early stage of learning English. The school was last inspected in 1997.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good and improving school. It has many strong features and few weaknesses. Pupils' overall standard of attainment at the end of Year 9 is below average, but rises to about average by GCSE in Year 11. This rate of progress represents a good achievement by the school and its pupils. In 2001, the school's GCSE results were, on most measures, very slightly above average. The majority of pupils make good progress. Teaching is good. The school's governors and senior management have worked hard and successfully to raise standards. The school provides a good standard of education for its pupils. On its above average income and expenditure, the school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- GCSE results are good and represent a substantial achievement by the school's staff and pupils.
- The majority of pupils make good progress during their time in school.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is a substantial strength of the school.
- The school's provision is very good, too, in English and art. It is good in most other subjects.
- Bangladeshi pupils do particularly well – and better than pupils of the same heritage tend to do nationally.
- Teaching, pupils' attitudes and learning, and the school's care for pupils are strong features.
- The quality of education provided for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is high.
- The leadership and management of the school are strong and effective at all levels.

What could be improved

- The school's management information system is not sufficiently robust or comprehensive.
- There are many deficiencies in accommodation, despite recent new building. Most of the toilets are a disgrace.
- ICT is not used sufficiently in English, history, religious education (RE) and in the school's SEN provision.
- There is not enough provision for RE, collective worship or for promoting pupils' spirituality.
- Parents do not receive precise enough information about pupils' studies or progress.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made substantial progress since 1997. Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 9, although still below average, has risen faster than the improvement nationally. Their overall level of attainment in GCSE examinations is substantially higher than at the last inspection: in 2001, for instance, 54 per cent of pupils gained at least five grades A*-C, compared with 34 per cent in 1997. The school's teaching has improved further. The school's ethos remains hard-working and caring. The school has shown that it is very capable of continuing to improve. The school received national recognition of its calibre by gaining a *School Achievement Award* from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in both 2000 and 2001.

The school has also improved most of the major weaknesses identified at the last inspection. It has, for example:

- raised pupils' overall attainment – significantly so in GCSE examinations;
- ensured that the curricular deficiencies in music have been removed;
- secured a reasonably broad and balanced curriculum for pupils; and
- improved provision for pupils with special educational needs to the extent that the aspect is now good.

It has not, however, done enough to make sure that all pupils receive enough teaching of RE or experience regular collective worship. More remains to be done, too, to ensure continuity in Years 10-11 in the personal and social education course and in RE, and to try to raise pupils' overall level of attendance beyond 90 per cent.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	C	D	B	A

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

The school's results in the Year 9 national tests in 2001 were close to average in English, below average in mathematics, but well below average in science. The overall results were, however, in line with the average for schools of a similar kind (as measured only by the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals) – although better than the group average in English and mathematics. Standards have risen over the 1997-2001 period and at a faster rate than the rise nationally. By the end of Year 9, standards in the school are below average in most subjects. They are average overall, however, in design and technology, German, Spanish and physical education (PE), well below average in RE, and above average in art and ICT. Boys and girls do equally well in most subjects, though girls do much better than boys in English. The majority of pupils make good progress in their studies between Years 7 and 9.

Results in GCSE were very slightly above the national average in 2001 for the proportion of pupils gaining at least five grades A*-C and for average points scored. They were close to average on other measures. Results have risen sharply since 1997 – again, at a faster rate than the national rise. Pupils' overall standard in 2001 was also much higher than that generally achieved in schools of a similar character. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall standard is average in most subjects. It is, however, again well below average in RE, above average in ICT and well above average in art. Bearing in mind that pupils' overall level of attainment on entry to the school is well below average, the majority of pupils make good progress over the whole of their time in school. The school's targets for examination results are reasonable. Pupils' academic performance represents a commendable and substantial achievement by the school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	The vast majority of pupils show positive attitudes, being keen to attend school and displaying strong interest in their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Most pupils conduct themselves responsibly and thoughtfully.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils from different backgrounds work harmoniously together, forming constructive relationships with one another and adults.
Attendance	Satisfactory overall – as is pupils' punctuality for school and lessons.

Most pupils are pleasant, reasonable, reflective and hard-working young people. The school is an orderly and harmonious community, marked by a generally calm and welcoming atmosphere. Pupils' attitudes and commitment were good (and often very good) in four out of every five lessons seen; in most of the rest they were satisfactory.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching is a strength of the school. It is good overall throughout Years 7-11 and in most subjects. It is very good in art and in specialist ICT lessons. It is satisfactory in Years 7-9 in science and French and throughout the school in RE. In over one out of every five lessons, teaching is very good (and occasionally outstanding). Its overall quality is higher than at the last inspection. Its strongest features are teachers' subject knowledge, planning and class control. The setting of homework is satisfactory. Literacy and numeracy are effectively taught. In well-taught lessons pupils make good progress through teaching that is well planned, brisk, interesting, humorous and suitably demanding. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching is characterised by a lack of pace, discussion and rigour. As a result of the predominantly good teaching, pupils of all abilities and backgrounds sustain their interest and commitment. They learn well here.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory overall. The school's technology status is suitably prominent, although resulting in a squeeze on the time for some other subjects.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision is much improved since 1997 and is now good. Work is very well organised and matched to pupils' needs; assessment is precise.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school's provision is sound overall – strong for pupils' moral development, satisfactory for their social and cultural growth, but not wide enough for significant spiritual development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Another strength of the school – except for its poor toilet provision. The school has a very strong framework of pastoral care for pupils, as a result of staff's high commitment and skill towards pupils' welfare.

The prominence of ICT, design and technology, and business education gives the school a distinctive technological flavour. Humanities in Years 7-9 and course choices in Years 10-11 are, in consequence, restricted. The use of ICT is not as consistently strong across all subjects as it should be. A wide range of extracurricular activities and good quality careers guidance enrich the curriculum. Religious education is not taught enough throughout the school. The school works closely with parents, but does not provide enough information for them about pupils' courses or progress. Overall, however, the school provides a secure, nurturing and very welcoming environment for pupils.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The new headteacher is building firmly on the good legacy from her predecessor by a clear, perceptive focus on purposeful management and classroom quality. Senior and middle managers are effective and supportive.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body's work is active, well informed and suitably focused – except for the blind spot over RE and collective worship.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Much improved of late – and the school performs well. More needs to be done, however, to anticipate, monitor and interpret its performance.
The strategic use of resources	Financial planning, management and accountability are strong. There are few shortages of resources, but many weaknesses in the school's accommodation.

The new headteacher has made a very positive, thorough and well-planned start on assessing the school's priorities and practice. The school's management information system is not comprehensive enough. Overall, the school has sufficient teaching staff and other resources, but has major deficiencies in accommodation – notably in toilets, PE, its new "library" and its overall aesthetic standards. The school has sufficient technical help, except in art and music. The school works hard to secure best value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are expected to work hard and do well. Pupils make good progress and like school. Teaching is good. The right type and amount of homework are set. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A minority of parents would like to be kept better informed about their children's progress.

Inspectors agree with parents that the school has appropriately high expectations of pupils' work and effort. As a result of good teaching – and especially of firm class control, good planning and interesting lessons – most pupils make good progress. Homework was set reasonably during the inspection. The quality of reports to parents and carers about children's attainment and progress require improvement. The school is forming plans to increase home-school links as a priority.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils' standard of attainment, although varying widely, is below average overall by the end of Year 9, but in line with that expected nationally of pupils by the end of Year 11. Their overall level of attainment is below average in the national tests in Year 9, but usually close to average in GCSE examinations. Since the last inspection in 1997, pupils' attainment in both the Year 9 national tests and GCSE examinations has risen – and at a faster rate than the rise nationally.
2. The overall attainment of pupils by the end of Year 11 is a substantial achievement by the school. This is because most pupils progress well during their school career here and at a greater rate than is typical nationally. Pupils in this school tend to start in Year 7 below (and often well below) average overall, but reach an average standard by the time they leave school.
3. When pupils come to the school in Year 7, their overall level of attainment is well below average. The sets of data held in the school on pupils' performance in the national primary tests over the 1998-2001 period show that, although intake standards have risen over the four-year period, they remain well below average overall. The proportion of high-attaining pupils joining the school, in particular, is low at about three-fifths of what would be found in a typical comprehensive school. Other sets of national tests administered by the school also indicate that the school's intakes are below average; they also suggest that intake pupils have, at least until 2001, performed a little below the level of their innate ability.
4. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2001, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected basic national standards of Levels 5 or 6 was close to average in English, below average in mathematics and well below average in science. Results in the previous two years were again close to average in English, but below average in mathematics and science. The standard reached in the 1996-1998 period was decidedly lower than after 1998. As indicated above, however, the results achieved over the last six years show a faster rise than that achieved nationally.
5. Girls are consistently ahead of boys overall in English by the end of Year 9, although both groups perform similarly close to the national pattern for their respective sexes. In contrast, girls and boys usually do equally well overall in mathematics and science, although boys usually just edge in front of girls in science. Teachers' assessments of pupils in these three subjects are usually fairly close to the test results pupils achieve.
6. When these 2001 Key Stage 3 results 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 in line with the group average – above it in English and mathematics, but below it in science. Results in 1999 were uniformly above average. In 2000, pupils performed at the top end of the group average in all three subjects and bettered the group average overall.
7. In the five other (non-core) subjects formally assessed at the end of Year 9 in 2001, teachers judged the overall attainment of pupils as above average in information and communication technology (ICT), average in modern foreign languages, below average in design and technology and in history, and well below average in geography. In respect of current Year 9 pupils, inspectors agree with teachers' judgements in history, ICT and modern foreign languages, but consider that the overall level of pupils' attainment is average in design and technology and below average in geography.
8. As pupils move through the school from Year 7 to the end of Year 9, the limited statistical evidence available from national tests suggests that they generally make good progress: by the time the Year 7 intake of

1998 had reached the end of Year 9 in 2001, for example, they were closer to the expected national standard for their age than they had been three years earlier. The evidence of pupils' work seen during the inspection also confirms that pupils' progress and achievement are good overall. Pupils make significant progress predominantly as a result of teaching that is well planned, suitably brisk, interesting, thorough and firmly controls classes. Progress is less than it could be in a small minority of classes where there is insufficient rigour or depth in study or discussion.

9. In the GCSE examinations of 2001, pupils' level of attainment was a good average overall. It was fractionally above the national average for the proportion of pupils gaining at least five grades in the range A*-C (or their course equivalents) and for average points scored: the boost to above average in these ratings was the result of the success of about one third of the school's Year 11 pupils in the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) course in ICT at Intermediate level (Part 1). The school's results were average for the proportion of pupils gaining at least five A*-G grades. They were slightly below (but close to) average for the proportion (36 per cent) gaining at least grade C in all the core subjects of English, mathematics and science.

10. The school's GCSE results have risen substantially since the last inspection in 1997 – up from 34 to 54 per cent of pupils gaining at least five A*-C grades and showing a rise in average point scores from 29.2 to 40.4. This rate of rise (which is faster than the national rise) represents a good performance and substantial achievement by the school. It is a testimony to the hard work of teachers and pupils, and the focused attention on standards by the school's management. Its achievement was recognised by the accolade of a national *School Achievement Award* from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for both 2000 and 2001.

11. Although the school does not have a clear model or comprehensive sets of data to track pupils' progress fully through the whole of their secondary education, the evidence available indicates that pupils usually make substantial progress in their studies both over Years 10-11 as well as from their start in Year 7. Taking into account pupils' achievements in the national tests two years earlier, most pupils make at least sound progress overall as they move through the school from Year 9 to Year 11. The overall rate of progress was particularly good amongst those pupils who took their GCSE and GNVQ examinations in 2001.

12. There are several reasons for pupils' commendable rate of progress through the school. The school has created a climate where both teachers and pupils believe in their capabilities to achieve well. It has given central priority to securing a good standard of teaching through monitoring, focused in-service training and new appointments. It has established a purposeful and caring sense of discipline and the feeling of being a community. It has increased the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' attainment and progress to a better level than in 1997, although it has further to go. Its policy of building on its strengths and entering a significant proportion of pupils for the GNVQ course in ICT has paid dividends.

13. In the core subjects, pupils' attainment of a grade in the range A*-C in GCSE in 2001 was broadly average in all of English, mathematics and science – a commendably consistent performance. The results have been at a similar level over the last four years in English. In mathematics and science, however, results have risen appreciably during this period from a below average point to their present average level. The quality of grades obtained amongst all subjects taken was broadly average overall in 2001, with a fair share of the highest A* and A grades. No pupil achieved the highest A* grade in 2001, however, in design and technology (resistant materials or food elements), French, physical education (PE), media studies or child development.

14. Girls achieved a slightly greater proportion of the higher (A*-C) grades in GCSE than boys in 2001, but the overall gap between the sexes was much smaller than it was nationally. Indeed (apart from in 1999) the difference in the academic performance of boys and girls has been consistently less than it is nationally – and was identical in 1996 and 1997. Although girls do much better than boys in English (and in 2001 slightly better in mathematics), they performed worse than boys in science in 2001. The minority of Bangladeshi pupils in the school did particularly well in 2001: 61 per cent (approximately double the national rate) gained at least five grades A*-C.

15. When the school's average point scores at GCSE are compared with those in schools with a similar "free school meals" background, this school's overall performance was very good and substantially higher than most others in 2001. By the same measure, pupils' overall performance was well above average in all of

English, mathematics and science. In 2001 the school comfortably exceeded its GCSE targets. It has set itself a similar target for the current year: such a target is reasonable, bearing in mind that the Year 9 level of attainment of the current GCSE cohort was noticeably lower than that of its predecessor.

16. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' overall standard of attainment by the end of Year 9 was below average overall. It is average in design and technology, German, Spanish and PE, well below average in RE, but above average in art and ICT. By the end of Year 11, the level of work is of an average standard in most subjects. It is well below average in RE, above average in ICT, and well above average in art. The low attainment in RE is not due to the quality of teaching (which is satisfactory), but to the low time allocation and, in consequence, inadequate coverage of the subject. Overall, pupils (including the gifted and talented, those for whom English is an additional language and those with special educational needs) achieve well in this school.

17. In English, pupils' overall level of attainment is below average by the end of Year 9, but reaches the national average standard by the end of Year 11 – a strong achievement from intakes that are well below average in the subject. Reading and speaking in the subject are close to average overall. Most pupils read aloud with reasonable audibility, fluency and expression, and can spot the key points in what they read. As a result of considerable and successful effort by the department to achieve a consistency of approach, most pupils present work well and are strong in planning and drafting their written work. Handwriting, spelling and punctuation are broadly average. Pupils' speaking in the subject is marked by a good level of discussion and accurate use of technical vocabulary. Rigorous, extended debate, however, is rare. Most pupils listen carefully.

18. In other subjects across the school pupils' standard of reading is close to average overall. Their competence in reading aloud is a little below average overall, but varies very widely from the very fluent and expressive to the hesitant and almost inaudible. There is, however, a greater readiness and confidence to read aloud than often seen, even when pupils' reading is weak – an indication of the confidence and feeling of “inclusiveness” that this school has managed to create amongst its pupils. Pupils tackle reasonably the research and skimming of texts that they are expected to do.

19. Pupils' standard of writing is broadly average overall. The strongest features are the planning and drafting of work, and the frequency and scale of note-taking (as, for example, from video-recorded snippets); the high attention to note-making in English is often well exploited in other subjects. Presentation and neatness are generally good – but with a few very untidy examples. Spelling and punctuation are below average. The amount and standard of word processing are higher than often found, although even the spell-checking facilities of ICT are not able to eradicate the weakness in spelling of many low attainers. Handwriting is average overall, but a significant minority of pupils have a very immature style. The smallish proportion of high-attaining pupils usually produce extended writing of a high standard. The below average general standard of writing in history is at least partly the result of limited time for the subject in Years 7-9.

20. The quality of speaking in class is reasonable overall in clarity and audibility. Pupils' ability to express their thoughts varies enormously: many confidently and accurately use appropriate terminology and vocabulary to explain their thinking (as, for example, their methods of mental calculation in mathematics), but a significant minority find it difficult to convey their ideas with much coherence. A general weakness is the infrequency with which pupils take part in extended discussion or synthesise several points of view. Most pupils listen carefully, respectfully and often very intently (as, for example, in art and in design and technology) and a fair proportion are prepared to ask questions or seek further clarification of what they do not fully understand.

21. In mathematics and in numeracy across the curriculum pupils generally handle numbers and data reasonably well. Most are competent in basic skills and techniques, but a significant number are soon thrown by problems that require them to apply known methods in unfamiliar situations. Overall, however, pupils generally make substantial progress in numerical capability as they move through the school. The overall standard in science is below average by the end of Year 9, but average at the end of Year 11. Basic work is sound and most pupils achieve well, especially in Years 10-11.

22. Attainment in ICT is high in the specialist-taught lessons, as a result of very fine teaching and a high level of equipment and standardised software. A much higher proportion of pupils in the school reach the basic Level 5 at the end of Year 9, for example, than normally seen. Standards of ICT within other subjects vary

widely – from the good standard in mathematics, science, design and technology, geography, music and business education to the unsatisfactory level in English and the poor standard in history, RE and special educational needs. Although the auditing and consistency of ICT usage and standards require harmonising across the school, the subject is a considerable strength of the school.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

23. The vast majority of pupils show positive attitudes towards their experience of school life. They are keen to attend and show strong interest and involvement in the wide range of activities provided for them. The school is an orderly community, marked by a generally calm and welcoming atmosphere. Overall, pupils behave well in class and around the school. In about four-fifths of lessons, pupils' attitudes and behaviour are at least good and are very good in a third of them. They are otherwise satisfactory, except for a very small number of lessons where pupils respond unsatisfactorily to teaching that fails to engage their full interest.

24. Pupils respond positively to the school's rules of conduct and generally show respect for the fabric of the building and for property. The level of litter seen across the school site is at times high and detracts from the overall quality of school life. Whilst some instances of teasing and bullying were reported by individual pupils, there is no evidence of any significant incidence of such behaviour. Furthermore, pupils report that staff deal promptly and effectively with any such episodes. Pupils from different social and ethnic backgrounds show positive attitudes in their relationships with one another and work harmoniously together.

25. Pupils generally show a satisfactory capacity to reflect on their actions and consider how they affect others. A good example was seen in a Year 10 session on personal and social education (PSE), in which pupils, working in teams led by a liaison group from the local Police force, were invited to consider their rights and responsibilities within the law. Pupils form constructive relationships with one another, with staff and with other adults. The many pupils with special educational needs are generally very well integrated into the life of the school. Pupils show respect for the beliefs and values of others, a quality they demonstrate in many aspects of classroom life.

26. Pupils show a reasonable capacity to take responsibility and to exercise their initiative, but the opportunities for them to do so are limited. There is, for example, no school council, although pupils are invited, from time to time, to form task groups to discuss issues of immediate concern to them – as in the recent pupil consultations on the poor state of the school's toilets. Pupils themselves initiate some charity and community work, whilst some are engaged on literacy programmes with pupils from nearby primary schools. The school's team of volunteer prefects, drawn from Year 11 pupils, support staff in and around the school.

27. The level of pupil exclusions is in the moderate range for a school of this size. The school has a sound system of sanctions and rewards which are applied well to individual circumstances. Where pupils are excluded, they are provided with work and support from the school, so as to ease their reintegration at the end of their period of exclusion.

Attendance

28. The attendance of pupils is satisfactory overall. In the 2000-2001 academic year, it was 90.3 per cent, a point very slightly below the national average of 90.9 per cent. The attendance of nearly all year groups exceeded 90 per cent; only in Year 7 was attendance at the unsatisfactory level of 88.2 per cent, largely because of very poor attendance by a small number of pupils and a higher than usual incidence of illness in the Autumn term.

29. In the last academic year the level of authorised absence was a little above average at 8.9 per cent, whereas the amount of absence without good reason (0.9 per cent) was fractionally better than the national picture. Over the last six years, attendance has been very consistently around 90 per cent, in the range 89.2-

90.9 per cent. In the last academic year attendance was very slightly higher than it was around the time of the last inspection.

