

INSPECTION REPORT

HILLCREST SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Netherton, Dudley

LEA area: Dudley

Unique Reference Number: 103863

Principal: Mrs M Brennan

Reporting inspector: Dr D A W Biltcliffe
1025

Dates of inspection: 3rd - 6th March 2003

Inspection number: 249105

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:	Cllr M Bradney
Dates of previous inspection:	5 th - 6 th March 2001

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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
11479	Mr J A Paine	Team inspector	English; drama	
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4607	Dr D E Ward	Team inspector	Science	
11190	Dr W M Burke	Team inspector	Art; 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
4335	Dr S P Musson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
4829	Mr I H C Waters	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
8645	Dr J D Ward	Team inspector	Citizenship; music	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
13217	Mr M D Butterworth	Team inspector	Physical education	
18673	Mr R Wilkins	Team inspector	Religious education	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This mixed comprehensive school is a little smaller than average and educates about 748 pupils, aged 11-16. It has recently become heavily over-subscribed for entry in Year 7. The overall social and economic background of pupils is well below average. Their overall level of attainment on entry to the school at age 11 is also well below the national average, but rising. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is similar to the position nationally, whilst that with statements of such need is much smaller than usual. Nearly one quarter of pupils come from families of ethnic minority heritage, of whom 23 are at an early stage of learning English. The school was last inspected in March 2001.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Hillcrest is a very good school. It has many strengths and no major weaknesses. It has rapidly and impressively improved over the last two and a half years from weakness to its present high position. Pupils' overall standard of attainment rises from well below average in Year 7 to a below average point at the end of both Year 9 and Year 11. This rate of progress represents a good achievement by the school and its pupils in a short period of time. In 2002, the school's GCSE results were, on most key measures, below average, but were much better than they had been in previous years and better than most in a similar type of school. Teaching is of good quality, and often very good. The school's senior managers, with governors and other staff, have worked hard – and with admirable success – to raise standards and aspirations. The school now provides a good standard of education for its pupils. Its progress was recognised by the accolade of a national *School Achievement Award* in 2002. On its broadly average income and expenditure, the school gives very good value for money. This is a very good school for pupils to learn and grow up in, in confidence and security.

What the school does well

- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Their relationships and personal development are excellent.
- Pupils make good progress throughout the school. Standards continue to rise.
- The quality of teaching is good overall, and very good in Years 10-11.
- Most subjects are good. Art, design and technology, history and physical education (PE) are very good.
- The very effective teaching of literacy is raising standards, especially in spelling, handwriting and presentation.
- The school's provision for pupils' moral, social and all-round development is very good.
- The quality of pastoral care, support and welfare is high and sensitively promoted.
- The vast majority of parents and the wider community now have a very high regard for the school and its work.
- The leadership and management of the principal and key staff are outstanding. The school knows clearly where it is going and gets there quickly.

What could be improved

- The rise in standards of work can be carried higher – as the school is determined to do.
- Management information systems require sharpening.
- All pupils need to study a modern foreign language in Years 7-9 and religious education (RE) in Years 10-11, as well as experiencing a daily act of worship consistently.
- Homework, reports to parents, some health and safety matters, the marking of attendance registers and facilities for people with disabilities require improvement.

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 very good progress since March 2001. Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 9, although still below average, has risen a little 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, 17 per cent of pupils gained at least five grades A*-C, compared with 38 per cent in 2002. The school's teaching has substantially improved. The school is purposeful, vibrant, happy and hard-working. It has shown that it is very capable of continuing to improve.

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

- raised pupils' overall attainment – significantly so in GCSE examinations. English has performed well, whilst mathematics and science also show clear signs of improvement.
- continued to improve the quality of teaching: it is now much better than in 2001.
- improved the standard of assessing pupils' progress, although still more use needs to be made of the data.
- ensured that the curricular organisation of English and science has improved to a good level.
- raised significantly and quickly the overall quality of middle management: it is now very good.

It has steadily improved the teaching and use of information and communication technology (ICT) outside specialist lessons, but more needs to be done.

The scale and speed of the school's improvement are an impressive tribute to the school's establishment of a clear vision and goals, inspiration, teamwork, hard effort and, above all, its outstanding leadership and management.

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
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	E	E*	E	B

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 2002 were well below average in all the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The overall results were, however, better than the average for schools of a similar kind (as measured only by the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals) – and particularly in English and science. Standards have risen recently at a slightly 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, music and RE, well below average in mathematics and modern foreign languages, and above average in art and PE. Boys and girls do equally well in most subjects, though girls do better than boys in English. The majority of pupils make good progress in their studies between Years 7 and 9.

Results in GCSE were below the national average in 2002 for the proportion of pupils gaining at least five grades A*-C and for average points scored. They were well above average, however, on other measures. Results improved sharply in 2002 – and at a much faster rate than the national rise. Pupils' overall standard

in 2002 was higher than that generally achieved in schools of a similar character. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall standard is below average in most subjects. It is well below average in mathematics and modern foreign languages, average in English and geography, above average in art, design and technology, and RE, and well above average in PE. Bearing in mind that pupils' overall level of attainment on entry to the school was well below average, the majority of pupils made good progress over the whole of their time in school. The school's targets for examination results in 2003 are modest, in view of its considerable success to date. Pupils' academic performance represents a commendable achievement by the school, its teachers and pupils.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils work hard and are keen to do well. They are (rightly) very proud of their school and its achievements.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils act in a highly mature and responsible way.
Personal development and relationships	These are outstanding. Pupils work very well together, are courteous and cooperative, and readily take on responsibilities.
Attendance	Satisfactory overall and much improved over earlier years. Punctuality for school and lessons is good.

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour have been transformed to a very high standard over the last two years, as a result of management's firm but humane policies and practice. The harmony and warmth in pupils' relationships are noticeable features of school life. Pupils readily assume the important democratic responsibilities that school councils discharge. They enjoy, and actively enhance, the school's positive climate for learning and living.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Quality of teaching	Good	Very 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 good overall throughout the school and in nearly every subject. It is very good in Years 10-11 in history and RE, and throughout Years 7-11 in art, design and technology, geography and PE. It ranges from very good to satisfactory in modern foreign languages, but is satisfactory overall. In over one third of lessons teaching is very good (and sometimes outstanding). Its overall quality is much higher than at the last inspection. Its strongest features are teachers' subject knowledge, high expectations and the way they manage pupils, but no feature is weak. The setting of homework is patchy, but satisfactory overall. Literacy (especially) and numeracy are effectively taught – and in an unusually coherent way across all subjects. In well-taught lessons, pupils make good progress through teaching that is rigorous, brisk, exciting, well structured and makes pupils believe in themselves. The very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching is characterised by a lack of depth in what pupils learn. As a result of the high quality teaching they receive, pupils of all abilities and backgrounds are keen to learn, concentrate hard and make good progress in their studies. Pupils learn well here and enjoy it.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a good range of subjects overall, although it is light on vocational work.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good overall and much improved from the low position three years ago. Pupils generally receive strong help, but more is needed.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Pupils cope well linguistically with the school's teaching and give every appearance of being well adjusted and integrated.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall. Provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development is good, whilst that for their moral and social education is very good. The overall picture is strong and, again, much improved.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Another strength of the school. Pupils feel secure, valued and encouraged. Like staff, they show care and concern for others.

The school has deliberately (and successfully) concentrated on improving pupils' literacy, but, in doing so, has squeezed the time for geography, history and RE and channelled many lower-attainers' French time into English. As a result, statutory requirements are not met for modern foreign languages in Years 7-9 and for RE in Year 10. Careers education is satisfactory. Extracurricular provision is wide and well used. A few health and safety issues require attention. Pupils' work is generally assessed well, but reports to parents do not record pupils' attainments and progress precisely enough.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Outstanding leadership and management from the principal and key staff have transformed the school – effectively, quickly and impressively. The result is a school where learning is assured and enjoyable.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have steadfastly supported the necessary programme of change and have been well repaid by their trust in the school's management.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school monitors and evaluates carefully its key activities: its personal observations now require supplementing by comprehensive sets of data.
The strategic use of resources	Financial planning, administration and control are very good. Funds for staff training are exceptionally well used.

The school is fortunate in having visionary and courageous leadership from the principal, supplemented by a very strong senior management team and effective middle managers. They are sensitive but uncompromising in their pursuit of excellence. Valuable networks have been forged with the community and academic institutions. Pupils now reap the benefits. Accommodation and resources are largely up to standard. Best value for money is pursued vigorously.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The good progress that children make.• The school's ethos of hard work and care.• The high standard of management and teaching.• Pupils' standard of behaviour.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A few parents would like more information about how their children are getting on.