30. The attendance of a small minority of pupils, however, is unsatisfactory. This is occasionally due to long illness, but is usually the result of taking holiday in term-time or casual, condoned absence. The school adopts a wide range of means to try to help absentees to still do well in their studies. Partly as a result of its efforts, a much higher proportion than usual of unsatisfactory attenders manage to achieve well: a third of those Year 11 pupils who had below 80 per cent attendance in the last academic year, for example, still managed to achieve at least five A*-C grades in GCSE examinations.

31. The school has a very practical and thorough attendance policy to guide its work. Its own internal guidance documentation is clear, comprehensive and precise. It has a useful, semi-computerised system for recording and analysing pupils' attendance and for helping to identify problems. It undertakes occasional, very intensive spot-checks to monitor and detect truancy: any resulting absences are very carefully followed up. In contrast, both its prospectus and its *Student Diary* make only passing reference to the importance of good attendance and punctuality. Nor does it analyse its attendance data thoroughly enough to identify and disseminate the causes and trends of attendance and absence – or the impact of its positive, remedial measures.

32. Punctuality for lessons is generally satisfactory, although a minority of pupils loiter and are late for lessons: the absence of warning bells does not aid promptness to lessons, particularly at the end of the mid-morning break or after lunch. The nominal fifty-minute lessons are usually shortened in practice to 45 (or even 40) minutes, because of the time pupils inevitably take to move around the school's site. Punctuality in coming to school on time is satisfactory overall: approximately 20 pupils are late for school on a typical day.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

33. The quality of teaching is a strength of the school. It is good overall at all stages across the school and in nearly every subject. It is at least satisfactory in virtually all lessons - satisfactory in a quarter and good in just over half of them. Additionally, teaching is very good (and occasionally outstanding) in over one in every five lessons. Only one out of the 218 lessons inspected had teaching that was wholly unsatisfactory – a very good achievement.

34. The overall quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. In 1997, 95 per cent of the teaching was said to be satisfactory or better and one in every 20 lessons was judged to be unsatisfactory. Now virtually no teaching falls below a satisfactory level. Just over three-fifths of the teaching was good (or better) at the last inspection, but that proportion has risen to about three-quarters. Teaching was good in one out of every seven lessons; now it is of this quality in over half of all lessons. More good teaching was seen in Years 7-9 than in Years 10-11, but teaching quality is now evenly spread throughout the school.

35. As a result of their very good subject knowledge and understanding, most staff (including the few not specialist-trained for the lessons they teach) show ready enthusiasm for their subjects and arouse pupils' interest. They choose topics carefully, are aware of common pitfalls or difficulties that pupils are likely to face, guide pupils wisely and prepare them thoroughly for examinations. A significant minority of lessons are models of professionalism, enthusiasm and inspiration. The result is that pupils show a greater degree of enjoyment of their lessons than normal.

36. In an English lesson in Year 9, for example, the teacher provided a well balanced, comprehensive overview of the main themes in the study of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and asked very focused questions – as, for instance, about the evidence for Macbeth's nervousness. In a design and technology lesson in Year 11 the teacher had a wide-ranging knowledge and understanding about electronics, mechanics and resistant materials and enabled pupils to determine appropriately when to use ICT and when not to do so. Subject knowledge is particularly strong in English, science (in Years 10-11), art, design and technology, geography, ICT and music (in Years 7-9). It is satisfactory in RE. The industrial experience of a few staff is put to good use for pupils' benefit.

37. Most teachers pay sound attention to the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. They generally give an appropriately high emphasis to the correct spelling of both common and technical words by, for example, direct exhortation or the prominent display of key specialist vocabulary on classroom walls. A few staff train pupils to speak clearly and face the rest of the class when giving oral feedback or help pupils to create “mind maps” of the themes they are studying.

38. The extensive use of ICT results, in many subjects, in pupils producing attractive text – as, for instance, in their coursework – to a higher standard than often seen. Teaching about the applications of computer software is done very systematically. Teachers encourage pupils a little more frequently than usual to make their own notes when, for example, watching videorecorded extracts. The use of arithmetic calculations and data-interpretation is appropriately frequent in subjects such as science, design and technology, and geography.

39. Most lessons are very well planned and have precise objectives. In the best cases these are prominently displayed, shared clearly with pupils and often referred to at the end of lessons. The start of most lessons is brisk and purposeful, incorporating both a quick review of the previous lesson and an outline of new content. They are particularly effective in the fewer instances where teachers also explain at the outset the precise purpose, main stages and timings of different activities.

40. The main body of lessons usually incorporates a balanced range of activities. In the most successful cases tasks are carefully sequenced and designed both to arouse and sustain pupils’ interest and to give them the confidence to tackle work on their own. In a Year 11 mathematics lesson, for example, the teacher carefully constructed the lesson to build up pupils’ confidence in solving short GCSE problems. In most cases the ends of lessons are rounded off soundly, although only in a minority of cases is this stage done really well by teacher and pupils revisiting the clearly stated aims for lessons and identifying precisely together the main body of knowledge that has been learned.

41. The majority of teachers have sufficiently high expectations of pupils’ learning, behaviour and effort. Expectations are noticeably high overall in English, art, design and technology, ICT and (in Years 10-11) history. They are satisfactory in French (in Years 7-9) and PE. In the best lessons teachers ensure that pupils settle down very quickly, listen attentively and cover a good amount of ground in the time available. They pitch the level of work appropriately high, set demanding but realistic targets for achievement and give pupils every assistance to do well. They require pupils to think hard, do not countenance sloppy thinking or writing and expect pupils to use suitable technical vocabulary with clarity and accuracy. In these cases, teachers’ high level of commitment and a brisk pace ensure that pupils cover much ground securely during lessons. They also partly explain the good progress that most pupils make during their time in school.

42. This challenging approach to teaching and learning was seen in most subjects and for pupils with special educational needs. In a Year 8 art lesson, for instance, the teacher gave a firm lead by demonstrating high quality practice, using pupils’ own work, by identifying with pupils the most significant or effective features, and by helping them to understand clearly how they could improve their own work. In a minority of cases, however, opportunities to stretch pupils’ creative ideas or intellect were missed, because topics were examined superficially, probing follow-up questions were noticeably absent or teachers provided answers too quickly.

43. Most teachers use a good range of effective teaching methods, and especially so in science (in Years 10-11), art, geography and history. Introductory explanations are usually clear, relevant and brisk. Group work is used well in a few subjects to open up issues, encourage debate and allow pupils to form their own opinions, but is not used often enough overall. Brainstorming is rarely encouraged (although strong in English) as a means of ensuring that key ideas are quickly gathered from a large proportion of the class. Teachers make effective use of frequent, short questioning as an alternative to straight exposition and for stimulating pupils’ interest or curiosity. Probing, extended and supplementary questions are much less frequently used, however, as a means of deepening factual knowledge or conceptual understanding. The result is a tendency in a minority of lessons to provide answers for pupils too quickly or, more frequently, not to exploit the potential of rigorous, extended discussion.

44. Once pupils arrive in class – although a significant minority of pupils are quite often a little late (partly as a result of the extended site and narrow corridors) – time is normally used very well. Teachers are generally

very good at introducing and driving lessons forward at a brisk pace. The large amount of available computer equipment enables most teachers to illustrate lessons relevantly and to access suitable information and ideas quickly, although they have little access to other sophisticated teaching technology.

45. In a Year 9 mathematics lesson, for example, very pertinent use was made of an electronic board to set "problems", debate the steps in their solution and carry the ideas through to a scaled drawing of a running-track. The generally high level of provision of good quality textbooks enables teachers to stimulate pupils' interest well and provide apt illustrations – as, for example, on the work of Van Gogh, Munch and Mackintosh in a Year 11 graphics lesson. The multi-sensory teaching of basic literacy to pupils with special educational needs is very well done.

46. The management of pupils' learning and behaviour is a strength of the school. In nearly all classes teachers have a firm, benevolent hold over pupils' behaviour, attitudes and commitment. Pupils know exactly what is expected of them and, as a result, generally settle down to work quickly. In nearly all cases teachers ensure that pupils show solid concentration, sustaining pupils' interest by a variety of effective means – such as clear directions, gentle humour, individual encouragement or no-nonsense approaches. In most classes teachers establish a close rapport with pupils and a warm atmosphere for learning. Only very occasionally does a teacher resort to shouting as a means of control. Pupils appreciate the hard effort and friendliness of their teachers.

47. In most classes pupils' standard of work and progress are regularly and systematically monitored by teachers. This is often achieved by teachers quickly circulating round the class to check on pupils' written tasks and discussions. Marking is usually thoughtfully done and, in the best cases, contains many helpful comments and advice for future improvement. Occasionally, however, as in French in Years 7-9, marking is minimal and irregular. During the inspection, homework was generally set appropriately; it was particularly well used in English, science, art, ICT, modern foreign languages and (in Years 10-11) music.

48. Teaching is good overall throughout the school. It is very good overall in art and in specialist ICT lessons. It is satisfactory in Years 7-9 in both science and French, and throughout the school in RE. Most pupils achieve good progress in their studies both in lessons and over longer periods of time. The high overall quality of teaching is the main reason why most pupils make good progress in their studies: as a result, most pupils concentrate well, work hard and do well.

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

49. The curriculum reflects the school's status as a Technology School. All pupils study business education in Years 8 and 9 and the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) course in ICT in Years 10-11. In the adaptation of the curriculum to include these courses, less time is available for humanities subjects in Years 8 and 9, and there is a restricted choice of courses to study in Years 10-11. The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of extracurricular activities and good quality support and guidance for future employment or further education.

50. In Years 7-9 the breadth and balance of the curriculum are satisfactory overall. All subjects of the National Curriculum and RE are taught. The majority of pupils study French, but higher-attaining pupils choose to study French, German or Spanish in Year 9, following "taster" courses in the various languages in Year 8. All pupils study ICT and business education in Year 8.

51. In Years 10-11 a satisfactory range of curricular provision is offered. All pupils study the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, a choice of one from four modern foreign languages, design and technology for GCSE examination, and ICT for the GNVQ examination, thus reflecting significantly the emphasis on technology by the school.

52. In addition, pupils choose only one from an appropriate list of ten subjects to study to GCSE level. This list includes the creative subjects (art and music), the humanities subjects (geography and history) and business education. This narrowing of choice severely restricts the range of subjects available for study,

with the result that the creative subjects are under-emphasised. Only a small number of pupils study most of these optional subjects, and as so few pupils opted for geography, for instance, the subject is not currently taught in Year 10. This restricted situation was reported at the time of the last inspection and little progress has been made in resolving the issue.

53. The school's teaching time of 25 hours is in line with the minimum recommended by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). This overall time is reduced by holding the weekly assembly during tutorial time and by the time needed for pupils to move between lessons when there is no natural break. The time allocated to RE is too little to teach fully what is required by the local Agreed Syllabus for the subject. The arrangement by which the subject rotates with personal and social education (PSE) disrupts continuity of teaching. As a result of these factors, the teaching of RE does not meet statutory requirements. This deficiency was reported at the time of the last inspection and inadequate progress has been made in addressing the issue.

54. The very low allocation of time in Years 8 and 9 for geography and history is barely adequate to meet National Curriculum requirements, restricts the range of what can be taught and limits the methods available either to extend fully the higher-attaining, or to support adequately the lower-attaining, pupils in these subjects. The time available to teach PE in Years 10-11 is not sufficient to teach the programme of work in enough depth. The school has a broad, well-taught programme of PSE that appropriately incorporates sex education and education about the dangers of drugs.

55. The school has a comprehensive whole-school strategy to raise standards of literacy as part of the National Literacy Strategy. The teaching of literacy in English is of a high standard. All members of staff have received training to enable them to develop provision within their own subjects; some other departments have introduced appropriately effective methods to improve the standards of literacy.

56. The National Numeracy Strategy to raise standards of numeracy is a strong feature in mathematics. A well-written policy for introducing strategies to improve standards in numeracy in all subject departments has been produced and appropriate staff training has taken place. Work to introduce strategies across the curriculum is at an early stage of development.

57. All pupils have the opportunity, within the limitations noted above, to study the full range of subjects offered. Pupils are grouped appropriately in classes by their prior attainment: this arrangement is effective. With the exception of RE, all subjects match work carefully to the needs of individual pupils. English, science, design and technology, and modern foreign languages sensibly offer an alternative accreditation to those pupils for whom the GCSE examination is not judged to be appropriate. The school has a good programme of support for pupils with long-term illness, those who are excluded or those who have difficulty in attending school regularly. Approximately twenty pupils, for whom the full range of subjects is not deemed relevant, suitably attend a variety of work-related courses at a local further education college for one day each week.

58. The school has no written policy statement to guide its curricular planning (beyond its Technology College bid). There is a wide-ranging discussion within school before making decisions about the curriculum, but parents and pupils are rarely consulted. The curriculum is monitored effectively by senior managers through discussions with heads of department. As a result, plans for the future are sharply focused. Schemes of work are of high quality in English, science, art, design and technology, and ICT and are generally good elsewhere, except in RE where they are poorly written.

59. A wide range of extracurricular activities enhances the curriculum. There are, for instance, residential visits for linguistic studies to France, Austria and Germany, to study World War 1 battlefields in France and for geographical fieldwork in the Yorkshire Dales. Pupils regularly visit theatres, museums and the local area for field studies. A successful school production is staged annually. There is an extensive range of sporting activities. Over one third of pupils, for example, take part in a well-organised programme of inter-school sports fixtures. They are supported by the strong, voluntary commitment of six members of staff.

60. Most subjects organise study support to help pupils with coursework and revision. Well- attended additional lessons are provided in English, mathematics and science. A good number of pupils attend the homework club and attend clubs in art, business education and modern foreign languages or take the opportunity to complete work using the school's ICT facilities at lunchtimes and after school.

61. Provision for careers education and guidance, which forms part of the tutorial programme, is of good quality. The course is organised effectively with an appropriate scheme of work and is taught successfully by the careers coordinator in Years 10-11. Visiting speakers enhance the course. Pupils participate in an "Industry Day" in Year 9 and visit local colleges in Year 10. Pupils receive a comprehensive range of thoughtful and impartial guidance, which is provided by the careers officers and supplemented by advice from trainee careers officers supervised by Manchester University. Guidance is sensibly focused on those in greatest need, but regular opportunities are provided for other pupils to receive support. All pupils in Year 11 have at least one interview with a careers officer.

62. Pupils in Year 9 are introduced to the careers library, which has a satisfactory stock of materials. The three computers in it enable pupils to access careers information, which is also available on the computer network in other parts of the school. All pupils participate for one week in a well-organised programme of work experience. Pupils are fully prepared for it, but opportunities are missed to strengthen pupils' knowledge of job applications, selection and workplace procedures. During the work placement, pupils are visited by a member of staff and complete a diary.

63. Links with the community are satisfactory. Pupils visit a local hospice, for instance, and are involved in charity fund-raising. Links with local sports clubs are strong. Close relationships are maintained with contributory primary schools to provide a smooth transition into secondary education. Pupils in Year 6 visit the school for "master classes" in mathematics, science and ICT, and a regular series of visits is made to primary schools by pastoral staff.

64. Good relationships are enjoyed with local colleges which are attended, for example, by pupils to complete courses for the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in food studies. Links with Manchester University are strong: the school regularly hosts the training of a group of up to 18 student teachers each year and supports a programme for trainee careers officers.

65. Since the last inspection, the three main weaknesses in the school's work with pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) have been well addressed. The present SEN coordinator has shown energy and imagination in improving a seriously weak position to its current good state. Work is very well organised, assessment is sharp and well recorded, relations with parents and external agencies are very good, links with subject departments are much improved and work is soundly matched to the differing needs of pupils. The school had come to grips with the old national SEN Code and is well on target to assimilate the new one. The main deficiency remaining is the very poor accommodation for both pupils and staff and the lack of easy access to ICT. The present accommodation is overcrowded, poorly maintained and unacceptably lacking in privacy for review meetings.

66. The quality of work for pupils with special educational needs is sound across the curriculum, except in RE. The quality of provision in the two pivotal subjects of English and mathematics is good. The English department, for example, uses its literacy strategy thoughtfully to support SEN work and takes its full share of responsibility for pupils' assessment and recording. The quality of work done with pupils who have severe learning difficulties is very good overall: it is skilled, carefully planned and systematic. There is, however, too little specialist teacher time available to support the SEN work that has to be delegated to learning support assistants (LSAs).

67. The school's provision to meet the needs of pupils for whom English is an additional language is sound. The majority of work for the seven pupils who are classified as being at an early stage of learning English is undertaken effectively and sensitively through additional help in mainstream classes. The partnership of the English teaching with specialist help is flexibly applied, appropriately subtle and works well. A similar arrangement works effectively in science through, for example, the preparation of guidance and checklists for mainstream staff. These pupils make good progress.

68. The *Excellence in Cities* project to support gifted and talented pupils is at an early stage of implementation and is, in part, constrained by external requirements and expectations. The work undertaken is generally sound, largely through adapted and enrichment activities for individual pupils. The timetable of activities at whole-school level is still being constructed, but little has been put in place. The process of identifying pupils requires further refinement: the criteria adopted have, for example, excluded several pupils who scored at least 120 on the *Cognitive Abilities Tests* in Year 7.

69. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is sound overall. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is, however, unsatisfactory. This is to some extent owing to insufficient RE being taught. Pupils are, however, given some insights into issues connected with different religions in their RE lessons and in daily tutorials and weekly assemblies. These include, for example, bible stories connected with *Thought for the Day*, the celebrations of Christmas and Eid and occasional presentations by religious groups. Pupils have opportunities to visit local churches. The two weekly assemblies held during the inspection were very well organised and presented and were of very high calibre. They incorporated the notion of bravery, especially in connection with persecution for religious beliefs. Pupils gave the topic their serious attention and were clearly moved by the presentation.

70. Pupils experience elements of spirituality in some of their daily lessons – in particular in art, where they learn to appreciate beauty through balance and form in their own work and in their studies of major artists of the Western art tradition; they also study arts from Aboriginal and African cultures. In music, pupils experience the beauty of, for instance, combined sounds, when they compose and perform pieces on tuned percussion instruments and in their choral part-singing. The promotion of spirituality in other subjects of the curriculum is light and the overall aesthetic weakness of the school's site gives little lift to the spirit. The school does not meet the legal requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

71. Moral education is promoted well. In the weekly assemblies, RE and PSE, firm moral messages are given to pupils. These are reinforced by staff, who have a deliberate policy of promoting good behaviour and conduct in a positive, explanatory way: pupils who misbehave are firmly but quietly dealt with and are encouraged to reflect upon the implications of their conduct for their own development as well as on the rights of others around them. There is a system of rewards and sanctions that is made very clear to pupils. The school puts a strong emphasis on awarding merits and credits which give pupils a chance to win prizes for diligent effort.

72. Pupils study and reflect on moral issues in lessons. In some subjects – as, for example, art – the calm and industrious ethos of the department allows pupils to experience the satisfaction of work and study for its own sake. In art, ICT and music pupils are taught to respect equipment, instruments and work on display. In history they study the moral implications of the Reformation, the politics of Northern Ireland and the Holocaust.

73. Provision for pupils' social development is satisfactory overall, with some good features. The school is an orderly community that allows pupils to socialise freely. There is a good range of extracurricular activities which enable pupils to form a wide range of friendships. These include a good variety of sports activities in which about one third of the school takes part. Sports activities include winter cricket practice, girls' football and badminton. The music department runs two choirs and an evening orchestra. This latter activity, together with a number of others, is open to adults from the local community. A number of "drop-in" clubs offer activities that foster pupils' interests and provide, for some, an alternative venue to the outdoor spaces. The range of social opportunities for pupils is further extended through the organisation of day and residential visits which include geography field trips, visits abroad in connection with the learning of modern foreign languages and an important residential visit for pupils in Year 7.

74. Pupils' social development is not, however, enhanced by the physical environment of the school. Whilst there are some newly created and relatively attractive buildings and outdoor spaces, many parts of the site are drab and ugly. In particular, the entrance and reception areas are unattractive and unwelcoming. There are no designated social spaces for pupils (with the exception of a limited facility for pupils in Year 11) and the arrangements for lunch do not allow enough time for recreation or full participation in activities. Toilets for pupils are in an unacceptable state.