The school's positive qualities are accurately noted by parents. The school intends to address the provision of more curricular information and more precise reporting about pupils' progress in the near future. Overall, parents (rightly) feel fortunate in having a school of this high calibre for their children.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils' standard of attainment is below average overall by the end of both Year 9 and Year 11. Their overall level of attainment is well below average in the national tests in Year 9, but was at a higher (although still below average) level in the most recent GCSE examinations. Since the last inspection in March 2001, pupils' attainment has risen a little in the Year 9 national tests, but has risen very substantially in GCSE examinations – and at a much faster rate than the rise nationally.
2. The overall attainment of pupils by the end of Year 11 in 2002 was a highly commendable performance by the school and its pupils. This substantial improvement was achieved because of the school's clear, determined strategy to focus on good quality teaching and high pupil aspiration: most pupils progressed well, particularly during Years 10-11, and at a much greater rate than is normally found nationally. This achievement was all the more remarkable because of the fragmented education many pupils had received in their early years in the school. This performance was recognised in 2002 by the accolade of a national *School Achievement Award* from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).
3. Pupils in this school start Year 7 well below the national average overall, but the standard of entry is rising: the sets of data held in the school on pupils' performance in the national primary tests over the 1998-2002 period show that intake standards have risen over the five-year period, although they still remain well below average overall. In particular, the proportion of high-attaining pupils joining the school is low, at about two-fifths of what would be found in a typical comprehensive school. The school is, for the first time, heavily oversubscribed for its Year 7 entry in September 2003.
4. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2002, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected basic national standard of Level 5 was well below average in all the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The same pattern emerged overall for the proportion reaching the higher Level 6 – except that the proportion in English was much higher than before and close to average. The overall results have risen over the last five years, broadly in line with the rise that occurred nationally. Girls are consistently well ahead of boys overall in English by the end of Year 9, although boys are steadily improving. In contrast, girls and boys usually do equally well in mathematics and science, although girls just edge in front of boys in mathematics. Teachers' assessments of pupils in these three subjects are usually fairly close to the test results pupils achieve.
5. When these 2002 Year 9 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 better than the group average – above it in English and science, and in line with it in mathematics. The school has improved substantially of late – from a position where it was below (and usually well below) similar schools over the 1998-2001 period to one where it did better than the group average in 2002.
6. In the five other (non-core) subjects formally assessed at the end of Year 9 in 2002, teachers judged the overall attainment of pupils as close to average in design and technology and in information and communication technology (ICT), a little below average in modern foreign languages, and well below average in geography and history. In respect of current Year 9 pupils, inspectors agree with teachers' judgements in design and technology, but consider that the overall level of pupils' attainment is below average in geography, history and ICT and well below average in modern foreign languages.
7. As pupils move through the school from Year 7 to the end of Year 9, the statistical evidence available from national tests suggests that the intake of 1999 generally made sound progress by the time they

reached the end of Year 9 in 2002, despite the school's difficulties during the early part of pupils' time in the school. It also indicates that they made much better progress overall than most pupils in a similar kind of school. The evidence of current Year 9 pupils' work seen during the inspection indicates that pupils' progress and achievement are good overall. Pupils make this rate of progress predominantly as a result of high quality teaching that is brisk, interesting, thorough and encouraging. Progress is less than it could be in a very small minority of classes where there is insufficient rigour or depth in study.

8. In the GCSE examinations of 2002, pupils' level of attainment was below average overall. The results were, however, a dramatic improvement over previous years and reversed substantially a previous steady decline. The results were below the national average for the proportion of pupils gaining at least five grades in the range A*-C and for average points scored. They were well above average, however, for the proportion of pupils gaining at least five A*-G grades and in the top five per cent in the country for the proportion gaining at least one A*-G grade.
9. The school's GCSE results have risen markedly since the last inspection in 2001 – up from 19 to 38 per cent of pupils gaining at least five A*-C grades and showing a rise in average point scores from 25.0 to 31.3. The rate of rise over the 1998-2002 period was in line with the national rise, but far outstripped the national rise last academic year. The recent level of results represents a very good performance and a substantial achievement by the school. It is a testimony to the hard work of teachers and pupils and to the focused attention on high standards of pupils' attainment, aspiration and behaviour by the school's management and the whole teaching staff. The school displays a determined confidence to keep on pushing standards higher – an approach to which the pupils themselves are committed.
10. In the core subjects, pupils' attainment of a grade in the range A*-C in GCSE in 2002 was fairly close to average in English (when two-thirds of the girls gained such a grade), but still well below average in mathematics and science at just over half the national pattern. Only in art and dance did pupils obtain the highest A* grade in 2002, but A grades were gained in English language, English literature, science, art, design and technology (food and textiles), geography, religious education (RE), dance and Urdu. The English result is a good example of how a very clear strategy for improvement can produce commendable results in a short period of time.
11. Girls gained a greater proportion of the higher (A*-C) grades in GCSE than boys in 2002: the overall gap between the sexes was about the same as it is nationally. Girls did much better than boys in English in 2002 (gaining, for example, more than double the A*-C grades that boys did) and achieved the same as boys in mathematics and science. Pupils of all backgrounds (including those from ethnic minority backgrounds) achieved well in GCSE: for example, 28 out of the 30 pupils who had gained at least Level 5 in all of English, mathematics and science in their Year 9 national tests in 2000 went on to gain at least five grades A*-C in GCSE; there were understandable explanations for the two pupils who did not.
12. 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 good and higher than most others in 2002. By the same measure, pupils' overall performance was well above average in English and science, although average in mathematics. Pupils' achievement was well above the group average for the proportion gaining at least five grades A*-C and very high for the proportion gaining either one or five grades A*-G. In 2002 the school comfortably exceeded its GCSE targets. It has set itself most targets for 2003 that are noticeably lower than it achieved in 2002 – even bearing in mind that the Year 9 level of attainment of the current GCSE cohort was slightly lower than that of its predecessor.
13. Although the school does not have a complete model or set of data to track pupils' progress fully through the whole of their secondary education, the evidence available indicates that pupils usually make good progress in their studies over Years 10-11. Taking into account pupils' achievements in the national tests two years earlier, most pupils make at least good progress overall as they move through

the school from Year 9 to the end of Year 11.

14. 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 themselves and their ability to achieve well. It works hard – and very successfully – to secure a good standard of teaching through careful recruitment, supportive monitoring and extensive, focused in-service training. It has established a purposeful and caring sense of discipline and the feeling amongst staff and pupils that they are all part of a learning community. It has increased the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' attainment and progress to a much better level than previously, although it has still further to go. Overall, the school has made impressive strides forward in the last two years.
15. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' overall standard of attainment by the end of Year 9 was below average overall – a rise from the well below average level that pupils had on entry to the school. In individual subjects it is well below average in mathematics and modern foreign languages, average in design and technology, music and religious education (RE), and above average in art and physical education (PE). By the end of Year 11, the level of work is below average in standard in most subjects. It is well below average in mathematics and modern foreign languages, average in English and geography, above average in art, design and technology, and RE, and well above average in PE. 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. All the signs are that this recent improvement will continue apace – the school staff are fervently determined that it will not be otherwise.
16. In English, pupils' overall level of attainment is below average by the end of Year 9, but rises further to be close to average by the end of Year 11. Reading is highly valued and pupils' accuracy in reading is usually good, although pupils' audibility in reading aloud requires improvement. Clearly understanding what is read is always at a premium in lessons. Across the school, pupils search competently for information from texts. The standard of writing is average overall: craftsmanship in writing is carefully encouraged. The quality of group discussion is above average, but the clarity and audibility of many pupils' speech require improvement (including training in the use of the voice) to match the quality of what they have to say.
17. In other subjects across the school, pupils' standard of literacy is broadly average, partly because the national Key Stage 3 Strategy has been very effectively and consistently implemented. The standard of reading is average: pupils are generally keen to read aloud and are given enough, suitable opportunities for reading in most subjects. High attainers read complex texts well.
18. Pupils' standard of writing is average overall. Most written work is soundly planned and drafted. Higher-attaining pupils generally write in suitable detail and length. Note-taking is better practised (and taught) than usual. The standard of presentation and handwriting is above average, because pupils are encouraged consistently to take care and to have pride in their work. The accuracy of spelling and punctuation are close to average overall for the same reasons.
19. The quality of speaking is broadly average. Its strengths are pupils' willingness to contribute a point of view and, especially, to take a sensible, constructive part in group discussions, moving rapidly and without fuss into such activities. There are two weaknesses: many pupils do not speak clearly and audibly enough in formal situations and do not generally give extended answers. A notable strength is the care, intensity and respect with which pupils listen to their teachers and to one another.
20. Pupils' standard of numeracy in mathematics and across the curriculum is below average, but on a rising trend. Most pupils handle numbers and data soundly, and are competent in basic skills and techniques. This is partly because the school has carefully audited its current practice and provision and knows clearly how each subject has "pledged" to work on, and improve, numeracy. Higher attainers reach an average standard in interpreting graphs. Calculators are used appropriately.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

21. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils have been transformed for the better over the last two years. Pupils have responded exceedingly well to the firm but humane policies implemented by the school's new management. They have shown that they can act in a highly responsible and mature way, now that a positive and supportive school climate is available to them.
22. Pupils show much improved attitudes to what the school offers since the last full inspection. This is well indicated by the significant improvement in attendance. But pupils have not been encouraged into school merely by the application of more efficient school policies. They now take pleasure in the whole curriculum, both within and beyond the classroom. During the inspection, they eagerly shared with the visiting team the fruits of the many projects and enterprises with which they were involved.
23. The incidence of graffiti and litter has been substantially reduced to a low level. Pupils show obvious pride in their school and value the improvements that have been made to the school's fabric and learning resources. They are warm and courteous to one another, to their teachers and to other adults. They display spontaneous interest and natural hospitality to visitors and are effective witnesses to the school's substantial progress.
24. Pupils work well together, in pairs and in groups, and generally show a cooperative spirit both in class and around the school. Attitudes and behaviour in lessons are very good overall and very rarely unsatisfactory. Pupils cooperate well with teachers in ensuring that the best use is made of time and resources within lessons.
25. All available evidence indicates that the incidence of bullying is low. Both pupils and parents acknowledge that, when it does occur, swift action is taken to eliminate such behaviour and eradicate its causes. There is no evidence of any harassment based on gender, disability or racial origins. Indeed, the general harmony across groups of all kinds is a very positive and noticeable feature of school life.
26. Pupils show a mature readiness to take on responsibility. The school councils (at house and whole-school level), for example, are active, serious bodies that take on significant tasks. Prefects take clear, appropriate initiatives in sensitively and effectively discharging their supervision of other pupils. Pupils assume a variety of other roles, such as acting as receptionists or librarians, taking part in a peer-mentoring system and acting as "buddies", whereby older pupils can give support to younger ones.
27. The number of permanent exclusions has been regularly reduced (from eight to four) over the past three years. The number of fixed-term exclusions is high for the size of school (115 incidents, involving 70 pupils in the last full year). Analysis of the train of action and the causes involved in these exclusions reveals that they have been implemented in a careful and graduated way as part of a consistent approach to behaviour and discipline. This firm but thoughtful approach has contributed to the very good climate of behaviour that now prevails in the school.