75. Pupils enjoy some opportunities to exercise responsibility. These include duties as prefects for older pupils and duties on the reception desk for all. In their daily lessons, pupils regularly help with the setting out and storing of equipment. Within subjects, pupils benefit socially from their work in pairs and groups, especially in mathematics, science, music and PE. Pupils contribute to displays of graphics in the local Town Hall and, in connection with design and technology, visit the Manchester Science Museum. Social interaction with pupils who have special educational needs (and particularly those with hearing impairment) is very good.

76. Pupils' cultural development is promoted satisfactorily. In RE, for example, pupils from the Bangladeshi community share their traditions with white pupils. At Eid and Christmas time, greeting cards are exchanged. Bangladeshi pupils have also made presentations, as part of staff training, in order to raise awareness of those issues that affect their integration into both the school and the wider community. Visiting speakers have included a newly arrived person from Bangladesh. The school recently promoted an African arts day.

77. Within subjects, pupils learn, for example, about the lives of scientists and study the implications of the use of mercury in the local industry of hat-making. In mathematics they also learn about famous mathematicians as well as studying aspects such as symmetry in Asian designs. In both art and music, pupils study the arts from a wide range of cultures, including Africa and Asia. Foods from different parts of the world are sampled and studied in design and technology. Pupils may join the *Student Forum*, where they make visits to places of cultural interest and study issues such as those dealt with by Amnesty International.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

78. The school has developed a very strong framework for the pastoral care of its pupils. This is led by a deputy headteacher and a very committed and capable group of heads of school and year heads, who are well supported by individual form tutors. This aspect of the school's work is given high priority by senior managers and provides a secure and welcoming environment in which pupils can work.

79. The school's health and safety committee, which reports to the governing body on relevant whole-school issues and policies, is reviewing all aspects of policy and implementing these on a priority basis. The documentation relating to this work, however, is not adequate, because it does not give a clear, audited picture of the overall state of health and safety in the school. The condition of pupils' toilets is unacceptably poor and the lack, for example, of soap and paper in them presents a substantial risk to pupils' health – as well as being provision at variance with civilised standards. The medical room is not adequate to provide for pupils' needs. During the inspection, too, unnecessary hazards were observed that require continual vigilance – such as gravel on paved paths in the vicinity of the recently completed buildings.

80. The school has effective policies to promote good attendance and behaviour and to eliminate bullying. For the most part, these policies are successfully implemented. Staff communicate and cooperate well with one another and with other staff, such as the Education Welfare Officer, in relation to pupils' welfare and discipline. Formal arrangements for Child Protection are soundly and sensitively managed.

81. There is a good range of curricular provision for personal and social education (PSE) across the school. This programme is generally well taught, by a specialist group of teachers, through the use of imaginative and engaging teaching methods. There is also a weekly session of tutorial work provided for all pupils. The coordination of these programmes, which have developed independently, is poorly managed.

82. The school offers good support and guidance for the personal and academic development of individual pupils. For pupils needing additional support, particularly during their GCSE courses, staff offer an effective mentoring scheme. This has been carefully monitored to assess its effectiveness: there is strong evidence that it is not only well liked by pupils and staff, but has made a significant contribution to raising pupils' attainment. The recently appointed Learning Mentor works on an individual basis with pupils who find difficulty in taking advantage of what the school offers. The school nurse offers a limited period of personal counselling during her allocated time in the school. Overall, however, the school has a limited capacity of earmarked time and expertise to provide specialist counselling for those pupils who need support additional to that provided by their tutors. The school provides suitable programmes of study for pupils with statements of special educational need that conform with the requirements of those statements.

83. The school's assessment policy is presently under review. The coordinator is working with each subject department towards producing a policy that is both specific to subjects and common to the whole school. The developing policy includes the recording of assessment data, reporting to parents and, most importantly, the accuracy of teachers' assessments and the analysis and use of assessment data.

84. Within subject departments current procedures for assessing individual pupils' work are good overall. There are very good features in some subjects. In English, art, and design and technology, for example, pupils' work is very carefully marked in order to make clear to them how it can be improved. In ICT most aspects of assessment are very good: this department has developed an excellent computerised system that enables pupils' work to be very carefully monitored in fine detail. There are weaknesses, however, in modern foreign languages. In Years 7-9 in French, pupils' work is poorly marked and one single grade for the three languages is given at the end of the key stage; this assessment does not represent accurately pupils' relative strengths or weaknesses in any of the three languages of French, German or Spanish. Assessment in RE is poor in all aspects: this weakness is directly connected to the overall poor provision for the subject.

85. In Years 7-9, assessments in most subjects relate satisfactorily overall to National Curriculum levels. The school is, however, seeking ways to help some staff to assess these levels more accurately and with greater confidence. In Years 10-11, assessments are closely linked to the requirements of external examinations and, as a consequence, give clear indications of the progress of pupils as well as providing targets for improvement. Some teachers have long experience of assessing work for national examinations, both within the school and at national level.

86. Although many departments use their assessment data to monitor pupils' work and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching, the school does not have a coherent system for the collation and use of the same key academic data across departments. Consequently, it cannot assess accurately the attainment and progress of all pupils across Years 7-11, nor can it evaluate precisely enough the performance of the whole school. For example, the school has not formally and coherently identified the reasons why its recent overall academic performance has been good.

87. The school does not keep copies of annual reports to parents, although a few reports were brought back into school by pupils for perusal during the inspection. Reports are not presented in a common format, and there is no clear and consistent way in which levels and grades are shown. The written comments are, overall, far too general, concentrating heavily on attitudes and encouragement. As a consequence, the reports do not give a clear indication to pupils or parents of children's attainment and progress or specify exactly what action pupils need to take to improve their work. In some of the examples seen, subject reports were missing. Sometimes the distinction is not immediately clear between work that pupils have covered and their achievement.

88. *Records of Achievement* give a helpful indication of pupils' academic progress as they move through the school and are finally completed in Year 11. These records also include pupils' evaluation of their own progress and show personal achievements outside the taught curriculum. In the samples seen, however, there were fewer certificates than usually found. The school's assessment procedures and practice for pupils with special educational needs are good. The quality of *Individual Education Plans* (IEPs) is much improved since 1997 and is now of a high standard. They are appropriate to the new SEN Code and are generally well used across the curriculum.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

89. The school continues to work hard at implementing its commitment to involve parents closely in the education of their children. The return rate of the pre-inspection questionnaire seeking parents' views about the school was encouragingly higher than at the last inspection. The responses indicated that parents hold the school in high regard for what it offers and achieves for their children. They are particularly pleased with the school's teaching, its approachability and management, the expectations the school promotes for its pupils and the progress their children make. These views are strongly supported by the findings of the

inspection, as shown (for instance) by the good progress that pupils make and the results they achieve whilst at the school.

90. The school has continued to improve since the last inspection and the increasing over-application for the number of places available at the school suggests that the school's reputation has grown even stronger. Although the large majority of parents returning the questionnaire held the school in high regard, a significant minority felt that the school did not work closely enough with parents or keep parents well informed about their children's progress. The school has in place sound links with its contributory primary schools: the school's teachers, for example, visit local primary schools to meet the incoming pupils. The home-school agreement, signed also by pupils, is a contract that the school takes seriously – as is conveyed to parents at the specifically designated Contract Evening. The agreement is renewed when pupils move into Year 10.

91. Parents are provided with a fair range of information about the school. This includes such items as a prospectus, homework timetable, school policies (as, for example, on attendance and behaviour) and an evening for parents on *Preparation for Examinations*. The school holds the usual range of parents' consultative evenings and a weekly newsletter is now sent from the headteacher to parents, via pupils, every Monday. The school fosters links with parents through such means as family ICT sessions, sports activities, a summer numeracy school and help with literacy. In contrast, it does not provide an adequate range of written curricular information, especially about the content of subjects studied in Years 7-9. Its website is out of date and does not provide parents with an adequate range of information about the school.

92. The school has good links with parents who have little English. A bilingual member of staff is available to assist parents wishing to contact the school or whilst attending parents' evenings. In conjunction with other members of staff or form tutors, she makes home visits, as required. In addition, one governor is a leading member of the local ethnic community and serves on the Bangladeshi Welfare Association.

93. Children's progress is communicated to parents through annual reports and parents' evenings. These are usefully supplemented in Years 10 and 11 by brief, interim reports. As noted earlier, however, the full annual reports are too variable in presentation and insufficiently specific overall about pupils' attainment and progress. The school is very active in contacting parents about any concerns that may arise.

94. A particular strength of the school is its very close involvement with the parents or carers of pupils with special educational needs. It works closely with them, for example, to support and review pupils' progress and in the setting of targets for future improvement. The school has also run parenting classes as well as offering guidance on how parents can help their children with, for example, numeracy, reading and spelling strategies. Links with external agencies are strong.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

95. The school has a set of broad and relevant objectives for pupils' education and development. Its aims and values have been appropriately enhanced, so as to reflect its identity as a technology school. In addition to the specific goals relating to this feature of the school, significant emphasis is placed on the importance of access to education and inclusiveness for all, and on the creation of a climate of positive relationships. To a very large extent, these aims are successfully and commendably achieved in the daily life of the school.

96. The recently retired headteacher had, over many years, established a secure and admired place for the school within the community. In the last few years this has been matched by an impressive improvement in pupils' attainment by the end of Year 11. Since her appointment at the beginning of 2002, the current headteacher has taken the opportunity to review overall policies and priorities, whilst ensuring the retention and consolidation of the high standards and positive ethos which have characterised the school. She has also made a start on bringing systems and roles together, so that there are clear lines of responsibility and accountability amongst senior staff. This fresh look at how the school is managed has been welcomed by staff, who have shown themselves ready to give full support to senior management during this period of transition.

97. Existing structures and systems have achieved much. The school does not, however, have in place a coherent and comprehensive range of essential management information, including that about pupils' attainments and progress. Such a system is required to allow the school to respond speedily and effectively to current and future demands, to understand its strengths and weaknesses accurately and to observe precisely trends in its activities. In some other respects there has, at times, been a lack of overall vision and coherence in the school's rapid development. The recent building programme, for example, has provided needed additional space for the school, but the lack of a library-space suitable for a school of this size and the continued existence of some very poor accommodation indicate limitations to date in the overall approach to planning.

98. Senior staff make a very positive and effective contribution to many areas of the school's life. Their work has recently become more sharply focused, with clear role definitions and a greater sense of their authority to operate as a senior management team. The quality and effectiveness of leaders of subject and pastoral areas range from very good to satisfactory, but are good overall. These leaders play a significant role in the effective management and direction of the school and have had a clear impact on the recent improvement in pupils' attainment. The school's pattern of communications and formal meetings is clear and soundly based. It gives a suitable opportunity for staff at all levels to have an influence on the development of the school's policies.

99. The governing body brings a high level of local support and commitment to the work of the school. Governors, ably led by an active and well-informed chair, scrutinise policies and plans with care. They make an effective contribution to the school's development through their enthusiastic involvement in the life and work of the school. The governing body has not, however, ensured that statutory requirements are met for the provision of collective worship and the teaching of RE.

100. The school's new Performance Management system has been appropriately launched and developed. There is, in addition, further monitoring of teaching and learning by the senior team and some heads of department. The headteacher has signalled her commitment to the central importance of the quality of teaching and learning by herself observing all school staff teach within her first term of service.

101. The school has a widely based system of planning for future improvement, in which staff and governors play a full part. The current school improvement plan is well framed, has a realistic number and range of targets and contains appropriate costings and success criteria. The headteacher has already moved to identify further areas for improvement in this good planning process, so that the school's longer-term goals can be carefully monitored and implemented.

102. The school's financial management and planning are good and support its educational priorities effectively. The deficit in the budget at the time of the last inspection has been paid off and the school now appropriately carries forward a small surplus. The governing body is well informed about the school's spending patterns. The expertise and experience of individual governors are used to good advantage by the school. Governors are prepared to take the initiative on financial matters and to bring forward ideas about future spending patterns.

103. Financial management and administration are well managed by a team comprising the headteacher, a very efficient business manager and the bursar. The business manager, who has a very clear understanding of the school's financial situation, is a member of the senior management team and the governing body. These roles mean that there are close and effective links between governors and the school. Day-to-day financial administration is carefully monitored by the bursar and the business manager. They have, for example, established very clear guidelines for spending by heads of department. The most recent external audit of the school's finances raised only a few minor issues, to which the school responded immediately and appropriately.

104. The school has made effective use of specific funds and grants. Funds from the *Excellence in Cities* initiative have, for instance, been used to employ a coordinator, and to support the programme, for gifted and talented pupils. The proportion of the school's expenditure on staff training has risen considerably since the time of the last inspection and is now above average. This area of spending is closely linked to both the

priorities set out in the school's improvement plan and to the training needs of individuals identified through performance management. Other specific grants and funds are used appropriately – as, for example, in the use of funds for newly qualified teachers, who are well supported during their first year of teaching.

105. The school makes satisfactory use of such new technologies as e-mail and the Internet. The school website, however, is poor in quality and does not provide much information of use or interest to parents. The school's overall use of electronic systems is modest.

106. When purchasing services, the school takes the concept of best value into full account. It is, for example, examining the current catering contract with a view to establishing the full cost of running the system and to see whether a more beneficial scheme might be found. The employment of a site manager to carry out small maintenance work is beneficial financially to the school; the school also sells this grounds maintenance service to local primary schools.

107. The proportion of the school's budget spent on teaching staff is broadly average, a lower proportion than at the time of the last inspection. The provision of teachers is good and almost all lessons are taught by specialists. In the small number of lessons where the teachers are not specialists, there is no detrimental effect on pupils' learning. The school now has a coordinator for special educational needs, the lack of which was identified as a weakness at the last inspection. There are, however, insufficient qualified, specialist teachers for pupils with special educational needs. Teachers spend a below average proportion of their time in teaching. The ratio of pupils to teachers is more favourable than usually seen.

108. There is sufficient technical support except in art. The administrative and clerical staff provide good support for the teaching staff on a broadly average number of hours per week in total.

109. There is a very good system of induction to the work of the school for teachers new to teaching. Teachers being trained in the school, on both the Initial Teacher Training scheme and the Graduate Teacher scheme, are very well supported. The school has very substantial links with its partner institutions. This support, together with the overall good quality of the teaching in the school, makes it an effective provider of teacher training. Several of the current newly qualified teachers were trained in the school.

110. Most subjects have sufficient accommodation. Although there has been some new building since the time of the last inspection, much of the school's accommodation is poor in quality and in some cases unsuitable for its purpose. Some rooms are too small for the groups using them – as, for example, in English, science and graphics. Current building work promises to alleviate some of the problems in science. Pupils' progress in drama is limited by the lack of adequate drama facilities. The rooms used for teaching pupils with special educational needs are of an unacceptably low quality: for example, the area is too small and lacks adequate space for private interviews. One design and technology room is also used as a storeroom for scenery from school productions and for equipment, creating a potentially hazardous environment.

111. The "mobile" classrooms are in poor condition. The one used for history and RE, for example, has plaster peeling from the ceiling. The facilities for PE are very poor. The gymnasium leaks and smells musty, and the toilets and changing rooms near the gymnasium are in a state of disrepair and cannot be used. New building has resulted in a geography room with no natural light or ventilation and two history rooms with very little natural light and poor ventilation. The accommodation for music has improved a little since the last inspection, although the main music room is too small and another room is also used for storing instruments.

112. The state of the toilets, a concern raised by both parents and pupils, is a disgrace and a health hazard. Although some toilets for pupils' use have been improved recently, during the week of the inspection many had no seats or broken seats, no soap or toilet paper and broken doors. The school rightly has spending on major improvement work on toilets as one of its high priorities.

113. The site is a mixture of attractive areas and some that are dull and depressing. The entrance to the school is poorly signed, unwelcoming and unstimulating. Inside the school the overall state of decoration is poor, and in many areas there are broken or missing ceiling tiles and flaking paint. There are some

attractive seating areas outside for pupils to use at breaks and lunchtimes, but there are no social areas indoors for pupils in Years 7-10. Many paths are uneven and potentially hazardous.

114. The spending on learning resources is below average, although it has risen since the time of the last inspection. The provision of resources is, however, generally good, although there are some out-of-date textbooks in French and the history department does not have sufficient good textbooks for the lowest attainers in Years 7-9.

115. The school's Technology School status has led to increased spending on ICT facilities. The number of centrally provided computers is much better than average and the school has a spending plan to ensure an adequate replacement programme. There are, however, few laptop computers for pupils to use in those classrooms without computers and a very small number of interactive whiteboards. These aspects represent low provision for a technology school. The provision of ICT in departments is unsatisfactory in history, modern foreign languages, RE and for pupils with special educational needs. In these areas there are insufficient up-to-date computers available for pupils to use. There are firm plans to ensure modern foreign languages has good provision within the next few months. Access to centrally provided ICT facilities is not easy for geography, history, modern foreign languages, PE and RE and for pupils with special educational needs.

116. At the time of the inspection the school did not have a library. A room designated as the learning resource centre has recently been completed, but is much too small to provide an adequate space for books and computers and for pupils to work in. The school has not given sufficient thought to the purpose of a learning resource centre and to whether this designated area is likely to be adequate or suitable for that purpose.

117. Overall, however, taking into account the good quality of education provided and pupils' good progress from Year 7 to Year 11, set alongside the school's level of income and expenditure, the school gives good value for money.

PROVISION FOR PUPILS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT

118. The resource base for pupils with a hearing impairment that is located at the school forms the local education authority's provision for its secondary-aged pupils with a hearing impairment. There are currently just three pupils in the department, in Years 7, 9 and 10. All have a statement of special educational need that mainly centres on the development of linguistic skills associated with hearing impairment. No pupil currently attending the resource base relies entirely on the use of signing as a means of communication. When operating to capacity, the resource base can provide support for 12 pupils.

119. Pupils take appropriate, accredited courses (including GCSE) and achieve good success in them. The standard of the three pupils' work is similar to that of pupils of the same age in mainstream education. For example, during a science lesson on revising about sound, a hearing-impaired pupil in Year 9 understood the meaning and function of an oscilloscope and could communicate with his classmates and to his teacher his knowledge and understanding of amplitude and pitch.

120. On occasions, hearing-impaired pupils make better progress and achieve a higher standard than their classmates because of the high quality, specialist support they receive to enable them to participate fully in mainstream lessons. In a Year 10 English lesson, for example, the support teacher ensured that during a role-play activity, in which pupils took turns to pursue job applications through making telephone contacts with employers, the pupil with a hearing impairment was fully aware of the content and purpose of the lesson. As a result, she worked conscientiously with a classmate and sustained a higher level of interest in her work than many others in the class. This resulted in the pupil being able to show a more informed and mature interpretation of the learning objective for the lesson.

121. The local authority's philosophy is to enable pupils to work alongside their mainstream peers as much as possible, whilst giving focused support for their specific, individual needs in the resource base. These needs are mainly associated with the development of linguistic skills, including knowledge of

vocabulary and the application of grammatical structures: pupils' standards in these aspects are often below those of pupils of the same age who do not have a hearing impairment. To help pupils to improve, the resource-base staff support them with their current work and prepare them to benefit from future lessons by being tutored individually beforehand. The balance of support offered, assessed according to individual need, is generally very effective. A contributory factor to this effectiveness is the very generous provision of teachers and support assistants and the range of expertise they possess. The school's focus on ensuring that these pupils receive as full an education as other pupils is good.

122. The quality of teaching, including that in one-to-one support sessions, varies between satisfactory and very good, and is good overall. Where teaching is very good – such as in a design and technology lesson where Year 10 pupils were designing a brochure for an electronics company who are marketing a new mobile communications network – there are high expectations of pupils' effort, behaviour and presentation. Appropriate discussions reinforce and extend the pupils' knowledge and understanding of the subject and make pupils use and improve their thinking and intellectual skills. This process leads to substantial gains in learning and has a positive effect on pupils' attitudes; these are good and sometimes very good.