Attendance

28. The attendance of pupils is satisfactory overall. In the 2001-2002 academic year, it was 90.8 per cent – in line with the national average of 90.9 per cent. The attendance of all year groups (except the 88 per cent of Year 10) exceeded 90 per cent. The level of authorised absence was a little above average at 8.5 per cent, whereas the amount of absence without good reason (0.7 per cent) was better than the national picture. The school works hard and effectively to sustain pupils' attendance at a high level.

29. Over the last four years, attendance has improved noticeably and consistently, year on year, from the unsatisfactory 86.4 per cent it was in 1999 to its present position. In the last academic year, attendance was higher than it was at the time of the last inspection of 2001. In the first half of this academic year attendance has been sustained at around the same level, despite a major influenza epidemic in the early Spring Term.
30. The attendance of a small minority of pupils, however, is unsatisfactory. This is occasionally due to illness, but more often to casual, intermittent (and often condoned) absence. About two per cent of attendance is lost through families taking holidays in term-time, despite the school's very strong discouragement of this practice. The school adopts a wide range of constructive means to try to help longer-term absentees to do well in their studies when they return to school.
31. The school has a thorough attendance policy to guide its work. Its own internal guidance documentation is clear, comprehensive and precise. It has a useful electronic system for analysing pupils' attendance and helping both to identify problems and to disseminate the causes and trends of attendance. Registers, in contrast, are poorly kept (a weakness also identified two years ago), particularly as a result of too many completions in pencil and original entries being sometimes changed.
32. The school undertakes sensible spot-checks to monitor and detect truancy: the problem is small and any resulting absences are very carefully followed up. The school's prospectus takes a clear, direct line about the central importance of good attendance and parents' obligations in this regard. The pupils' *Personal Organiser* also draws attention to the importance of good attendance and punctuality. Punctuality for lessons is good, without any use of the usual lesson bells. Punctuality in coming to school on time is good overall: only a small number of pupils are late for school on any day.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

33. The quality of teaching is good in Years 7-9, very good in Years 10-11 and good overall across the school and in nearly every subject. It was at least satisfactory in virtually all the lessons seen. Teaching is satisfactory in around a quarter of lessons and good in two-fifths of them. An unusually high proportion of teaching is either very good (29 per cent) or outstanding (six per cent). Just two of the 158 lessons inspected had teaching that was unsatisfactory. This high quality of teaching is a considerable achievement by the school's management and teachers.
34. The overall quality of teaching has improved substantially since the last inspection in 2001. Then 85 per cent of the teaching was said to be satisfactory or better and nearly one in every seven lessons was judged to be unsatisfactory. Now only one per cent of teaching falls below a satisfactory level. About 37 per cent of the teaching was good (or better) at the last inspection, but that proportion has more than doubled to 76 per cent. The quality of teaching has improved as a result of several, interlocking factors – in particular, the focused concentration of senior managers on the importance of good teaching, the appointment of many new and enthusiastic staff, the regular monitoring of classroom work, the school's collegiate approach to teaching, the commitment of staff to personal improvement and a comprehensive programme of regular, voluntary training.
35. Most teachers have a very thorough knowledge of their subjects. This is particularly noticeable in Years 10-11. As a result, they select interesting and worthwhile topics, give clear explanations to pupils and ensure that pupils understand how the various aspects of subjects fit together. They find it easy to draw on a reservoir of pertinent examples to illustrate the work being studied and carefully structure the steps in pupils' learning, so making lessons inviting, stimulating and easily understandable. Just occasionally, teachers do not know enough to extract full value from the topics studied, leaving pupils with only a superficial picture of the subject. Teachers pay very close attention to the requirements of external examination syllabuses.