123. Relationships are very positive between adults and pupils. Where signing is used as a significant means of communication, the full discussion that takes place about the pupils' work enables them to think about how well they have worked and what they have learned. Where teaching is good – such as in a one-to-one support session where a Year 7 pupil worked with a learning support assistant revisiting aspects of science and PSE – tasks are challenging and the adult uses probing questions to assess the pupil's knowledge and understanding. Lessons are brisk and intensive, so that pupils keep on task. In all teaching a lot of discussion takes place, in order to help pupils to assimilate the incidental language that takes place within mainstream lessons.

124. Although no unsatisfactory lessons were observed, there are, on occasions, some weaknesses in the teaching provided by specialist staff: when assisting pupils in class, there is sometimes a reluctance on the part of support staff to allow pupils to demonstrate their independence and expectations are sometimes too low in one-to-one sessions. For example, a Year 9 pupil, revising food groups as part of preparation for the assessment tests at the end of Year 9, was asked to classify pictures of food items according to their most appropriate groups. Opportunities were, however, missed to reinforce the pupil's spelling, vocabulary and word recognition, and to encourage him to consolidate his learning through devising his own annotation of what he knew by the end of the lesson.

125. The policy of including pupils with hearing impairment in mainstream lessons is very good. Teachers have been provided with a range of training that has been very effective in raising their awareness of the needs of this group of pupils. This was observed in a Year 7 mathematics lesson, where the hearing-impaired pupil had no additional support, but made much better progress than the rest of the class, because the teacher ensured that she was confident about what she had to do and had the appropriate resources to complete the task independently. The teacher's management capitalised on the pupil's high level of self-motivation.

126. Staff in the resource base have devised a comprehensive and helpful policy and file of information that are instructive and easy to implement. Rarely do teachers fail to use aiding equipment properly or forget the need for these pupils to be seated where they can clearly see the teacher's lips. Pupils' classmates are also very aware of the needs of those who have hearing problems and are conscious of the need to wear the radio aid if necessary.

127. The quality of support from learning assistants is very good both in the department and in the mainstream setting. This is because they understand the specific needs of the pupils very well. They give appropriate help, when it is needed, but encourage independence. One member of staff also provides a good deaf role model for the pupils. Signing is very good and is effective for pupils who use this as a significant means of communication. The school has signing clubs for pupils and members of staff. The pupils' performance of carols through signing was recalled as a memorable contribution to the Christmas celebrations.

128. The resource base supports pupils well to enable them to benefit from the mainstream curriculum. Pupils do not study a modern foreign language, so as to gain the time for individual support. Staff in the resource base plan pupils' work with mainstream teachers and, where necessary, adapt the curriculum to help the hearing-impaired pupils. This is done mostly through providing appropriate communication by the use of sign-supported English.

129. Staff in the resource base write individual learning plans for every subject that each pupil studies. These are made available to subject teachers, shared with both pupils and their parents and reviewed every half term. These pupils also have individual education plans (IEPs) which are devised by the Access and Inclusion Manager of the school. The targets in these are more general and are reviewed twice a year. The quality of pupils' records is very high. They provide comprehensive information about the standard of work pupils attain and their rate of progress over time. Hearing-impaired pupils are encouraged to participate fully in extracurricular activities alongside their classmates.

130. There are well established links with employers and colleges of further education that provide suitable employment and training opportunities. The unit, however, plays too limited a role in preparing pupils for life after school and for entering a "hearing world". There are too few opportunities made available for these pupils to develop skills and confidence, especially in their use of specialist equipment and modern technology – such as becoming familiar with text phones, text direct and text talk.

131. Pupils' statements are reviewed regularly. There is good liaison with outside agencies, including audiological services. Both parents and pupils are readily encouraged to contribute their views and opinions at annual review meetings. The "open door" policy of the resource-base staff promotes good relationships amongst all those involved. This policy helps pupils to understand the importance of taking more responsibility for themselves as they get older. As a result, their skills of independence improve and they readily accept responsibility for maintaining and caring for their own equipment.

132. Raising standards and enabling pupils to achieve their full potential are priorities in the resource base, and additional revision is planned to help the pupils studying for examinations. The department applies for special consideration for hearing-impaired pupils taking GCSE examinations and the Year 9 national tests, to enable them to have time to complete their work and so adequately reflect their real attainment.

133. The management of the resource base is good. All staff work very well as a team. Clear information is given to teachers to help them to understand the needs of hearing-impaired pupils within mainstream classes. Good procedures are in place to sustain links with all subject teachers through the maintenance of very good quality notes made at the end of lessons. These notes indicate how well pupils achieved and how they may need more help.

134. The staff of the unit have a wide range of experience and expertise between them. There are not, however, any formal procedures in place for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning provided by the resource-base staff. As a result, individuals are not certain of their strengths or the areas in which they need to improve. Performance management has recently been put in place by the local authority, but no classroom observations have yet taken place. No monitoring of progress made towards the first set of performance targets has been undertaken.

135. The accommodation is satisfactory. The room allocated to the resource base is small, but adequate for its purpose. Both it and the school's hall have been fitted with a loop system. Resources are satisfactory, but not well organised owing to the lack of designated storage space. It is not possible to make a judgement about improvement since the last inspection, as the resource base was not reported on separately in 1997. Overall, although the resource base is significantly under-subscribed and, therefore, over-staffed, it provides a good facility for hearing-impaired pupils of secondary age.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

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

- (a) ensure that the monitoring and evaluation of the school's effectiveness are enhanced by
- the formulation and systematic use of a comprehensive information system about the performance of all key aspects of the school's work; and
 - the systematic collation and use of the same key academic data across all departments, in order to assess accurately both the attainment and progress of individual pupils across Years 7-11 and the performance of the whole school (## 11 31 86 97).
- (b) establish a clear and realistic plan for the usage and further improvement of the school's accommodation to ensure, *inter alia*, that
- the unacceptably poor state and servicing of most toilets for pupils is improved substantially and as a high priority;
 - a plan is formulated to raise the overall aesthetic quality of the school;
 - the drab and worn standard of some of the other accommodation is brought up to the good standard of the best;
 - the planned usage and location of the new "library" is re-examined, in order to create a suitable centre for learning resources;
 - the accommodation and facilities for PE are overhauled;
 - the department for special educational needs has appropriate accommodation;
 - the signing around the school is clear and harmonised; and
 - risks to health and safety are adequately audited and acted upon (## 26 74 79 97 110-113 116).
- (c) monitor and audit the use of information and communication technology (ICT) across all subjects of the curriculum and exploit its benefits to a greater degree in English, history, religious education (RE) and special educational needs (## 22 277).
- (d) ensure that statutory requirements are met for
- sufficient teaching of RE to pupils in Years 7-11 (a weakness identified at the last inspection, but poorly addressed since); and
 - a daily act of collective worship for all pupils, as part of the school's strategy to improve its unsatisfactory provision for pupils' spiritual development (## 53 66 69-70 99).
- (e) improve the quality and range of information to parents by
- providing reports that are clear and specific about children's attainment and progress; and
 - providing detailed written curricular information (and especially in Years 7-9) about the subjects and courses that pupils will study (## 87 90-91 93 105).

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 20 24 32 40 42-43 47 52 54 58 62 66 68 79 82 84 107 108 114 and in subject sections.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	218
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	94

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	9	40	113	55	1	0	0
Percentage	4	18	52	25	0.5	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1036
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	305

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	30
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	127

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	167

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	25
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	13

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	8.9
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.9
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for 2000-2001.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	100	103	203

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	45	51	51
	Girls	80	63	51
	Total	125	114	102
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	62 (57)	56 (58)	50 (51)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	22 (17)	33 (29)	18 (18)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	50	51	48
	Girls	80	68	58
	Total	130	119	106
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	64 (71)	59 (59)	52 (52)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	21 (26)	35 (29)	23 (19)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

Percentages in brackets refer to 2000.

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
	2001	100	100	200

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	49	90	100
	Girls	56	90	99
	Total	105	180	199
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	53 (45)	90 (92)	99 (98)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

Percentages in brackets refer to 2000.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	40.4 (34.8)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

Figures in brackets refer to 2000.

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied:	School:	62	100
	Interm-Part 1		
	National		n/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	4
Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	167
Chinese	0
White	862
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	7	1
Chinese	0	0
White	30	0
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)	67.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.5

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	14
Total aggregate hours worked per week	436

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.1
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	21.5
Key Stage 4	20.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
	£
Total income	2,856,970
Total expenditure	2,801,339
Expenditure per pupil	2,694
Balance brought forward from previous year	37,271
Balance carried forward to next year	92,902

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	17
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	20
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	2
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1036
Number of questionnaires returned	251

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	37	53	6	1	3
My child is making good progress in school.	49	46	2	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	39	43	7	2	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	35	56	7	2	0
The teaching is good.	44	49	4	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	31	47	18	3	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	41	50	4	2	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	65	32	1	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	32	48	14	2	4
The school is well led and managed.	44	43	3	2	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	50	40	5	3	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	39	42	11	1	7

Other issues raised by parents

There were additional comments from parents on 13 of the questionnaires returned.

Amongst the positive points mentioned were:

- The good progress pupils make.
- Teachers work hard to encourage pupils and give them individual help.
- The school tries hard to work closely with parents and to resolve any problems they have.

Amongst the concerns expressed in questionnaires were:

- Occasional poor behaviour by a small minority of pupils.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES: YEARS 7-11

ENGLISH

Overall, the quality of provision in English is **very good**.

Strengths:

- the good quality of teaching, especially teachers' very high level of subject knowledge;
- the high calibre of departmental leadership and management;
- the overall amount of progress made by pupils in Years 7-11;
- the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C in GCSE English literature;
- the use of data to track pupils' attainment and progress.

Areas for improvement:

- the proportion of boys gaining an A*-C grade in GCSE English literature;
- pupils' speaking and listening;
- more use of ICT in English.

137. On entry to the school in Year 7, the proportion of pupils who have already reached the benchmark of Level 4 in the national tests in their primary schools has increased since 1998, but remains significantly below the national average overall. Whilst the proportion of pupils entering the school at the higher Level 5 has increased over the period 1998-2001, it has been inconsistently so and remains well below the national average overall.

138. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 have steadily improved over the period 1997-2001. In 1999, the proportion of pupils reaching at least Level 5 was above the national average. When compared with the attainment of pupils in schools with similar socio-economic circumstances, pupils' performance in this school was above the national group average in 2001. The attainment of both boys and girls was, however, slightly below the national average for their age-group over the period 1998-2001. Girls perform better than boys, but both boys and girls are close to the national averages for their respective sexes.

139. In GCSE English language in 2001, the proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C was close to, but slightly below, the national average. The proportion of A*-C grades obtained over the period 1998-2001 varied slightly, but was close to average overall. The proportion of pupils gaining either of the two highest (A* or A) grades over the same period was lower than the national average. The overall performance of girls in GCSE English language is much better than that of boys. The proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C in English literature was significantly above the national average in 2001.

140. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall standard in English is below the national average. The majority of pupils read effectively, using a range of approaches. They quickly retrieve information from texts and identify appropriate textual references to support a point of view. Pupils in a Year 7 class, for example, identified the sequence of statements within the *I have a dream* speech of Martin Luther King and considered thoughtfully whether the order of the statements could be changed without undermining the interpretation of the speech. In another Year 7 class that was beginning to work on the structure and organisation of discursive essays, pupils considered the importance of a word's context in determining its meaning.

141. Pupils in a Year 8 class reading Willy Russell's play, *Our Day Out*, recalled events or actions in the play, identified appropriate textual references and then provided explanations. The rate of progress in this lesson was excellent, because the teacher used opportunities in discussion to deepen and extend pupils' statements. The teacher's style of questioning after pupils' initial answers probed their understanding carefully by the use of questions such as "What's wrong with that?" and "Tell me more about...".

142. In a Year 9 class, pupils used Key Stage 3 assessment criteria to identify Level 5 features, applied them to an example of writing and considered how improvements could be made. In another Year 9 class, pupils deepened their understanding of *Macbeth* significantly, as they considered the extent to which Macbeth is nervous in Act 2, Scenes 1 and 2.

143. Pupils regularly work in pairs or small groups to discuss language or literature. The enhancement of pupils' literacy skills is a very strong emphasis in the teaching of pupils in Years 7-9. In a Year 7 class, for instance, pupils identified words of comparison, such as "sunniest" in the sentence "It was the sunniest day of the year", using small whiteboards, before sharing their examples with the rest of the class.

144. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and English as an additional language, make good progress overall in Years 7-9. Teaching objectives from the *National Framework for Teaching English*, including those for word- and sentence-level activities, have been incorporated into the school's revised scheme of work for the subject. The national criteria for assessing English are shared with pupils and used to consider how their written work may be improved. The Progress Units for pupils who did not achieve Level 4 by the end of Year 6 in their primary schooling are systematically and well taught in Year 7.

145. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall level of attainment is average and most pupils make good progress. High-attaining pupils produce extended written work and argue persuasively in discussion. In the written work of less able pupils there is noticeably less evidence of analytical skill and of the facility to consider the effects of authors' use of language. In a Year 10 class of boys studying John Steinbeck's novel, *Of Mice and Men*, for example, pupils created a character diagram and then used information from the text to label it – as, for example, "Her hair hung like little rolled clusters, like sausages". This visual representation of pupils' knowledge and understanding of characters in the novel helps them to organise their learning as well as deepen their understanding. In Year 10 class, girls used small whiteboards to record quickly three characteristics of formal letters before going on to explain why, for instance, the use of the date is important in a letter. Pupils went on to read employment advertisements to identify key words or phrases that might subsequently enhance a letter of application – as, for instance, "passionate about..." or "team member".

146. Pupils' knowledge and understanding are very well developed in Year 11. Using a card- sorting and matching activity, pupils identify how the author of *Dancing Birds* uses language to influence or express emotion. In Year 11 class revising the key images in John Clare's poem, *First Love*, girls are helped to remember some of these images by creating "mind maps" of small illustrations that are subsequently labelled with a quotation from the poem. For example, a picture of a spring flower has the quotation, "her face, it bloomed like a spring flower" written against it.

147. Pupils' overall standard of writing is close to the national average by the end of Year 11. The structure, organisation and drafting of pupils' written assignments in Years 10 and 11 are sound. Most pupils ensure that they use appropriate textual references to provide good evidence of their knowledge of texts. The writing of the most able pupils is well presented, accurate and well expressed, with an understanding of the impact on the reader of their choice of words. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make good progress. Those who are gifted and talented generally progress soundly.

148. Pupils' attitudes to their learning are good throughout the school. Most pupils enjoy the subject, are well motivated towards their work and concentrate well in lessons. They respond well to the range of teaching strategies used in lessons that are carefully planned to encourage pupils' learning. Pupils work cooperatively in a range of small teaching groups and with their teachers. High expectations are consistently prominent in all lessons.

149. Teaching is good overall throughout Years 7-11. The specialist English teachers in the department have a very high level of subject knowledge and their sense of enthusiasm for their subject is communicated strongly in all lessons. Very well planned lessons in Years 7-11 incorporate clear objectives and suitable plenary activities. In Years 7-8 all lessons include interactive starters that focus on key literacy skills and are carefully structured to ensure that pupils make progress quickly. The national Key Stage 3 Strategy

planning for English is very well incorporated into the department's schemes of work. All teachers set high expectations for pupils, including those with special educational needs and those who have English as an additional language. Oral work is a regular feature of most lessons, although insufficient attention is given to the use of appropriate means of fostering extended, reflective and clearly expressed responses.

150. The study of English language and literature makes a substantial contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In order to ensure that this is consistently done, the department has listed materials and texts which contribute to pupils' development in these areas. Pupils read and reflect thoughtfully, for instance, on the use of language in Chinua Achebe's poem, *Vultures*, and the imagery contained in lines about the Holocaust. The department organises a range of extracurricular activities that include theatre visits.

151. The department is very ably and strongly led, with a clear sense of purpose. There are very good administrative and management systems in place to ensure the effective day-to-day running of the department. All staff take a very active role in the development of the department. Using a range of assessment data to identify attainment, including the Key Stage 2 national test results, the department has a rigorous method of tracking pupils' progress from Year 7 onwards.

152. The use of regular pupil reviews ensures that pupils receive well-targeted support. Departmental documentation and curricular planning are mostly of a very high standard. Planning for the subject incorporates the guidance contained in the Key Stage 3 National Strategy. Although drama is planned within English across Years 7-11, the school has insufficient information to show how progression in drama techniques and strategies is ensured.

153. Across other subjects in Years 7-11, pupils use a range of suitable reading approaches that include the skimming and scanning of texts. The overall standard of reading is satisfactory. Most pupils are fluent and competent readers who also understand what they have read. The overall standard of pupils' writing is close to average, although in geography and history particularly standards are below average. An above average standard of writing is often seen in business education and in information and communication technology. Good presentation is a particular feature of art, design and technology, RE and business education. The use of ICT within English is unsatisfactory overall. The overall standard of speaking is broadly average. Pupils listen attentively in most subjects.

154. **Media Studies** is taught in Years 10 and 11, and pupils are prepared for the GCSE examination. In the two lessons seen, teaching and learning were good in both year groups. Pupils make good progress. In Year 10, pupils use their existing knowledge of such features in "soap operas" as structure, characterisation, "cliffhangers" and general conventions to create their own versions. Pupils in Year 11 reviewed their knowledge of key words, as they considered how different newspapers represented Madonna – by, for example, journalistic use of such language as "...in her ruthless drive to amass a fortune by shamelessly purveying sex...".

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision for mathematics is **good**.

Strengths:

- the good progress pupils make by the time they leave school;
- the effectiveness of the teaching;
- the leadership and management of the subject.

Areas for improvement:

- teachers' questioning skills to enable pupils to work out more for themselves;
- the quality of marking pupils' work;
- more investigational work in Years 7-9, especially for high-attaining pupils.

155. At the end of Year 9 in 2001, the proportion of pupils who achieved either the basic or higher levels expected of 14 year olds in the national tests was below the national average. Based upon the average points scored by all pupils, the school's results were also below the national average for all schools, but were above average when compared with those of schools in similar social circumstances. The results of previous years show steady improvement since the last inspection in 1997, but during this period few pupils achieved the highest levels. The overall performance of girls and boys is very similar.

156. The proportion of pupils who achieved grades in the range A*-C in the GCSE examinations in 2001 was above the national average. A much smaller proportion of pupils than average achieved the highest grades (A* or A); the proportion who achieved grades A*-B was below average, whilst the proportion who achieved a grade in the A*-G range was above average. Overall, the trend in GCSE results is upwards: they have improved significantly since the last inspection, despite a dip in 2000. When compared with other schools in similar social circumstances, the school's GCSE results are well above average. Based upon the average grade achieved by all the pupils in the school who were entered for the examination, pupils made significantly better progress in mathematics than in many of their other subjects. Girls and boys do equally well.

157. By the end of Year 9 the standard of work of a larger than average proportion of pupils (more than half of them) is below that expected of 14 year olds. Many pupils work at a steady pace in lessons and, with help, make satisfactory progress towards completing successfully the work expected of them. Their attainment is limited by poor recall or insufficient understanding of earlier work and, equally, they are soon baffled, when familiar skills are required to be applied in unfamiliar contexts.

158. Pupils in the top sets make good progress in a broad range of arithmetic, algebra, geometry and data-handling. Many work with interest and enthusiasm and achieve high standards, especially in arithmetic, algebra and (to a lesser extent) geometry. These characteristics were evident in their attempts to design, and draw to scale, an area on which to hold an athletics competition containing a 400m track with eight lanes and places where field events such as the high jump, shot and discus are marked out. Given the necessary measurements required for such events, pupils worked in teams and set about the task with enthusiasm. Many achieved the lesson's objectives. Others were daunted by the magnitude of the task and needed help in breaking down each part of the task into pieces of mathematics that they could handle successfully. The work had the additional advantage of enabling pupils to see how mathematics is used and applied in real situations.

159. Low-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs in Year 9 make satisfactory progress overall – and occasionally good progress – in lessons. They benefit from much systematic teaching, employing visual ways of helping them to understand abstract ideas. One such set of pupils, for example, developed confidence in the recognition of common geometrical shapes by suitably paced questioning and discussion of a set of plastic shapes, putting an additional emphasis on their correct spelling. Pupils with English as an additional language are firmly integrated into the full range of sets and make sound progress.