36. Most teachers pay good attention to pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy – an especially strong feature in English, design and technology, geography and history. In most classrooms, key technical words are prominently displayed to guide pupils and encourage them to memorise the correct spelling of subject-specific vocabulary. Quite often, teachers focus pupils' attention closely on precise spelling or, for instance, understanding the difference between such homophones as "heir" and "air". Teachers generally emphasise the importance of good layout, presentation and handwriting, with the result that these aspects are above average in standard. Most teachers help pupils to structure their writing carefully and encourage them to gain a good level of competence in such skills as taking notes. Teachers consciously improve pupils' numerical and analytical skills. The national strategies for literacy and numeracy are very coherently implemented.
37. Lessons are well planned – very well so in about half the subjects. The beginnings of lessons are particularly strong and focused. In the best lessons, teachers revise previous work briskly but comprehensively, checking out precisely what pupils have remembered. They then ensure that pupils understand exactly what is to be learned in the rest of the hour (often listing aims on the board) and set clear timescales for the various activities, often wisely anticipating problems pupils are likely to encounter. Pupils then learn with confidence and make quick progress. Such lessons end with a thorough review of what ground has been covered – by pupils explaining, and not by teachers telling them, what they know. In a small minority of lessons, teachers do not explain clearly to pupils why they are studying the topic or what they must do.
38. Teachers have an unusually high level of expectation of pupils' behaviour and attitudes to work – an expectation to which pupils often impressively respond. The vast majority of teachers raise and sustain pupils' aspirations admirably, establishing appropriately demanding standards of attention to work and detail. In the best cases, they ensure that pupils explore issues rigorously and sensitively, set suitably strict time limits for activities such as research or group discussions and draw the class together to debate conclusions, reinforce understanding and check that pupils have clear understanding. In a minority of lessons, in contrast, teachers do not encourage pupils to pursue issues in depth, explore alternative explanations or explain their ideas at any length.
39. A challenging approach to teaching and learning was seen in a much higher proportion of lessons than usual and particularly in a number of outstanding, inspirational lessons. In a Year 11 RE class, for example, the teacher's excellent creative planning of a revision exercise on euthanasia resulted in pupils gaining a sensitive and extensive understanding of the ethical issues involved. In a Year 9 geography lesson on deforestation the teacher immediately established a tone of interest and respect through a powerful electronic presentation and went on to extend pupils' understanding and work coverage by pacy, well-timed, energetic and supportive teaching. The teacher in a Year 11 history lesson very successfully deepened pupils' understanding of the issue of appeasing Hitler's Germany in the 1930s by providing searching texts for perusal and analysis and by handling the subsequent class evaluation (with topical allusions) with considerable insight and participative challenge.
40. Most teachers use a good range of effective teaching methods. They begin by briskly reviewing previous lessons, drawing out from the pupils themselves what they remember. They use whole-class time well for initial explanations, mid-lesson reviews and restimulation, and end-of-lesson summaries. Appropriate use is made of individual, paired or group research and discussions. Key points are flagged up carefully on a whiteboard or overhead projector. Teachers often move swiftly round the class, checking on progress, offering guidance and keeping up the pace of learning. In a few lessons, teachers do not make the purpose of lessons clear, do not time activities carefully (or share the timings with pupils) and fail to round lessons off adequately with a checking review. A more common weakness is to underuse or restrict extended debate and discussion, or not to allow pupils sufficient independence in how they learn.
41. The management of pupils' learning and behaviour is very good in nearly all cases. Teachers have a firm but friendly attitude to classes and have a calm, gentle but no-nonsense approach to classroom discipline. Pupils know that staff care and have their best interests at heart. Partly as a result, they line

up in orderly fashion, come into class quietly and quickly get down to work. They are well-mannered, courteous, responsive and responsible. Teachers successfully establish very good relationships, based on mutual respect. Only rarely do they not fully curtail pupils' inappropriate chatter. The climate for learning in lessons is exceptionally positive.

42. Time is used very productively in most lessons. Teachers use the school's good range of resources well – as, for example, when video extracts are thoughtfully used (often in snippets and with suitable pauses and note-taking). Any homework set is usually appropriate in character, but there are too many suitable occasions when no homework is set, thereby reducing the potential reinforcement of lessons. Most teachers make reasonable assessments of pupils' work in progress. As a result of the good quality teaching they receive, pupils normally make good progress in their studies and achieve well.
43. Teaching is good overall throughout the school. It ranges from very good to satisfactory in modern foreign languages, but is satisfactory overall. It is very good in Years 10-11 in history and RE, and throughout the school in art, design and technology, geography and PE.

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

44. Overall, the school's curriculum provides a good range of learning opportunities that mostly meet the needs of all pupils. The school has modified its curriculum to help to overcome pupils' overall low standard of literacy on entry by providing an additional allocation of time for English in Years 7-9 and a choice of subjects in Years 10-11 that reflects pupils' strengths. All subjects of the curriculum work very effectively to raise the standard of literacy and also provide good support in raising the standard of numeracy. The curriculum is enriched by a broad range of extracurricular activities and strong links with contributory primary schools, colleges of further education and training providers.
45. In Years 7-9, the breadth and balance of the curriculum are satisfactory overall. All subjects of the National Curriculum and RE are taught. Additionally, all pupils study personal, social and health education (PSHE), which includes education about sex, citizenship and the harmful effects of drug misuse. French is studied as a foreign language, but approximately one fifth of pupils in Years 7-9 do not study the subject, as the school feels that their literacy skills are not good enough and there are insufficient teachers of French. This is a breach of the statutory requirement for all pupils in this age group to study a modern foreign language.
46. As a result of difficulties in organising the timetable, pupils are unable to study both dance and drama in each of Years 7-9. The appropriate, strong focus on developing pupils' skills in literacy by providing additional time for English has resulted in a low allocation of time for geography, history and French. These subjects struggle to teach the National Curriculum in sufficient depth or detail.
47. In Years 10-11, a satisfactory range of curricular provision is offered. All pupils study the core subjects of English, mathematics and science as well as PE and PSHE. Pupils choose additional subjects, within three option groups, to reflect their strengths, in consultation with teachers and parents. The groups limit the range of choice available: for example, one group does not include a humanities subject (such as geography or history) and only one group includes French, the major modern foreign language taught in the school.
48. The provision for RE in Year 10 does not meet statutory requirements. Pupils who are not following the courses leading to examinations for the short-course GCSE or the Certificate of Achievement have RE as part of the PSHE course. The allocation of time (and the fragmented pattern) for teaching RE within this course is insufficient to teach the local Agreed Syllabus.
49. A small group of students for whom the full range of GCSE courses is inappropriate are sensibly disapplied from the National Curriculum. They study work-related courses (such as construction) in partnership with a local college of further education or participate in extended work experience. The

range of vocationally orientated courses in the curriculum is limited to business studies and to a small group of pupils studying health and social care in Year 11.