160. The attainment of pupils on arrival at the school in Year 7 is well below average. During their first year in the school, they consolidate much of what they encountered at primary school and go on to extend their skills and knowledge towards the expected level with better understanding. The National Numeracy Strategy is firmly established and pupils' confidence in their ready recall of basic number facts and methods of mental calculation is improving. Low-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs use ICT well to consolidate their knowledge of basic number skills. Pupils in the top sets make good progress and quickly move on to the programmes of study appropriate for their stage of learning. For example, they use ICT to explore quite challenging aspects of geometry. Pupils in the middle sets make steady progress, especially when their learning is based on practical and visual activities.

161. In Year 8, pupils generally make steady, systematic progress during lessons and acquire a suitable range of the skills and techniques of the subject. Nevertheless, their attainment is still below what it should be. Pupils' lack of retention of earlier work often impedes their progress. By using imaginatively designed number activities in short bursts, however, pupils remain alert and develop both speed and accuracy in mental arithmetic. For example, a set of lower-attaining pupils enjoyed improving their response to quick-fire

questions put to one another, by each having cards on which were answers and questions of the type “I am 21, who is 7×5 ?”. Similarly, as a result of very good teaching and by using real data culled from newspapers and other sources, pupils in both middle and top sets were well motivated and improved their knowledge and understanding of ways of representing data to draw meaningful conclusions. Such methods of teaching are helping to raise pupils’ attainment.

162. By the end of Year 11, pupils’ attainment is average overall in the sense that about half of them achieve at least the standard expected in a GCSE grade C. Attainment has improved since the last inspection. Higher-attaining pupils, including some with English as an additional language, gain a good working knowledge of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, statistics and probability, and use these skills to solve successfully problems in everyday contexts. A few of these pupils show flair in completing extended investigations of mathematical problems. For example, one such problem, prepared as a piece of GCSE coursework, required pupils to investigate the greatest volume that can be enclosed by a rectangular piece of card, 36cm by 24cm, with open ends. By testing prisms with cross-sections of different shapes, pupils derived a general formula that led them to use sophisticated mathematical concepts and enabled them to establish that a cylinder gives the maximum volume.

163. Thorough and systematic teaching enables many pupils in the middle and lower sets to make good progress. They learn an appropriate range of skills and routines and apply them accurately in familiar situations. When the same skills are required in an unfamiliar context, however, they soon become confused. Equally, if required to state reasons for their (correct) answers, such pupils find it difficult to express them clearly. A significant proportion of pupils soon forget what they learn. These factors partly explain why more pupils do not achieve the grades expected of them. The lowest-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in a suitable range of basic skills in preparation for the foundation tier of the GCSE examination.

164. Pupils’ progress in Year 10 is good overall. Those in the top sets especially have gained from recently introduced approaches designed to improve their attainment. The highest-attaining pupils tackle GCSE problems at the level of grade A*, revealing high levels of mathematical insight. Two of these pupils, for instance, explained clearly how to obtain a good estimate of acceleration at any point on a velocity-time graph and also knew how to use this graph to estimate the distance travelled in a given time. Other pupils in the top set solve problems at the levels of GCSE grades A, B and C with varying degrees of confidence. A few pupils, for example, were hesitant in solving a problem that involved both trigonometry and algebra. They have another year, however, in which to develop such confidence.

165. Pupils in the middle and lower sets make good progress in developing sufficient understanding to enter for either the intermediate or foundation tiers of the GCSE examination. One set of pupils of average attainment, for instance, made good progress in sketching with reasonable accuracy the graphs of functions of the form $y = 3x + 2$. By thorough and systematic teaching, they readily identified it is a straight line of gradient 3, that cuts the y-axis at $y = 2$.

166. Pupils’ attitudes to the subject are almost always at least good and in about a quarter of lessons are very good. Pupils make a positive response to the teaching they receive and are cooperative in tackling the work they are required to do. A significant minority are too ready to admit defeat, however, and quickly ask for help. Most are willing, if not eager, to answer questions and respond well to encouragement. Almost all pupils work hard and productively, when practising routine skills and procedures. Most pupils take pride in writing their answers neatly, although a significant minority of pupils in the top sets present written work in an untidy manner. All too often, however, problems that have several stages in their solution are presented as a sequence of unexplained calculations and mathematically incorrect statements; these fail to convey pupils’ understanding, especially when the answer is wrong. At the time of the inspection, pupils in both Year 9 and Year 11 were making serious attempts to prepare for their forthcoming examinations.

167. Behaviour in lessons is almost entirely good (and often very good). Teachers work hard to maintain orderly classrooms: their vigilance and persistence are usually effective in containing minor disruptions by a few pupils. Pupils generally respect their teachers and respond positively to admonition. Most form constructive relationships with their peers and their teacher, and enjoy humorous exchanges. They

frequently help one another to clarify misunderstandings and work cooperatively in groups, sharing both ideas and tasks.

168. The quality of teaching is entirely competent and good in about two lessons in three; a small proportion is very good. If teachers were less keen to do much of the thinking for pupils and encouraged them to be more independent, then significantly more of the teaching could be very good. The National Numeracy Strategy has been successfully introduced in Year 7 and the methods of teaching advocated in it are helping to improve pupils' basic skills. Similar methods are being effectively introduced into Years 8 and 9. In Years 10-11, however, too many pupils lack the confident recall of basic number facts and strategies for efficient mental methods of calculation.

169. Teachers' good subject knowledge and their expectations of what pupils can do enable them to plan lessons with appropriate content and methods of teaching. Lesson plans often include appropriate modifications to match the different needs of pupils. In a lesson for pupils in Year 10, for example, alternative work with greater challenge was given to pupils who did not need to practise the routine skills of sketching straight-line graphs of linear functions as much as others in the set. The weakness identified in the last inspection of not enough work in using and applying mathematics has improved significantly.

170. Pupils practise skills and techniques frequently and effectively. A suitable emphasis is placed upon the spelling of mathematical terms correctly. Pupils learn to do the standard processes accurately – such as readily interchanging equivalent fractions, decimals and percentages. Practical work is used well to help pupils to understand abstract ideas, especially in geometry. Pupils use computers with greater frequency than in many schools to help them to learn more effectively. For example, pupils in a middle set in Year 9 followed the steps in a well-planned worksheet that guided their learning of geometrical transformations. In this lesson they learned how to describe the translation of a shape across the screen, using vector notation. Pupils were highly motivated and worked with great interest and concentration. More opportunities now exist than before for pupils to investigate mathematical problems that require them to decide on lines of enquiry, justify their thinking and hypotheses, and reach general conclusions from their working. Nevertheless, such methods of learning are not used often enough in Year 7-9, and especially with the gifted and talented pupils.

171. Many lessons include clear demonstrations and explanations of mathematical skills and techniques. Too often, however, such lessons miss opportunities for pupils to contribute to discussion and offer their own explanations or ideas in solving problems. In such lessons, teachers tell pupils the answers to questions and do the thinking for them, thus failing to develop pupils' confidence and independence to tackle problems without immediately resorting to their teacher for help.

172. The vigilance, patience and care that teachers put into the development of good relationships with their pupils, together with effective strategies for handling misdemeanours and the judicious use of humour, ensure a good climate for learning and are a significant strength of the teaching. The pace of lessons is usually finely judged. Lessons often begin with several quick-fire questions that consolidate pupils' knowledge of earlier work or improve their confidence in mental methods of calculation. The main part of lessons is conducted at a pace that allows pupils to absorb new work. Teaching resources, especially ICT, are used effectively. Classroom support assistants are deployed to the maximum benefit of pupils; those who provide support to the pupils with hearing difficulties are particularly helpful in ensuring that such pupils take a full part in lessons.

173. During lessons, teachers make good assessments of pupils' understanding and quickly clarify misunderstandings. Formal, written assessments are made with sufficient frequency. Pupils' work is marked with reasonable regularity and brief, encouraging comments are occasionally added. Rarely, however, do additional comments challenge pupils or indicate how they might improve, and the mark or grade awarded does not distinguish between pupils' attainment and the effort they put into their achievement. Each pupil's progress is tracked and a target for their level of attainment is identified. Homework is set in accordance with the timetable and usually consists of an appropriate consolidation of earlier work.

174. The department is well led and efficiently managed. Pupils' performance is tracked from entry into the school and is beginning to be analysed for indications of any weaknesses in teaching. Planning for improvement includes appropriate targets, but lacks specific criteria against which their success can be evaluated. The department has successfully completed the training of a graduate entry to mathematics teaching. Progress since the last inspection is good: standards have risen significantly, the good quality of teaching has been at least maintained and the leadership of the department continues to be effective. The subject is well placed to continue raising pupils' achievements.

175. Pupils' general standard of numeracy is good and supports their learning in other subjects effectively. In both science and ICT, for example, pupils handle numbers with confidence: they complete appropriate calculations accurately, use sensible degrees of accuracy and generally manipulate the formulae they meet competently – such as when relating speed with distance travelled and time taken. In science, art, and design and technology, pupils estimate and measure with reasonable accuracy and know the correct abbreviations for the units of measurement they use. Most pupils use calculators appropriately; very few use them to perform simple calculations that should be done mentally. In science, design and technology, geography, history, ICT and the GCSE projects in PE, pupils draw and interpret appropriate graphs and, where necessary, recognise relationships between the variables. Pupils are generally competent in using computers to represent data in a variety of graphical forms. Pupils' knowledge of common shapes and their properties is used well in art and in design and technology.

SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision for science is **good**.

Strengths:

- pupils' GCSE results have improved significantly since the last inspection;
- the good quality of teaching;
- good departmental leadership and management;
- the quality of the support materials used in Years 10-11;
- pupils' strong interest in the subject and their good behaviour in lessons.

Areas for improvement:

- ensuring that pupils know how well they are doing.

176. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, their attainment in the subject is well below the national average. The overall entry standard has risen in the last four years in line with, but at no more than, the national trend. The proportion of pupils who enter the school already at the higher Level 5 is only just over half the national rate.

177. Over the last four years, pupils' overall attainment in the national tests at the end of Year 9 has remained below the national average. In 2001, the proportion of pupils reaching either Level 5 or Level 6 was well below the national average. Usually, both boys and girls do equally well in these tests, although boys edged slightly ahead in 2001. When compared with the performance of pupils in schools with similar socio-economic circumstances, this school's results in 2001 were on a par with the group average.

178. Most pupils in Years 10-11 follow the national pattern of taking GCSE double-award science. In most years approximately half the pupils are entered for the higher-tiered GCSE papers. The school has adopted the modular-award approach where pupils take 12 units, each followed by multiple-choice testing and a final examination at the end of two years. About ten per cent of pupils, many with identified special educational needs, follow a Certificate of Achievement course. Grades in GCSE have improved from well below the national average in 1998 to the national average figure of 47 per cent of Year 11 pupils in 2001 gaining a grade in the range A*-C. Overall, science results show clear improvement. Pupils tend to perform as well in science as they do in their other subjects. When compared with those in schools serving similar socio-economic localities, these results represent a very good achievement by the department.

179. In most years pupils make good progress, because their attainment in GCSE is relatively higher than what they attained earlier on in the school. The most able pupils usually achieve top grades. In most years girls have done better overall than boys in GCSE examinations, but in 2001 the reverse was true.

180. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall level of attainment is below average. In several Year 9 lessons seen on the topic of sound, for example, pupils appreciated the differences between frequency and amplitude, but some had difficulty linking these to volume and pitch. In a Year 9 chemistry lesson, pupils in top sets selected the most appropriate separation technique for a range of different solutions and mixtures in different circumstances.

181. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall attainment is close to the national average. High-attaining pupils generally achieve a good standard and the top sets demonstrate, for example, above average competence in the use of graphs. There is still, however, room for many of them to acquire an even greater depth of knowledge and understanding through probing questions and debate. In some lessons there are few opportunities for pupils to explore their views with their teacher or classmates: opportunities were missed to do so, for instance, in a Year 11 lesson on the use of genetically modified or animal-based insulin for human beings. Where opportunities arise, such topics generate interest and deep consideration – as, for example, in another Year 11 class where scientific advances were linked to reduced mortality rates in young adults.

182. The standard of both the practical and written aspects of investigative work is at least average throughout the school. Work is often word processed and has been through several stages of drafting before it is finished. Pupils generally use a carefully structured framework to draft their initial thoughts, hypotheses and predictions. Both a consideration of the variables that might influence an investigation and the analysis of data are tackled in a structured way. The result is that by Year 11 pupils are competent in the expected processes.

183. Throughout the school, pupils enjoy practical work and readily acquire new skills. In the large amount of practical work performed, pupils handle equipment safely and correctly. Pupils in a Year 10 class, for example, very successfully used burettes, including the accurate reading of the solution's meniscus. Most pupils have reasonable competence in the planning of fair tests, choosing variables, making predictions and subsequently analysing their findings in a sound way.

184. Pupils make satisfactory progress overall in the subject in Years 7-9 and at least good progress in Years 10-11. Overall, in their five years in the school, pupils make good progress, moving up to an average overall performance from a lower starting-point. A major contributory factor to this positive achievement is the good overall quality of teaching in the department. Pupils work hard in the subject. They behave well and form positive relationships with their peers and teachers.

185. The quality of teaching is predominantly satisfactory in Years 7-9, good in Years 10-11 and good overall; it was at least satisfactory in all lessons. Two-thirds of the lessons seen in Years 10-11 were good or very good. Staff have secure knowledge and a wide range of suitable teaching methods. These are used to best advantage in Years 10-11, whilst a few lessons in Years 7-9 lack the necessary variety to hold pupils' interest. Card-sorting exercises are used successfully to highlight the important features of some lessons – as when, for example, in a Year 9 lesson pupils sorted descriptors of five different separation techniques into similar categories or in a very good Year 11 lesson identified how enzymes selectively operate on different types of food. Good lessons often incorporated scientific and technological examples drawn from everyday life. Many of the science staff have entered teaching after a career in industry and bring reality to many lessons by snippets of scientific facts and their background experiences.

186. Many teachers use carefully chosen demonstrations to illustrate and reinforce important aspects of the subject. A revision lesson in Year 9, for example, focusing on the earth's structure, was brought to life by the use of models to mimic the action of volcanoes and the weathering of rocks. The department has invested a lot of time training three members of the department in the implementation of a nationally recognised programme to develop scientific thinking. This special approach was employed to good effect in a quarter of the lessons seen in Years 7-9. These two practices have a noticeable influence on the interest and motivation of pupils coming to the end of Year 9.

187. The best lessons are based on detailed planning, carefully timed sequences of activities, a suitable variety of exposition, the sharing of objectives with pupils, probing question-and-answer sessions and a work summary on the board. Some excellent board summaries were observed in a Year 11 lesson on digestion, especially because pupils added very relevant further notes without prompting from their teacher. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly, adding suitable comments.

188. Pupils with special educational needs receive appropriate help from additional teachers, learning assistants and trainee teachers. They generally make good progress. A specialist teacher gives additional support on three days each week to pupils for whom English is an additional language; as a consequence Bangladeshi-heritage pupils do well in science. Their results are often as good as, or better than, overall national averages. This teacher has prepared, in partnership with other staff, an extensive bank of support material for GCSE double-award science. The materials break the syllabus into discrete sections to check understanding and aid revision: this work is a contributory factor to the improvement in GCSE results.

189. The department pays satisfactory attention overall to developing pupils' literacy and numeracy, but could do more, especially in Years 7-9. Most staff correct misspellings of key scientific words and encourage pupils to glue lists of the most important or common scientific words into their exercise books. Salient scientific words are, however, seldom listed on the board in lessons and are not always displayed on the walls of laboratories. Insufficient time is spent in checking pupils' understanding of scientific vocabulary by searching or supplementary questioning. In many lessons teachers' questioning seldom extends beyond the recall of facts covered a few minutes earlier. Few teachers reinforce pupils' literacy by encouraging pupils, for example, to read aloud sections of text.

190. In the small number of topics where competence in numeracy is required, the standard was sound overall. Students prepare graphs quickly and accurately and interpret them appropriately. In a Year 9 revision lesson, for example, pupils confidently spotted trends and differences in one another's results. In a Year 10 lesson, pupils measured accurately the rate of precipitation of sulphur from a reaction of sodium thiosulphate solution and dilute sulphuric acid. They also predicted further trends through changes in reaction conditions.

191. The department has a repertoire of activities that result in simple, yet effective, pupil-built equipment being taken home. In one Year 7 class, for example, pupils enjoyed making a periscope: pupils say that they find such activities make science lessons interesting and fun. A low-ability group in Year 7 purposefully made a buzzer-test grid that sounded when the correct answer was matched to a question. Pupils clearly enjoy, and benefit from, this approach.

192. In several lessons teachers used ICT effectively to demonstrate scientific phenomena and stimulate discussion. This approach is helped by the department having its own suite of computers. They were also used for word processing, encyclopaedic exercises and Internet searching. The level of ICT use in science is greater than often found. Whilst pupils have the necessary skills to search for relevant answers, staff do not check sufficiently that all pupils are using their time profitably. The department has an extensive stock of data-logging equipment.

193. A notable feature of the department's work is the effective use of short, videorecorded extracts, well selected for their appropriateness to illustrate a topic. Teachers sometimes show these extracts (often around only one minute long) several times to reinforce the major features. Some excellent clips, for example, were shown in Year 9 lessons on sound. The availability of television and video equipment in each room aids their frequent usage.

194. The leadership and management of the department are good. A team of conscientious and hardworking teachers is effectively led by a caring, industrious head of department who utilises teachers' strengths well. There is much emphasis on personal professional development. Teachers have readily opted into national programmes that encourage reflection on teaching methodology: as a result, the teaching support materials for Years 10-11 were thoroughly reviewed. The department usually has up to three trainee teachers on attachment to it. When vacancies occur, trainees are eager to remain at the school.

195. The head of department has collated an extensive bank of statistics that covers pupils' attainment from primary schooling to Year 11. The modular tests that are used consistently across the department underpin the organisation of teaching sets. The department has a thorough system for analysing pupils' attainment and achievement and setting targets, but it is noticeably weak on sharing this data with pupils. Revision classes are popular with pupils prior to their GCSE final examinations and the Year 9 national tests.

196. Some of the department's seven laboratories have been refurbished, but three are too small for the size of groups often timetabled to use them. Movement around these rooms is restricted by lack of space, but is usually trouble-free owing to the very sensible behaviour of pupils. An additional room with computers and presentational facilities is soon to be commissioned and promises to take some pressure off the shortage of accommodation in the department. Currently, some lessons are held far from the suited laboratories, with a consequent loss of teaching time. The laboratories and associated corridors are made attractive and useful by well-chosen wall displays of pupils' work and eye-catching posters.

197. The department has sufficient textbooks and other materials. A feature of the department are the pupil checklists it has prepared for use in Years 10-11, supplemented by commercial revision guides. Revision classes are well attended by pupils in Years 9 and 11. A well-organised team of three technicians prepares teaching materials and assembles equipment effectively; their efforts are a contributory factor to the department's success. In most years the school invites some 300 Year 6 pupils from primary schools, for several lessons over a few weeks, to experience "master classes" in mathematics, science and ICT. These pupils have an enriching experience, as they work with materials and computer software not usually available to primary pupils. Since the last inspection there has been good progress in all aspects of the department's work.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths:

- the overall standard of pupils' work is above average at the end of Year 9 and well above average in GCSE examinations;
- teaching is very good across all years;
- teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject;
- pupils are interested in the subject and work very hard.

Areas for improvement:

- an increase in the amount of three-dimensional work;
- greater use of ICT by pupils.

198. Teachers assessed the overall standard of work produced by pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2001 as being above the national expectation. The standard of work of this year group seen during the inspection confirms this judgement.

199. In GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11, attainment has been well above the national average over the past three years. A significant feature of these results is that a very high proportion of pupils gained either an A* or A grade in 2000 or 2001: in these years almost a quarter of the pupils gained an A* grade and a similar proportion gained the A grade. This performance is well above the national average. There is no significant overall difference in the attainment of boys and girls, although more girls take the subject. Pupils tend to achieve better results in art than in most of their other subjects.

200. Most pupils enter Year 7 with a level of attainment that is broadly in line with the national expectation for pupils of their age. They soon acquire good drawing skills and a knowledge of the power of composition – as, for example, by overlapping images, when they study such natural forms as plants, flowers or reptiles. They gain inspiration for their own work by studying the work of the artist Rousseau. Expressionism is introduced formally in Year 7, so that pupils learn some of the techniques that can be used to portray

feelings and emotions. They begin to experiment with warm and cold colours and learn how to use colour to convey a happy or sad mood.

201. Three-dimensional work is introduced in Year 7: pupils work successfully together to design and construct boxes that they then decorate with a suitable range of materials. They learn how to manipulate these materials to good effect, so forming a good basis for future work in collage. They gain a sound knowledge and understanding of the effect of using contrasting materials such as heavy linen, silk, sequins and string.

202. In Year 8, pupils continue to improve their drawing skills by exploring the use of line, particularly the fluid use of spirals and natural forms. They experiment further with mark-making techniques, including the use of oil pastel. They continue to develop their use of colour, including monochrome colour, and learn to draw in different media – such as scratching through oil pastel or combining different media such as pencil, pastel, chalk and paints.

203. In Year 9, pupils draw confidently from direct observation. They are successful in, for example, creating large-scale compositions from their observed drawings of a range of sea shells. They are helped by their teacher's demonstration of how to combine their drawings to achieve a composition on a large scale. They are encouraged by their own success in overlapping images to build a composition.

204. Standards in the present Year 11 are well above average and similar to those achieved in the recent past. Pupils' work in Year 10 is currently marginally better than that seen in Year 11. These pupils show very good imagination in their textile designs. They experiment very well with the modern process of "entrapment", using a range of modern materials. The teacher gives a clear explanation and demonstration of the changes from traditional to modern approaches to textile design: this clarity inspires pupils and gives them confidence. They are enthusiastic about their work and aware of the links that are evident in the designs of modern, commercial art and craft products.

205. Pupils in Year 11 show very good imagination and creativity, as they prepare for their final, controlled test for GCSE. They all showed appropriately individual responses to the theme, *In my World*. Pupils of Asian heritage make very good use of their knowledge and understanding of Islamic and Indian art, particularly in the subtle but dramatic use of fluid lines. All pupils make good use of the drawing and painting skills associated with line, tone and texture learned earlier. A few pupils, however, have long-term absences that are likely to lower their final grade in both coursework and the final, controlled test.

206. Pupils have very positive attitudes to this subject. Their behaviour is very good in all lessons and was exemplary in a third of the lessons seen. This is a tribute to the high quality, interesting teaching that ensures that pupils are successful. Pupils are encouraged by their own success.

207. Teaching is very good in all year groups. The teachers are specialists and have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject. They present pupils with work that is imaginative. They expect pupils to be creative and help them by giving examples of the scope of work that is available to them. In doing this, they give pupils clear and vivid examples from the work of major world artists that pupils can understand, appreciate and enjoy – and stimulate to success.

208. Staff teach the basic skills of drawing and painting formally from Year 7 onwards. They structure work in a way that allows pupils to apply the skills they have learned and so build systematically on their earlier learning. Teachers manage classes very well and create an excellent working atmosphere in all lessons. Pupils are able to concentrate on their work and are encouraged to share ideas.

209. The assessment of pupils' work is undertaken very well. It is a central and ongoing feature in all lessons: all pupils, including those with special educational needs and those who are talented, receive individual guidance and support from teachers in all lessons. This level of assistance ensures that all pupils make very good progress. Homework is always linked to the work done in class. Teachers make very good provision for all pupils (and especially for the gifted and talented) to learn independently, because homework is planned in such a way that there are no limits to what pupils can do.

210. At the end of most lessons, pupils are asked to display their work for assessment. This exercise is led by the teacher, but also involves pupils assessing their own and others' work. The process is effective in enabling pupils to learn from the work of others and to be aware of the criteria on which their work is judged. Marking is very thoroughly done. Pupils are given clear written guidance on what they have to do to improve in all years and especially for GCSE. Teachers keep detailed records and know their pupils well.

211. There is very good leadership in the subject. Documentation, including schemes of work, is in good detail. The teachers work closely together, sharing their ideas and practice, and thereby make a significant contribution to pupils' high standards. There are extensive displays of pupils' work throughout the school. These serve to inspire and encourage pupils and also enhance the school environment. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It helps pupils to appreciate the beauty, aesthetics, moods and feelings portrayed in works of art. Pupils gain a sound cultural awareness from their study of the art of other cultures, including the art of non-western cultures.

212. All the good features mentioned in the last inspection report have been maintained. The teaching of art is still a strength of the school; graphics is now taught within the design and technology department. Standards have improved at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE. The standard of the three-dimensional work done is high, but there is not enough of it, even though a visiting artist has made a helpful contribution. There is, for example, no provision for ceramics. The department makes some imaginative use of ICT, including the digital camera, but still more needs to be done. The subject has no technical assistance.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths:

- the good quality of teaching and learning;
- pupils' progress and achievement over Years 7-11;
- the very good provision of ICT;
- the training and induction of teachers new to the profession.

Areas for improvement:

- the standards attained in the GCSE examination;
- the development of a corporate identity to raise the status of the department;
- better opportunities for gifted and talented pupils.

213. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall standard of attainment is average. In recent years teachers' formal assessments have suggested that the standard of most pupils' work is below Level 5, the minimum expected of pupils of this age. Inspection findings indicate that the proportion of current Year 9 pupils attaining either Level 5 or the higher Level 6 in their work is average.

214. In GCSE examinations in 2001 the proportion of pupils who gained the higher A*-C grades was below average, although that of those gaining grades A*-G was average. Over the past three years attainment against national averages has fluctuated; the best results for boys and the worst results for girls were attained in 2000. In some recent years, pupils have tended to underachieve in relation to the grades they obtained in their other school subjects, although this underachievement has been gradually reduced. Pupils taking food technology in 2001 gained a well below average proportion of grades A*-C, although this result was largely in line with pupils' prior attainments. Over the past three years, all pupils taking the GCSE examination in art graphics, which builds on the design and technology graphics course in Years 7-9, have gained grades in the range A*-C, an achievement that is well above the national average.

215. During Years 7-9, pupils achieve well by making good progress in acquiring practical skills, knowledge and understanding. Although no Year 7 classes were seen during the inspection, it was clear from the work examined that pupils entering the school with a varied previous experience of the subject make sound progress in all branches of technology. In a Year 8 lower set, pupils with special educational

needs made good progress as they presented plays, using the mechanical puppets they had earlier designed and made. In a Year 8 middle set, pupils made very good progress and their standard of attainment was above average in planning and producing dishes originating from such countries as Egypt, India and China.

216. Pupils in a Year 9 top set made good progress as they learned the programming skills necessary to produce an interactive, information display board. The overall standard reached was above average. In a Year 9 lower set, progress was excellent, as pupils worked largely independently to construct circuits for use in a toothbrush timer. This project was also designed to encourage young children to clean their teeth by interesting them in the time taken for the activity.

217. By the end of Year 11, the overall standard of attainment throughout the department is close to average. The school has previously entered all pupils for systems and control, an aspect reserved in most schools for high-attaining pupils; this has had an adverse effect on results, because the control element has proved too difficult for lower attainers. The strengths of the department in Years 10-11 are in the level of pupils' confidence and competence with ICT and in their practical skills; design work is satisfactory, but less strong.

218. In a Year 11 graphics lesson, pupils made notes from a videorecording that were of high quality both in the amount of relevant information recorded and in the clarity of layout and handwriting. In a systems and control lesson, higher-attaining pupils worked independently, supporting one another well to solve problems. Very good practical skill was exemplified by the dexterity with which one boy filed acrylic sheeting, whilst several boys and girls expertly assembled components for their interactive box for a science museum. In contrast, many Year 11 pupils in lower-attaining groups lack motivation and are heavily dependent on their teachers: aspects of the work are too difficult for these pupils, but frequent absence has also delayed the completion of assignments.

219. Where lower-attaining boys are free from the constraints of coursework (as in the NVQ food course) and confident with computers (as in the ICT course), they are often successful in their work. On the child development course, a mixed-ability, all-girl group succeeds well because of the emphasis in the examination syllabus on subject knowledge and understanding rather than on literacy. Pupils with special educational needs – as, for example, one boy with hearing difficulty and another with sight impairment – are well supported by classroom assistants in food technology. Pupils with English as an additional language make good progress not only in acquiring technical words, but also in expressing personal opinions through their written evaluations.

220. The overall level of writing is good except where the agreed literacy policy has not been implemented. Pupils are currently given few opportunities to read aloud, although they cope well with reading the worksheets provided. Pupils' speaking is broadly satisfactory, but there is frequent evidence of minimal answers and indistinct comments that are not always improved by teachers. The overall level of numeracy is good. There are, however, missed opportunities for enhancing numerical competence with higher attainers and with gifted and talented pupils in graphics in Year 9 and in systems and control work in Year 11.

221. Pupils behave well in lessons. Relationships are very good: learning assistants and the technicians work closely with teachers to underpin this aspect of classroom life. In a lower Year 9 set, for example, the technician noticed that a rolling pin had fallen on the floor and ensured that the pupil got a clean one before continuing to roll pizza dough. The department sets homework with appropriate frequency and has good strategies to help pupils: at the end of a busy practical session in a food lesson, for instance, pre-prepared, self-adhesive labels, with homework assignments already printed on them to be used in pupils' planners, took pressure off those pupils with poor literacy skills. The majority of pupils have very good attitudes to the subject. The exception to this is a minority of pupils in some lower-attaining classes in Year 11 who turn up late to lessons, avoid work and waste time.

222. Teaching and learning are good overall (and often very good) throughout Years 7-11. The strongest aspects are teachers' subject knowledge and understanding, their enthusiasm for the subject and their

relationship with pupils. All teachers are confident, competent users of ICT. Teaching is weaker where the teacher does too much for pupils, where time is wasted as queues form around electrical machinery and where intuition rather than valid assessment data is relied upon to guide planning.

223. In a Year 11 graphics lesson, the planning was outstanding in improving pupils' understanding of examination criteria; by the end of the lesson pupils were in a very good position to make the most of their own strengths. In a class of Year 10 boys studying resistant materials for the Certificate of Education, work was well structured for their needs. As a result, all pupils not only succeeded in making a good, one-point perspective drawing of a craft knife, but a number of them acquired new knowledge and understanding of tools and materials. Access to "virtual babies" as a resource in child development has led to a realistic level of understanding of the responsibility of having a young baby.

224. An assessment of the individual strengths and weaknesses of Year 7 pupils, undertaken during the first three units of work, is used well to place pupils in sets and to plan appropriate levels of work. The quality of marking pupils' work is usually high throughout the school, and is often accompanied by helpful oral and written remarks. The use of ICT is very good in all year groups, although more experience of commercial software is required to bolster pupils' knowledge of circuitry in Years 7-9 and of designing in Years 10-11.

225. The leadership and management of the subject are good. This is a department with considerable strengths for training and inducting teachers into the profession. One teacher who has benefited from this process has recently been appointed as a local authority Adviser for ICT. Very good work has been done on revising the schemes of work for Years 7-9 and putting in place a potentially good assessment and recording system. Sensible modifications have been identified for GCSE entry in order to raise standards further. There is, however, a need for better levels of communication within the design and technology team, for more creative cross-curricular links, for a uniform dress code in workshops and food rooms, and for better use of computer monitors and the website to share the undoubted strengths that exist in this department.

226. The department has close links with contributory primary schools and with further education colleges. It successfully takes part in national initiatives and competitions. The graphics exhibitions at the local town hall are a commendable tribute to the school. The information in reports to parents is an aspect for improvement. Good progress has been made in addressing those weaknesses identified at the previous inspection, although many improvements are quite recent and have not yet had time to improve standards substantially. There are health and safety weaknesses in one workshop and a lack of space and storage facilities in another. Statutory requirements for the subject are met.

GEOGRAPHY

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **good**.

Strengths:

- pupils make good progress;
- teachers plan well and use effective teaching methods;
- the wide range of high quality fieldwork opportunities.

Areas for improvement:

- insufficient teaching time in Years 8 and 9;
- out-of-date resources and poor quality atlases and textbooks for Years 7-9;
- the recording and use of assessment data;
- the unsatisfactory accommodation in one classroom.

227. Pupils' overall level of attainment at the end of Year 9 is below that expected nationally. When teachers assessed pupils' work in 2001 at the end of Year 9, the results indicated that the overall standard was well below the national average; only ten per cent of pupils were judged to have achieved a level higher than Level 5. The assessment was very rigorous and consistent, but inspection evidence indicates that

levels were generally judged to be lower than those that the pupils actually achieved. The overall level of work seen during the inspection was below the national norm.

228. By the end of Year 11 pupils' level of attainment is average. Results in the GCSE examination in 2001 were in line with the national average for the subject, although few pupils achieved the highest grades. Boys gained significantly better results than the few girls who studied the subject. Pupils generally gain similar results in this subject to those they achieve in most of their other subjects. Results have fluctuated during the past five years from well above the national average in 2000 to well below it in 1999, reflecting the prior attainment of pupils. The numbers studying the subject are generally low, with less than ten pupils entering the examination in each year from 1998 to 2000. This is mainly due to the constraint in the choice of subjects available to pupils in Years 10-11.

229. The department analyses examination results carefully. Their analysis indicates that pupils make good progress in this subject. A clear strategy for improvement focuses on techniques for answering examination questions, improving revision and providing additional support for coursework. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make good progress, because the work set for them is closely matched to their needs and they receive good quality support in class. Few strategies are, however, used to enhance the progress of higher-attaining pupils, who are often not challenged sufficiently in class.

230. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a satisfactory basic knowledge of how, for example, landscapes are formed through the action of water, earthquakes and volcanic activity. They know what different kinds of environments such as equatorial forests and deserts are like and the relationship between people and the world around them. Pupils have a poor knowledge of where places are. Their breadth of knowledge of what places are like is limited. The higher-attaining pupils have a sound knowledge of geographical terms.

231. By the end of Year 11, pupils have a sound knowledge of how landscapes may change. In Year 11, for example, pupils wrote accurately about the reasons for flooding in Bangladesh, how this affected the lives of the people who lived there and the precautions that people could take to protect themselves and their property. They have a good understanding of the models geographers use. They used models effectively to explain, for instance, the reasons for the distance between settlements of different sizes and the pattern of land use in Manchester.

232. All pupils have a very good understanding of the methods of geographical enquiry, the collection of data and the analysis of information to draw conclusions. In Year 7, for instance, a group of pupils investigated the best location for seating around the school. They collected detailed information on the temperature, wind speeds and sunshine at each place. Working rapidly, they accurately collated and analysed the information they had collected and drew sensible conclusions about the best place for the seating. During Years 10-11, pupils produce good quality fieldwork enquiries for GCSE coursework on such subjects as the rate of erosion of limestone rock and the use of land in the local area.

233. Pupils extract information efficiently from a range of resource material and use computers effectively for research. One group of pupils in Year 9, for instance, worked in pairs and used ICT to collect quickly statistical data that indicated the level of development reached by a variety of countries. Higher-attaining pupils write very fluently and use geographical terms correctly. Other pupils generally write accurately, but often make spelling errors. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs have a secure knowledge of simple geographical facts, but have difficulty in explaining the reasons for changes in the landscape or when describing what places are like.

234. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Teachers have an extensive knowledge of the subject. They use this effectively to ensure that pupils understand topics fully by giving clear explanations, which are illustrated effectively with examples that are often drawn from the local area. Lessons are always very well planned and carefully structured, with a variety of activities designed to provide relevant information, reinforce pupils' understanding and involve pupils in the work. In one lesson, for example, pupils in Year 7 studied river basins. Recalling a recent visit to a local stream, the teacher skilfully used the knowledge gained from this experience to introduce pupils to the pattern of drainage in a river basin, introduce

geographical terms and, whilst reinforcing this understanding, provide practice in reading atlases. The lesson concluded with an imaginative practical activity to illustrate the type of material carried by streams and rivers. Throughout, the teacher used the pupils' natural curiosity to extend their understanding significantly.

235. Expectations are high and relationships with pupils are friendly, but firm. Teachers quickly establish a productive working atmosphere and are quick to intervene skilfully, and often with humour, to ensure that the rapid pace of the lesson is maintained and work is of the pupils' best standard. Resources are chosen with care and generally used effectively to arouse pupils' interest and for research. The conclusions of lessons, however, are often ineffective, as they are frequently rushed and do not assess fully the effectiveness of lessons and the understanding pupils have gained. Relevant homework is set regularly. Marking is up to date: it is often superficial in exercise books, although the marking of assessment work is detailed and helpful.

236. Pupils learn well. They are always interested, have a positive attitude, listen carefully and are keen to contribute and produce their best work, owing to energetic, purposeful teaching and a variety of imaginative and cleverly structured activities. Pupils behave well and usually maintain concentration throughout because of skilful class management, the brisk pace of lessons and teaching that quickly gains and holds their interest. Carefully structured explanations ensure that pupils know exactly what they are doing, so that they settle to work quickly and work hard. When working in pairs or groups, pupils organise themselves swiftly and cooperate effectively with one other.

237. The scheme of work is well structured and the curriculum fully complies with national requirements. The programme of fieldwork is of high quality, makes imaginative use of the local area and culminates in a well-organised residential field study in the Yorkshire Dales. Opportunities for the use of ICT for research, analysis of statistics and the presentation of work are regularly introduced into the curriculum, but some groups are unable to complete the programme because of the difficulty of gaining access to computer rooms. Pupils' work is assessed regularly through a range of appropriate assessment tasks. The recording of assessment data is not systematic, however, and is not used effectively to monitor the progress and support the work of individual pupils.

238. In Years 8 and 9 the subject is allocated one lesson each week. This is insufficient. Teachers have great difficulty in providing the range and depth of study required by the National Curriculum or the methods to extend high-attaining pupils and support lower-attainers. This deficiency was reported at the time of the previous inspection and inadequate progress has been made in addressing the issue.

239. The subject is taught by two very experienced and well-qualified teachers. Accommodation is in two adjacent rooms; one of these two rooms has no external ventilation or direct, natural light and is inadequate. High quality displays of pupils' work enhance the environment of the area. Audio-visual and fieldwork equipment as well as resources produced by the department are of good quality. Atlases, many published resources and the textbooks for Years 7-9 are out of date and of poor quality.

240. The leadership and management of the department are good. There is a clear sense of direction, a high degree of subject expertise and a good quality of teaching, with the result that pupils make good progress. Standards have been maintained since the time of the last inspection. The department has the capacity to succeed in raising standards further.

HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **good**.

Strengths:

- teachers manage pupils very well and expect them to work to the best of their ability;
- the attitudes of most pupils are good;
- most pupils make good progress.

Areas for improvement:

- the amount of teaching time in Years 8 and 9;
- the consistent use of targets to help pupils, especially those in Years 10-11, to improve;
- the provision of suitable textbooks for the lowest attainers in Years 7-9;
- the use of ICT, fieldwork and the local environment.

241. By the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment overall is below that expected nationally. Only a very small proportion achieve an above average level. This is a lower standard than that reported at the time of the last inspection. Most pupils begin Year 7 with a level of attainment that is well below the national average. In 2001, teachers assessed their pupils' work by the end of Year 9 as being well below the national average. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was below average and a little of it was above average. A significant minority of pupils in Year 9 still work at the standard expected nationally of pupils in Year 7.

242. In Years 7-9, pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, although most attain well below average standards. The highest-attaining pupils usually make good progress in acquiring new knowledge, but make unsatisfactory progress in such higher-level skills as evaluating sources or explaining different interpretations of the past.

243. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C in the GCSE examination was in line with the national average in 2001. No pupils took GCSE in 2000. The proportion gaining grades A*-C in 1999 was above average. The proportion gaining grades A*-G was above average in both 1999 and 2001. These grades represent good achievement and progress by pupils from Year 9 to Year 11. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was broadly average, but included some that has the clear potential for the highest grades.

244. Most pupils in Years 7-9 have good knowledge and understanding about the past. Many pupils in an upper set in Year 7, for example, working on the life of Mary Queen of Scots, showed clearly that they understood terms such as "heretic" and "heir" and had good knowledge of the religious divisions of the time. The lowest attainers often remember some details of work done, but their knowledge is frequently incomplete and they do not retain it for long periods. Pupils explain the causes of events well. Pupils in Year 7, for instance, explained successfully the reasons for the sending of the Spanish Armada and for its defeat. The higher attainers began to put the reasons for defeat into order of priority, with a valid explanation for their decision.

245. Most pupils describe and account for changes over time at least satisfactorily. In a sample of work seen from pupils in Year 9, for example, they explained adequately the changes in transport and in people's working lives between 1750 and 1900. Higher-attaining pupils clearly understand that people in the past had values and beliefs very different from those of today – as, for example, in work on child labour in the nineteenth century. Lower-attaining pupils describe the different attitudes, but do not as successfully explain why they existed.

246. The standard of the written work of the majority of pupils is below average. Only a very small proportion write well at length. Written work in pupils' books contains many spelling errors and is often

immature in style. For a significant proportion of pupils a low level of literacy leads to slow progress in lessons and low attainment and restricts their ability to record their knowledge and understanding adequately in writing. The below-average reading level of many pupils slows their capacity to glean information from what they read. This frequently reduces overall progress in lessons.

247. Pupils in Years 10-11 have generally good knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. They identify and explain changes over time well. Pupils in a class in Year 10, for example, demonstrated good knowledge of the problems of surgery in the nineteenth century and used correctly such technical terms as trepanning, anaesthetics and antiseptics. They used picture sources competently to explain how some aspects of surgery changed during the 1900s. Pupils in Year 11 showed sound knowledge of the developments in medicine made by the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. Some samples of pupils' practice examination papers indicate a level of knowledge and understanding that ranges from well below to well above average; it includes some high-quality answers from a very high attaining pupil on the reliability and usefulness of sources in work on the American West.

248. The teaching is of a consistently good quality. Teachers know their subject well and communicate it effectively, so that most pupils acquire good knowledge and understanding about the past. Lessons are very well planned and teachers take careful account of pupils' abilities. The work for lower attainers and pupils with special educational needs is usually appropriately matched to their abilities; support teachers are effective in keeping pupils focused on their work.

249. Whole-class teaching is invariably done well – as, for example, in a lesson on changes in surgery, in which the teacher used a mix of activities to help a group of pupils in Year 11 to identify changes and continuity. The teacher ensured that pupils understood each change before moving on and used the last few minutes of the lesson to quickly recap on the key points. Most lessons are teacher-led, with the result that pupils too rarely have the opportunity to take the initiative in lessons and to be responsible for what they learn. Unusually, no groupwork or class discussion was seen during the inspection.

250. Teachers expect their pupils to work hard and behave well. The vast majority of pupils have a very positive approach to their work. They concentrate on their work and usually behave very well – important contributory factors to their often good progress in lessons. This is especially true of pupils in Years 10-11. A very small minority in Years 7-9 have a poor attitude to their own work and that of others. When this is likely to affect the work of the whole group, it is dealt with firmly and effectively by teachers. Most pupils listen well to teachers' instructions and explanations, and hence are clear about the work they are asked to do. Most pupils in all years show a keenness to learn and to find out more about the topics they study.

251. The time allocation in Year 7 has been increased since the last inspection, when it was identified as a weakness. The time given in Years 8 and 9 is well below that normally seen nationally and is unsatisfactory. It leads to difficulties in covering the full content required in the National Curriculum adequately. In particular, it limits the possibilities for in-depth work with high attainers and the opportunity for low attainers to assimilate even basic knowledge. Several lessons clearly showed the teacher's concern to get through work quickly in order to move on to the next topic. In a lesson with an upper set in Year 9 on the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, for example, there was no time to look in any depth at the impact of World War 1 as a background to the treaty, thus restricting pupils' overall understanding of the topic.

252. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The head of department, however, has several roles within the management of the school that put a heavy demand on his time. There is a clear wish to raise the impact of the subject and to increase the number of pupils taking history in Years 10-11. The department's work reflects well the school's approach to hard work and good behaviour. There are, however, inconsistencies in practice within the department. Not all marked work has targets set that give pupils a way to improve their work. In some lessons the aim of the lessons is written on the board and pupils copy it into their books, so that they are clear about what they are doing and why; not all teachers, however, do this.

253. The department has sufficient accommodation. One room (a “mobile” classroom), however, is in a poor state of repair and the other two have little natural light and poor ventilation. The department does not make sufficient use of ICT in lessons. There are only two computers in the department, with a third imminent. This is low provision for a technology school. Access to the central ICT facilities is not always easy at times to suit the department. Pupils are, however, encouraged to use ICT for research and to word-process their work. There is insufficient use made of the local environment and fieldwork in Years 7-9. There are not enough good, up-to-date textbooks for the lowest attainers in Years 7-9.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

Strengths:

- the good quality of teaching, management, learning resources and technical help;
- the emphasis on high standards and personal responsibility for learning;
- a brisk pace, with high expectations and challenge in all lessons;
- national accreditation in ICT for all pupils at the end of Year 11.

Areas for improvement:

- the auditing, monitoring and evaluation of the use of ICT in all subjects;
- the use of ICT “level” descriptions in Years 7-9 to gauge pupils’ attainment and progress.

254. By the end of Year 9, pupils’ overall level of attainment is above average. Over Years 7-9 pupils make good progress and at the end of Year 9 achieve above the nationally expected standard for their age. This represents a very good achievement, because pupils’ overall standard is assessed as well below average on entry to the school in Year 7: only a minority of pupils, for example, are assessed at that stage as having reached the national benchmark of Level 4 in the subject. The subject is a strength of the school.

255. In 2001, teachers’ assessments indicated that the proportion of Year 9 pupils reaching the national expectation of at least Level 5 was well above average. In 2001, for example, 90 per cent of pupils were assessed as having reached Level 5+ (nationally 65 per cent), with 30 per cent reaching Level 6 (nationally five per cent). The percentage of pupils assessed as having reached Level 7 has fallen over the last three years: in 2001, just three per cent of pupils (nationally five per cent) reached this level.

256. All pupils in Years 10-11 take a GNVQ Part 1 and Full Award course in ICT; the course is begun in Year 9. By the age of 16, pupils’ success in GNVQ is well above the national average. In 2001, for example, 90 per cent of pupils achieved at least a pass grade, with over half achieving either a merit or a distinction grade. The attainment of the current Year 10 pupils also reflects the same picture.

257. By the end of Year 9, pupils are competent and confident in the efficient use of ICT applications, including word processing, desktop publishing, spreadsheets and database software. By this stage almost all pupils are well able to use a common set of software that ranges from word processing to desktop publishing, data-handling and presentation tools. They use spreadsheets and multimedia presentation software with confidence, accuracy and fluency. This aspect is a strength of the subject in the school.

258. In Year 7, pupils learn ICT terminology and acquire skills in the introductory use of a range of software. They create, extend, load and save a wide range of work correctly and learn to use a keyboard efficiently. Homework and other non-computer based work is well targeted to build their ICT skills – pupils complete a series of homework sheets, for example, that enable them to produce their own help guide to the use of the school’s desktop publishing software. They know about passwords and networks and how to log onto the school network to access their work files.

259. Pupils in Year 8 continue to build their skills in the main software programs used and learn satisfactorily how to use desktop publishing and word-processing software to produce attractive and well-designed work. They extend their use of ICT by learning to use spreadsheets and databases to handle

information, entering data and carrying out complex enquiries. They learn to create animated graphics, using professional software, and email their finished work around the world as greeting cards. They broaden their use of multimedia presentations, producing sophisticated, thoughtful work. They have developed, for instance, a guide to the ecological issues facing the world's rainforests. Through such work they learn to reflect thoughtfully on their uses of ICT, its benefits and limitations, and how it is used in society.

260. In Year 9 they also begin their GVNQ coursework by extending their understanding about the uses of ICT to wider social and business contexts. They learn to make more intensive, efficient use of the Internet to produce attractive presentations, information brochures and posters. They learn, for example, to use websites as a source of graphic design to create animated text and images with advanced features, to save these files in the correct file format and to deploy them effectively and with discrimination into presentation software, producing work for a specific purpose and audience.

261. Pupils are taught how to use Internet search engines effectively to locate information. For example, they learn to keep a search results page active, while opening their chosen websites on successive windows in the software, thus cutting down search time for the required information. They also understand that this technique, which reduces the demand on search sites, also shows consideration for other international users of the Internet. They learn to cite visited web-resources and to paste these details into their word-processed work, providing evidence of their growing skills in developing discriminating, Internet-based research skills.

262. Work in Years 10-11 demonstrates pupils' increased capability to use ICT effectively and with insight. Many pupils produce work to a very professional standard of sophistication and quality. They develop their capability to combine several ICT applications to carry out GNVQ coursework assignments. They develop greater levels of control over the outcome of their work. For example, they produce promotional materials, accounting spreadsheets and customer databases for a computer company that incorporate the use of graphics programs, spreadsheets, databases and information saved from the Internet within word processing and desktop publishing applications.

263. In Year 11, pupils undertake increasingly more complex and effective applications of ICT tools. They learn to create and use advanced formulae in spreadsheets to create an information system for others. They develop, for instance, a very detailed, multi-level spreadsheet (with complex formulae to professional standards) to record and calculate competitors' scores and points to determine team positions in the school's sports day – an example of how the department constantly exploits opportunities to illuminate pupils' understanding of how ICT can address real needs.

264. Pupils make good progress in acquiring or extending their ICT skills throughout the school – and often do so very substantially by the end of Year 9. Pupils with special educational needs make sound progress because of the intensive and sensitive help of teachers, well-structured learning resources and the effective individual learning programmes developed by the department. Higher-attaining pupils also make good progress overall by moving more quickly than others onto work that requires more complex uses of ICT. Most pupils work with constant enthusiasm and concentration on the computers outside lesson times, receiving very good support from teachers, who are always present each lunchtime and after school. The highest-attaining pupils, however, require still more opportunities for challenging work by the end of Year 9 through such means as designing more complex multimedia presentations and information systems or working with computer-controlled devices, in order to reach the highest levels of attainment in ICT.

265. Pupils' progress in Years 10-11 is enhanced by the extensive and challenging range of work undertaken and in the level of self-evaluation that they apply to their work. Their folders show thoughtful evaluations and reviews of their ICT work as well as different approaches to achieving the required results in coursework. Most pupils make good progress in acquiring a suitable level of self-accountability, showing responsibility and persistence in producing coursework to ever more specific and demanding criteria. Many folders show, for instance, that some assignments are developed over time at the pupil's request, each version showing an improvement in quality and accuracy.

266. Pupils have good attitudes to the subject. They are eager to begin work in ICT lessons. They show a ready willingness to work hard. For example, pupils in a Year 7 lesson participated very thoughtfully in a

discussion on how to make the best use of advanced features of a desktop publishing program. They generally take considerable pride in the range of work they produce. They demonstrate persistence in drafting and producing improved versions of their work. They take increasing responsibility for their own progress and for maintaining their work files on the network. Pupils' annotations on work files demonstrate their increasing understanding of the need to reflect upon, and critically evaluate, the quality and accuracy of their work.

267. The quality of specialist teaching and learning is high overall throughout the school: most teaching is at least good (and often very good), some is excellent and none is unsatisfactory. Teachers use praise and the recognition of achievement very well. Good teaching is characterised by a rapid pace and a highly disciplined, yet pleasant and relaxed, classroom climate, with high levels of expectation. Teachers intervene in a timely and constructive way to help pupils. The quality of teachers' subject specialist knowledge, lesson planning and classroom management is very high.

268. Lessons are very carefully structured, with well-defined introductions and precisely timed sequences of activity. Very effective plenary sessions synthesise and reinforce what has been taught. Teachers make very effective use of departmental computers (although some are due for replacement). Teachers intervene effectively, sensitively and with humour to encourage pupils, identify any problems and promote progress.

269. The department of six teachers is very well led and managed by an experienced member of the senior management team. His vision for the role of ICT in the school's curriculum and the highly effective manner in which the subject is taught are key features of this success. Outreach work is done with other schools in the area as part of a local authority project to raise standards in ICT. The head of department carries out his role as subject leader with zeal and dedication. He fosters a strong collegiate atmosphere: teachers plan, teach and work together very well. The two newly qualified teachers and the graduate trainee in the department are supported very effectively. The head of department's mentoring of these colleagues consolidates and extends their professional skills and contributes strongly to the department's success and its very strong professional ethos.

270. All staff are subject specialists and share a dedication, energy and enthusiasm for the subject. Departmental documentation is detailed and comprehensive. Teachers produce an outstanding and effective range of teaching resources to professional standards. Subject teaching materials are also published on the school's intranet and on the Internet and make a very strong contribution to pupils' attainment and progress, both in and out of school time. The development planning for ICT, a key element of the requirements for continuing Technology School status, is very comprehensive. It complies with all current subject requirements – as, for example, with measures to protect pupils from undesirable materials on the Internet.

271. The assessment of pupils' learning and progress is well structured in Years 9-11 towards the GNVQ qualification in ICT. Assessment is a continuous and prominent feature of lessons. Pupils have a good knowledge of their progress and achievement as a result of rigorous teacher marking and feedback. Pupils in Years 7-8, however, where assessment is less tightly structured, are not aware enough of ICT level-descriptors, how they fare in relation to these and what they need to do to progress to higher levels.

272. The school has made good progress in ICT since the last inspection, building on an already good picture. It has a comprehensive development plan for its next phase of work and has very detailed subject schemes of work and assessment. All pupils now have increased timetabled time for ICT lessons. The school has improved its pupil:computer ratio. It has extended the network with up-to-date software of good quality in 11 ICT rooms and with broadband access to the Internet for pupils and staff.

273. The subject is well supported by a dedicated team of three well-qualified technicians who respond rapidly and efficiently to technical problems or to staff requests for support. Over the last two years almost all staff have completed an in-house *New Opportunities Fund* ICT-training programme using the Technology College Trust as an approved provider and tutored "in-house" by the ICT department.

274. Despite the school's commitment to the wide use of ICT in all subjects – with its associated training and increased provision of hardware – there is an unsatisfactory inconsistency in the application of ICT and some gaps within departments. The school does not have adequate monitoring and evaluation of the contribution of all subjects' use of ICT.

275. The mathematics department has its own computer suite that is well used to support teaching – when, for example, pupils learn to create and interpret graphs to analyse statistical data in spreadsheets. This is extended by their use of a specialist program to predict the results of graphing changes to algebraic equations. Pupils use Logo software to explore the properties of shapes and angles. Low-attaining pupils use an integrated learning system to help them to consolidate their learning of number skills.

276. Effective use is made of a range of ICT hardware and software in design and technology to enhance and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. In two dedicated ICT suites pupils use ICT to research, analyse and present information appropriately and make very good use of it in Years 10-11 to design and test computer-based control systems as part of their GNVQ work. They also use computer-aided design and manufacture software to help them design and produce a range of products in different materials. In modern foreign languages, pupils use a range of ICT, in a well-equipped room, to increase their understanding and fluency in languages. The subject is shortly to acquire its own ICT suite with up-to-date teaching software.

277. The science department makes good use of ICT to extend pupils' scientific learning. It makes regular use, for example, of data-logging equipment to record and time reactions and events and uses spreadsheets, desktop publishing and subject-specific, CD-ROM resources to enhance aspects of scientific study. In geography, music and business education, pupils make good use of ICT. In geography, for example, they use the Internet effectively to research information and illustrate and present their coursework attractively, using desktop publishing and creating appropriate charts and graphs. The use of ICT in English is unsatisfactory because the department, although keen to use ICT, has no discrete provision and insufficient access to computer rooms. The use of ICT in history, RE and in the special educational needs department is poor, with little evidence of the planned, consistent use of ICT to enrich pupils' learning in these subjects.

278. Although the provision of computers is very good overall, with a computer to pupil ratio of 1:3, a proportion of them require updating. A planned programme of refurbishment of the school's ICT resources is under way through the next phase of Technology School funding.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in modern foreign languages is **satisfactory**.

Strengths:

- the good quality of teaching in Years 10-11;
- good results and high achievement in GCSE in Bengali, German and Spanish;
- wide curricular provision for pupils to study different languages in Years 7-11;
- the recent acquisition of multi-media software in French, German and Spanish.

Areas for improvement:

- the regularity, consistency and quality of teachers' marking in Years 7-9;
- more opportunities in French for pupils in Years 7-9 to extend their writing.

279. Teachers' assessments of pupils' work at the end of Year 9 in 2001 suggested that pupils' overall level of attainment in modern foreign languages was at the national average. Since, however, three separate languages are taught in Year 9, these results do not reflect fully the pattern of levels attained by pupils in each individual language. Unlike the procedure in most schools, pupils choose their language for GCSE at the end of Year 8 and study it exclusively in Year 9. Pupils who have the opportunity to study a second modern foreign language, Spanish or German, in Year 8 are predominantly higher-attainers.

280. In GCSE examinations in 2001, the proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the range A*-C in the full-course examination in German or Spanish was above the national average. The results in Spanish showed a marked increase over the results in 2000. Boys performed better than girls in each of these two languages.

281. The proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the range A*-C in the full-course examination in French was well below the national average and showed no change from the overall results for 2000. The number of pupils who are now entered for GCSE has increased considerably over the last three years. The proportion of girls gaining a grade in this range increased slightly from 2000, but boys' attainment was significantly lower than that of boys nationally. No boy gained one of the highest grades (A* or A). The department's work in French has been adversely affected by the long-term absence of one teacher, who was responsible for the two higher-attaining classes; the results for 2001 reflect the lack of continuity that this absence occasioned. In contrast, the proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the range A*-G was above the national average.

282. Pupils' overall level of attainment in German and Spanish by the end of Year 9 is average. Pupils have a good understanding of their foreign language, which is used well in class by teachers. Pupils' oral skills are good. In Year 7, pupils in a German class spoke fairly confidently about their homes, using several sentences. In a Spanish class, pupils said competently which leisure activities they liked or disliked. They also extracted successfully similar information from a reading passage about the character, Ali G, on the overhead projector. One of the gifted and talented Year 9 pupils in German had produced an excellent, accurate presentation on cassette about a range of topics, using three different tenses. Pupils in German and Spanish write at length and at an appropriate level – in German about their daily routine, using the present and future tenses, and about travel with the perfect tense, whilst in Spanish about past events on holidays, using the preterite tense appropriately.

283. The majority of pupils who study French from Year 7 tend to be drawn from middle- and low-attaining pupils. Some of these classes have experienced different teachers and a lack of continuity, owing to the long-term absence of teachers. Pupils' overall level of attainment in French by the end of Year 9 is below average. Pupils understand the tasks that they are set in the foreign language, however, and respond reasonably.

284. In a lesson in Year 9, for example, the top group of pupils participated in a role-play at the doctor's surgery, with three or four exchanges and used prompts. In a mixed-ability group in Year 9, pupils said what ailment they suffered from in different parts of the body. Pupils generally identify the correct picture from a phrase heard in class. In a Year 7 lesson on likes and dislikes pupils' responses were short, because they were not encouraged to extend their answers into complete sentences. Although some pupils in Year 9 learned the perfect and future tenses at the beginning of the academic year, the tenses had not been revisited since then: pupils, nevertheless, understood the perfect tense when it was used with such ailments as having caught influenza. In their written work, pupils complete exercises and vocabulary lists, but these are rarely drawn together to form short paragraphs of extended writing to which a national level can be attached.

285. Pupils' overall level of attainment by the end of Year 11 is above average in German and Spanish, but below average in French. In Year 11, pupils in a German class answered different questions at length, in preparation for their oral examination. They understood every question that was asked and used the appropriate tenses in reply. In a Spanish lesson, pupils extracted information from cassette about booking into a hotel and successfully reassembled a role-play conversation between a hotel receptionist and a tourist, working together in pairs.

286. Average attainers in a Year 10 French class, also working together in pairs, asked each other the way to places in town and in return were given the number of the bus to take. One pupil successfully completed all eight tasks, asking and answering the questions. In their written work in Year 11, high-attaining pupils display a good standard. In French they fax the lost property office about articles they have lost, using the perfect tense with direct object pronouns – sometimes with agreement – and a range of adverbs of time.

287. In their writing in German, pupils use subordinate clauses and inversion correctly, together with the past tense. One pupil in Spanish had written at length and with much detail about all the topics on the oral syllabus, displaying a wide range of vocabulary and a confident command of tenses and constructions. Average and lower-attaining pupils are less consistently accurate or fail to provide all the required information.

288. The achievement and rate of progress of most pupils are satisfactory in French and good in German and Spanish. The department takes an active part in strengthening pupils' literacy through a focus on important verbs in written work. Good pronunciation is practised through pupils reciting in chorus and individually. Key words are displayed in classrooms. Pupils acquire a sound knowledge of the vocabulary relevant to the topics studied – as, for example, leisure activities, illnesses, food and menus, school subjects and family life.

289. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language are well integrated into their classes and largely make progress similar to other pupils. Gifted and talented pupils have been identified and teachers ensure that they are challenged appropriately. In a Year 8 Spanish class, for instance, one pupil answered the same questions as the rest of the class, but had to extend her response and use the past tense. These pupils generally make good progress.

290. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. In many lessons they respond well to their teachers and to reciting in chorus. They listen well to cassettes and apply themselves to the tasks set. They enjoy games and respond sensibly. In some lessons they use their exercise books or reference books to help them with their work. They work cooperatively in pairs. Pupils in a Year 9 German class and pupils in the *Stay after School* (SAS) German class worked productively and with interest on computers. The presentation of written work, however, varies: some of it is neat and well illustrated, whilst some requires improvement because of untidy writing, pages missed out or unfinished work.

291. All the teaching seen was at least satisfactory. In Years 7-9, the teaching of French is satisfactory and that of German and Spanish is good. In Years 10-11, the teaching of all of French, German and Spanish is good. All teachers have a solid knowledge of their subject and make substantial use of the foreign language in class in many lessons. Tasks are usually set in the foreign language, but teachers ensure that pupils understand thoroughly what they have to do. The teaching of basic skills is satisfactory. Over time, pupils acquire a sound knowledge of verbs and tenses. Pronunciation is generally sound.

292. Lessons are well planned, with a formal start and finish on many occasions. Teachers begin every lesson with revision and then introduce different activities and skills to help pupils to maintain their concentration and interest during lessons. In a good lesson in Year 10, for example, average pupils in a French class revised numbers in chorus and individually, listened to them in short conversations on cassette and noted the answers. They then practised the conversations in pairs, asking for direction to places in town or giving the number of the bus to take them there. Pupils were thus able to consolidate both their oral and aural skills.

293. Teachers' expectations are sound, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Teachers prepare their pupils well for each of the four modules in Years 10-11 in the three languages. Teaching methods are effective: good use is made of such means as the overhead projector, cassette recorder, chorus work, paired work and games – as when pupils have to identify missing articles from a group or compete against each other by touching words or pictures on the board.

294. The management of pupils and relationships in class are good. Teachers praise and encourage pupils in their tasks: for example, the Spanish teacher praised a pupil in Year 7 after she persevered with the pronunciation of *prefiero*, which she had found difficult, and the class applauded. In a Year 7 German class, the teacher praised a pupil who had produced several short sentences about his home, exclaiming "*du bist wunderbar!*". Homework is set regularly. The marking of pupils' written work in French in Years 7-9 is, in some classes, minimal and irregular. There are no helpful comments or targets to help pupils to improve or marks to guide their progress.

295. The department meets statutory requirements for teaching the National Curriculum. Supply teachers, covering the long-term absence of several teachers, have not always been language specialists. At the time of the inspection, however, one specialist supply teacher had been working in the school since November and another had just joined. The acting head of department has worked hard, alongside her other commitments, to minimise the disruption and has been supported well by the other teachers. The department makes a strong contribution to pupils' cultural development, with annual visits to Germany and Austria, classroom displays and talking about food and menus in the respective countries. Pupils have no contact with a native speaker, however, in any of the three languages.

296. The department has recently acquired a substantial amount of up-to-date, multi-media software in all three languages. Access to computers is very limited at present, so that the full effect has not yet impacted on many classes, although there are opportunities for its use in the SAS classes after school. It is planned that 20 computers will be in place within the department next term, so that the department has the capacity to improve its work. Teaching staff have received the necessary training for this. There are sufficient textbooks, but those in French in Years 7-9 are outdated.

297. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Results in GCSE and achievement in German and Spanish are good. The proportion of Year 11 pupils attaining a grade in the range A*-C in at least one modern foreign language has risen over the last three years. The curricular provision for languages is good: Year 7 pupils now study either French, German or Spanish on entry, and some pupils have the opportunity to study a second modern foreign language in Year 8, before choosing their preferred language for GCSE in Year 9. Gifted and talented pupils have been identified and provision for them in the classes after school is good.

298. The curricular provision for languages is further enhanced by the addition of Bengali in Years 10-11. The proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the range A*-C in the full-course examination in GCSE in Bengali at 68 per cent was below the results for the previous two years, but the number of pupils attaining an A* grade increased. There is no published national average for Bengali, but these results represent high achievement. The quality of teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and contain different activities and skills. The very experienced teacher uses the foreign language well and does so almost exclusively in the Year 11 lessons.

299. In the two lessons observed, pupils worked productively and at a good pace, extracting information about tourism and answering questions on Bangladesh from worksheets. Good background information is provided to extend pupils' cultural development about a country that pupils may not know well. Extra classes in oral work are provided for Year 11 pupils prior to the examination in May; some pupils even attended extra classes during the Easter holidays, thus showing the extent of their motivation.

MUSIC

Overall, the quality of provision in music is **good**.

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the quality of teaching;• the use of ICT;• the continuity provided by the pupils' handbooks. <p>Areas for improvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the quality of the accommodation;• the departmental handbook.

300. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 9, their overall attainment is below the national average. Their attainment in performance and composition is close to average, but their musical knowledge and understanding are below average. Pupils perform and compose to a fair standard, using linked, electronic keyboards and computers as well as acoustic instruments. They gain good familiarity with the music

keyboard, although too many of them rely heavily on letter names which are printed on the instruments. Most pupils also rely on letter names added to notes presented on the staff; they are not well versed in essential musical terminology. Almost all pupils play, record and compose tunes that are based on a graded range of tunes provided for them in their handbooks.

301. Most of their computer-generated music is done in pairs, but they also use tuned percussion instruments to create group compositions, the majority of which reach at least an average standard. In one lesson they invented a repetitive piece that used five-note patterns against a second, repeating part. During Years 7-9, pupils learn a little about classical composers and gain some familiarity with music from around the world.

302. Pupils' overall level of attainment by the end of Year 11 is in line with the national average. In the 1999-2001 GCSE examinations, taken together, 23 out of 40 pupils gained grades in the range A*-C, although none gained an A* grade. The standard of work reached by the end of both Years 9 and 11 represents a good level of achievement from a low starting-point in Year 7.

303. In the work seen during the inspection, the overall standard of performance, composition and listening was in line with the national average by the end of Year 11. In one lesson, pupils listened to ten examples of music from the main historical periods and were required to identify which period each example belonged to. This lesson challenged them to draw on their knowledge of the historical development of instruments, the major composers and typical musical forms and harmonies used. Compositions presented on tape are of a good standard overall. Most of these are developed with the help of computers and digital recording. One of the best of these was a pastiche (electronically produced) of a Baroque minuet and jig that successfully recreated the typical melodic and harmonic conventions and tone colours of the period.

304. The quality of learning in Years 7-9 is good overall. Pupils enter the school with a wide range of musical attainment and experience and with general educational standards that are well below average. The good teaching they receive enables most pupils to acquire reasonably quickly the necessary practical skills in both music and ICT (on which their performing and composing are based). This was particularly noticeable in a lesson in Year 7, in which the teacher quickly introduced pupils to a simple tune that they were to learn to play. They were shown how to interpret note values, identify notes on the keyboard and finger a simple passage. Good use was made of their tutoring handbooks, which contain instructions on the use of the computer as well as the musical material to be worked on. The tasks in these books are carefully graded to ensure success and to allow for different rates of learning.

305. Pupils are interested in their lessons. Some classes are especially enthusiastic and clearly enjoy the subject. In a lesson in Year 8, for instance, lower-ability pupils worked in groups to produce a piece in *A B A* form. All the pupils worked hard and cooperated very well, especially in attempting to keep strict time and to make a good sound on their tuned percussion instruments. Pupils with special educational needs are well involved in all class musical activities. They make good progress and achieve standards in some aspects of music-making that compare favourably with those of their peers. Musically talented pupils, too, make good progress overall (and especially in Years 10-11), often taking leading parts with their "main" instruments in group work and rehearsals.

306. In Years 10-11 all pupils learn well and make good progress. The requirements of the GCSE course help to motivate pupils to reach appropriate standards in performing, composing and musical understanding. During the inspection, pupils in Year 10 played pieces before their peers, in order to learn about presentation, cooperation with their backing musicians and evaluation of the quality of their performances. At this stage, they learn to use such musical terms as *ensemble*, *pitch-bending* and *vibrato*, in order to communicate musical ideas with one another efficiently.

307. Pupils' attitudes to music are good overall throughout the school and especially so in Year 10, where they quickly develop a mature approach to the subject and a quasi-professional approach to performance. Throughout the school, most pupils can be trusted to work in the smaller classrooms and in corridors with minimal supervision. Almost all pupils behave well and responsibly.

308. Teaching is good overall throughout the school, with a number of examples of very good teaching. One lesson was outstanding, especially because the teacher used his own excellent musical expertise not only to present examples as illustrations of teaching points, but also to enthuse the pupils. The teaching of literacy is satisfactory overall and tends to be largely concerned with musical terminology. To some extent, however, the strong emphasis on computer-generated music means that literacy receives less attention than it should.

309. Teachers always prepare lessons in detail, with each section realistically timed. They have good expectations that pupils will work hard and behave well. Pupils are managed very effectively: often admonishments are followed by a humorous remark that helps to diffuse tension. Appropriate attention is now paid to the devising of specific tasks for lower-attaining pupils. This represents an improvement since the previous inspection. A team of visiting instrumental teachers gives lessons to around 50 pupils. These teachers make a good contribution to pupils' musical education. There has been a recent surge of interest in learning instruments – a reflection of the energy put in by the head of department.

310. The department is well led and managed. Instrumental lessons are effectively timetabled. Good priorities for the further development of the subject have been reviewed and clearly identified, although the departmental handbook requires improvement. Pupils make good use of ICT, which makes a strong contribution to their progress and attainment in music. As a matter of urgency, new accommodation is badly needed, in order to provide a wholesome main teaching room and to ensure that teaching time is not wasted when, for example, classes are split between the two smaller rooms to enable all pupils to work at the computers. The department has access to the services of a general ICT technician from time to time, in order to deal with minor hardware faults. Music makes a good contribution to the spiritual, social, moral and cultural life of the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

Strengths:

- good teaching;
- the good relationships that exist between teachers and pupils;
- effective departmental leadership and management.

Areas for improvement:

- many aspects of accommodation are in very poor condition;
- the department is not networked for ICT.

311. By the end of Year 11, GCSE results are slightly below the national average. The number of pupils taking the examination has increased over recent years, although with a much greater predominance of boys. The quality of written work in pupils' files ranges from below the expected standard to good. The best work is very competent, particularly when pupils produce individual projects that use a range of ICT skills to enable them to present statistics effectively and clearly. In a good practical lesson, used to support the theoretical work previously covered, pupils increased their understanding of flexibility and its contribution to fitness.

312. By the end of Year 9, both boys and girls reach expected levels of practical performance in games and athletics. In some lessons performances are good. Assisted by well-structured lessons, approximately half the boys in Year 7 have good basic skills in cricket, fielding and bowling consistently well. Year 8 girls, including some with special educational needs, use sprint starts effectively. Some pupils of Bangladeshi-heritage – girls in athletics and boys in cricket – rank among the best performers. The very good teaching of rounders helps Year 7 girls to develop effective catching and throwing skills; in some lessons improvement in these skills is easy to see. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, the talented and those with English as an additional language, achieve satisfactorily and often make good progress.

313. The timetable's structure meant that, of the lessons seen in Years 10-11 during the inspection, only one was a practical lesson. In this Year 10 lesson, boys threw the javelin competently, making suitable progress in applying both the appropriate grip and approach run, without anyone being particularly outstanding or weak. In a Year 11 lesson on the effects of technology in sport, pupils learned much, benefiting greatly from their brainstorming session and the teacher's very thorough preparation. The session was particularly productive when pupils contributed salient points to the final summary of the ground that had been covered. All the evidence available, including theoretical and practical lessons, indicates that pupils' overall level of attainment is broadly average.

314. Pupils of all ages have positive attitudes towards the subject. They behave well (and sometimes very well) in lessons. Both boys and girls concentrate hard and make sustained efforts. They cooperate well, when required to do so.

315. The standard of teaching throughout the school ranges from satisfactory to very good and is good overall. Lessons are invariably very well prepared, having clear objectives that are often shared with pupils. As a result of this very thorough planning, activities proceed with pace and purpose. All teachers are specialist-trained. They have secure subject knowledge and appropriate awareness of safety considerations. Occasionally, however, opportunities are missed to give pupils sufficient responsibility for their learning, when, for example, teachers dominate discussions or curtail them before they have been sufficiently developed.

316. Teachers have good ICT skills and use them to very good effect in planning lessons and, increasingly, for recording and reporting pupils' progress. The assessment of pupils' standards is good overall in Years 7-9, but the marking of written examination work in Years 10-11 often has insufficient detail to assist pupils to improve their work. Homework is used satisfactorily overall in Years 10-11: it is not, however, always used to maximum effect in encouraging pupils to prepare for new work or to extend the knowledge that they have gained in lessons.

317. The leadership and management of the department's work are good. The head of department provides clear, effective guidance and staff work well as a team. Schemes of work and lesson plans are well documented. Since the last inspection, there has been a significant increase in the use of ICT by staff: this has brought clear effects to the efficiency with which the department is run, although the department is not connected to the main school network. The amount of teaching time allocated to the subject is low in Years 10-11.

318. The sports hall and the new synthetic football pitch are the two good aspects of accommodation. All other facilities are in very poor condition. There are no playing fields for games. The main all-weather area is in a dangerous condition, because poor drainage has resulted in considerable erosion of a surface that also contains many sharp stones. The gymnasium is in a very poor state of repair: it is dank, poorly decorated and with a roof which leaks so badly that rainwater streams down the walls. Its associated changing rooms, showers and toilets are in such a bad state of repair as to be unusable. To a great extent, this gymnasium is out of commission.

319. Extracurricular provision is good. Teachers give generously of their time. Many practices are organised at lunchtimes and after school. A good range of competitive fixtures is provided for boys and girls. An annual visit to Spain is arranged for water sports holidays. Strong links exist with local sports clubs.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision for religious education is **poor**.

Strengths:

- hard-working and caring teachers who are committed to the best interests of their pupils.

Areas for improvement:

- the very low allocation of time for the subject throughout the school;
- poor timetabling arrangements in Years 7-9;
- the need to meet statutory requirements for the subject – a long-standing omission;
- the scheme of work for the subject.

320. The school does not offer pupils the opportunity to pursue either a full- or short-course GCSE examination in the subject. All pupils follow a course of study based loosely on the Tameside Agreed Syllabus for religious education.

321. In work seen during the inspection, the attainment of pupils in Year 9 was well below the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus for their age. Their knowledge and understanding of the richness and diversity of religion and of the place of Christianity and other principal religions in the country is superficial. They have only a limited understanding of the distinctive beliefs of different faith communities, of why they are important to their adherents and how they shape their lives.

322. Within that context, pupils' knowledge and understanding of Sikhism and Buddhism is strongest and that of Christianity and Judaism the weakest. Their grasp of religious language and concepts is weak. Their analytical, interpretative and evaluative skills, as well as the facility to apply religious insights to their own lives and those of others, are particularly underdeveloped.

323. In work seen during the inspection, the attainment of pupils in Year 11 was also well below the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus for their age. This was partly evidenced in the lack of Year 11 written work available for scrutiny. The Year 10 work that explored some of the classic philosophical arguments for and against the existence of God showed some skill in making a personal response, but lacked depth and intellectual rigour.

324. Boys and girls of all levels of ability make sound progress in individual lessons at all stages of the school. They do not, however, maintain this progress over time and achieve poorly at the end of both Years 9 and 11. This poor achievement and the very low attainment are not a reflection of the quality of teaching (which is satisfactory overall) or of pupils' attitudes towards the subject (which are good overall). It is because there are serious weaknesses in the school's provision for the subject, which have a very adverse impact on pupils' attainment and achievement over time.

325. With the exception of its provision for Band C pupils in Year 8, the school allocates to the teaching of the subject a wholly inadequate amount of time in all years, and especially so in Years 10 and 11. Pupils therefore cannot study the Agreed Syllabus in the breadth and depth necessary for them to achieve well and reach a standard of attainment in line with its expectations or their ability. Nor do all pupils have equal access to the provision made, because there are significant variations in the time allocated to different "bands" in Years 7 and 8.

326. The adverse impact of this very low allocation of time is made worse in Years 7-9 by the poor arrangements for timetabling the subject within the framework of the PSE carousel of lessons. Pupils are taught religious education for a term and then face a gap of between two and four terms, depending on the vagaries of the timetable, before they are taught it again. These arrangements make it difficult for pupils to build on their earlier learning and make appropriate progress over time.

327. The quality of teaching and learning was unsatisfactory in a small proportion of the lessons observed, good in half and satisfactory overall. Where teaching is strongest, teachers have a secure grasp of their subject, know clearly what they wish pupils to learn, communicate their aims to them effectively, and at the end of lessons review with them what they have learned. Teachers plan lessons soundly to achieve their aims. They engage and hold pupils' interest through a good variety of stimulating and challenging activities that are well matched to individual needs. They make skilled use of questioning to extend pupils' understanding.

328. Pupils in Year 9, for example, made good gains in understanding the key events in the life and ministry of Jesus, because the teacher made effective use of brainstorming to draw on their prior knowledge and ideas and thus involved them closely in the lesson. He developed their understanding of the ideas they raised through very skilled questioning, enlivened by humour, and through illustrations relevant to their lives. Challenging written work then led the pupils to draw together the knowledge and insights they had gained, within a coherent, chronological framework.

329. Such good teaching is underpinned by the very good relationships that teachers engender in class. They create a secure ethos, in which pupils with special educational needs or those from minority ethnic or faith backgrounds feel that they can take risks in their learning, because they know that their peers will listen to their contributions with respect. This was well evidenced in a Year 8 lesson on the Five Pillars of the Faith in Islam and in a Year 9 lesson that explored the links between Islam and Christianity, where the teacher drew on the personal experience of Muslim pupils.

330. Where teaching is less secure, such as in a Year 10 lesson on the family, it is because it does not address religious responses to the moral and ethical issues raised; the result is that the lesson effectively becomes one about personal and social education rather than religious education. The lack of time allocated to the subject inevitably means that, however high the quality of any one lesson, there is a serious lack of challenge to pupils over time.

331. The leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. Most of this is not the fault of the head of department, who is a most committed, hard-working and competent specialist – and with a wide range of other senior responsibilities in the school. He does his best, in adverse circumstances, to ensure that pupils receive their entitlement in the subject. He knows what needs to be done to raise standards, but his hands are tied by the poor provision for the subject, the responsibility for which lies in the hands of the governing body and senior management. The scheme of work, however, is poorly written. Pupils have inadequate access to ICT in the subject.

332. Improvement since the previous inspection has been poor – although the quality of teaching has been raised, an additional non-specialist teacher deployed and nominal increases made to teaching time. This poor progress is because the school has not effectively addressed the key issue of the previous inspection concerning the very low time allocation for the subject. It does not meet its statutory responsibility to ensure that appropriate provision is made for teaching the Agreed Syllabus to all pupils. Standards of attainment have therefore not improved since the previous inspection.