50. The school has worked vigorously to raise standards of literacy as part of the National Literacy Strategy. A senior member of staff leads the initiative effectively, an audit has been completed, the school has undertaken an extensive programme of staff training and additional time has been allocated to English. The strategy is particularly effective because teachers tackle literacy issues rigorously in class, focusing on key words, spelling and techniques to improve reading and writing. The school has a similar strategy to raise standards of numeracy in all departments as part of the National Numeracy Strategy. This is at a relatively early stage of development, but is increasingly becoming an established part of teaching in most departments.
51. Overall, pupils have the opportunity, within the limitations noted above, to study the full range of subjects offered. They are grouped appropriately in classes that are organised on the basis of prior attainment. This arrangement is broadly successful, as teachers match work appropriately to the differing needs of pupils. A few subjects offer suitable alternative accreditation to those pupils for whom the GCSE examination is not deemed appropriate.
52. A clear process of consultation leads to sound curricular decision-making and ensures that all views are carefully considered. There is no written curriculum policy, however, to guide plans for the future and to evaluate the progress being made. The curriculum is monitored effectively. Subject schemes of work are of good quality overall; they are excellent in RE and very good in mathematics.
53. A wide range of extracurricular activities enhances the curriculum. Pupils take part, for example, in a ski trip to the French Alps, geography fieldwork in Wales, theatre visits and a contact with Oxford University. They participate in a dance festival, a successful school production and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. They enjoy a good range of sports, including a lively House competition. Approximately 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 seven members of staff. Most subjects make provision to support pupils in their studies – as, for instance, with science classes during the Easter break and subject clubs and activities such as those for mathematics and citizenship. Subjects also provide regular help for coursework, homework and revision.
54. Provision for careers education and guidance is satisfactory overall, but there is no policy and little documentation to provide a basis for planning. Careers education forms part of the PSHE programme, through a relevant succession of activities. The provision is not monitored. In addition, the school holds a successful careers convention, is visited by a careers roadshow and receives regular visits from training advisers and representatives of local colleges.
55. Pupils receive comprehensive, impartial guidance from two external careers advisers. Guidance is sensibly focused on those pupils in greatest need, but suitable opportunities are provided for other pupils to receive support. Access to careers information for pupils is satisfactory and there are firm plans for a careers section to form part of the new school library. All pupils in Year 10 participate for two weeks in a satisfactory programme of work experience.
56. Close relationships are enjoyed with contributory primary schools. These have resulted in a successful programme of induction for new pupils and increasing cooperation with some subject areas – most notably English, science, art, design and technology, and PE. The school's good links with local colleges of further education are strengthened through the development of work-related courses. Connections with institutions of initial teacher training are well founded: the school hosts the training of students very effectively.
57. The provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) varies from satisfactory to very good, but is good overall. The SEN department was down at heel three years ago and not complying with

national expectations in many areas of its work. It has been radically and positively transformed since that time. Staff have shown imagination, determination and a high degree of commitment to turn things round.

58. The coordinator's work, particularly in quickly raising standards of provision, is widely recognised within and beyond the school. Her collaboration with key senior management and pastoral staff is good: messages about individual pupils penetrate widely and effectively across the school. Only her current, relatively high class-contact time prevents the coordinator from extending her consultancy role wider across all subjects.
59. Provision for these pupils is well administered. The coordinator is well assisted by learning support assistants (LSAs), who keep the routines and records up to date. The school has adopted the requirements of the 2002 Code, making them work well and in pupils' interests. A mix of in-class support (mainly from LSAs, but also from specialist teachers) and some individual or group withdrawal is flexibly and effectively offered – albeit with some limitation of staff numbers.
60. At its best, the school's provision is stimulating and well paced, using many effective approaches to learning. Where it is satisfactory, there is an undue reliance on formal plans and techniques rather than an alertness to the changing needs and responses of pupils. Pupils react very well, show a positive commitment to learning and achieve well. Their attitudes and behaviour are usually good (and often very good), even where their special need has emotional and behavioural characteristics. The contribution of LSAs is generally good. At best, LSAs collaborate closely with the class teacher, intervening flexibly and with initiative to meet pupils' varying needs. Sometimes, however, their work is unfocused and passive, indicating a need for more training and mentoring.
61. The quality of SEN provision for pupils in subject areas varies from satisfactory to good and is sound overall. There is, however, room for further improvement in most subjects, including the most effective use of LSAs. Special educational needs staff have a valuable link arrangement with each department. The school regards "inclusion" as one of its key objectives. In this it succeeds well across all areas of pupil difference: those with special education needs (including those who require support with their English) feel part of the school and value the additional help they receive, without any sense of stigma.
62. Links and collaboration with external agencies are generally good; some are outstanding. Support from the local authority's services varies. Educational psychology provision, for example, is highly restricted, but has been supplemented by excellent provision from the director of training in educational psychology at Birmingham University: her work is of very high quality and offers the school a good overview of pupils' needs.
63. Much of the provision for pupils who have English as an additional language follows similar lines to that for pupils with special educational needs. It was, however, difficult to inspect at first hand much of the provision being made for those pupils who are at an early stage of acquiring English. It was not possible, for instance, to see direct individual or grouped teaching of such pupils. Although the school has identified 23 such pupils, many were absent during the inspection: some were said to be "back in Pakistan" and others were ill. Where they could be identified in class groupings, they gave every indication of coping well linguistically. At the social and interpersonal level, these pupils give every appearance of being well adjusted and integrated.
64. The school now has a sound general policy and a designated coordinator for gifted and talented pupils. The identification of these pupils has been initiated by individual subjects and a further group of "globally gifted" children pinpointed. The school provides a satisfactory programme of cross-school, enrichment activities, although many of these are open access and not simply confined to pupils who are gifted or talented. The school recognises that the volume of subject-specific interventions and opportunities for these pupils requires expansion.

65. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is very good overall. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is good. In RE lessons, pupils not only gain knowledge and understanding of the major faiths, but also experience prayer and reflect on religious belief. In assemblies, pupils are encouraged to join in specially written house and school prayers. The assemblies are very well devised and organised, so as to provide a reverent atmosphere in which pupils reflect on their own feelings as well as those of other people. The school puts strong emphasis on celebrating individual and corporate achievements. Pupils are clearly proud to receive awards themselves, but also take pleasure in recognising the successes of their school friends.
66. Teachers make a point of greeting pupils, often taking time to engage with them in conversation. The school puts into practice a deliberate policy that values pupils as individuals, builds self-esteem and motivates them to achieve higher standards in work and conduct.
67. In some subjects, the teaching enables pupils to experience deep feelings of respect and wonder. In an outstanding geography lesson for pupils in Year 9, for example, the teacher devised a powerful pictorial presentation of the effects of deforestation, after which the pupils became very quiet, clearly reflecting on the implications of what they had seen. In art, pupils learn about their own appearance and character through self-portraits, and through dance gain valuable insights into ways in which important ideas and feelings can be expressed. Although the school adopts a "Thought for the Week", it does not meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.
68. Moral education is promoted very well. The school's senior staff give a very strong lead, particularly by making their presence felt around the school at all times, but especially when pupils arrive and leave. These members of staff supervise breaks and lunchtimes very diligently, providing an atmosphere of calm and orderliness, in which pupils behave sensitively towards one another. Prefects also make an important contribution, in similar vein, to these aspects of the school day.
69. Pupils develop a strong sense of loyalty to the school overall and to their "houses" in particular. This loyalty is also reinforced through a well-organised system of pupil councils that enable pupils to understand their position and role as members of a form, house and the whole school. Pupils feel they have a realistic chance of having their views heard and considered. There is a well-understood system of sanctions that is applied with consistency on the infrequent occasions that pupils behave unacceptably. The school's emphasis is, however, quite firmly on the encouragement of good behaviour, hard work, consideration for others and positive conduct, all of which are reinforced by commendation stickers and certificates.
70. Strong moral messages are given out in assemblies, PSHE, RE and in some other lessons. For example, pupils think about "green" issues in design and technology, especially in connection with packaging and genetically modified products. In a very pertinent history lesson, pupils discussed appeasement in connection with the current Middle East crisis.
71. Provision for pupils' social development is very good. The school is a very orderly and happy community that enables pupils to work and make a range of friendships without hindrance. There is a good range of extracurricular activities that offers pupils further opportunities for making friends. These include sports activities, orchestra, choir, woodwind groups and a number of subject clubs. The school musical involves a large number of pupils who clearly benefit from opportunities for individual and cooperative self-expression, as demanded by a public performance. The range of social experiences for pupils is also extended through the organisation of day and residential visits, an important one of which is to a ski resort where pupils enjoy hotel accommodation. Other residential opportunities are organised during "activities week" and Year 11 school leavers attend a stylish ball, held at a nearby, prestigious national centre.
72. The school provides a breakfast bar for pupils and (unusually) water bottles for use throughout the day, including lessons. Lunchtime is deliberately brief, but a staggered midday timetable helps to

keep queueing times as short as possible. The school site is potentially attractive and includes some pleasant and secure areas where pupils can socialise. More attention is required, however, to outdoor social facilities such as benching. Litter and graffiti are kept well under control.

73. Pupils enjoy very good opportunities to exercise responsibility, especially through the prefect and pupil council systems. The school has worked hard to identify suitable activities to promote citizenship: many of these enable pupils to learn about responsible action and how individual views can be voiced in communities. Pupils from the school have been elected as both local and national representatives on the UK Youth Parliament. Prefects have well-defined roles, including the running of the pupil councils and the hosting of local and national visitors. Older pupils help younger pupils with their learning and sometimes support them on personal difficulties. All pupils in Year 8 serve as assistants in the school's reception area.
74. Pupils' cultural development is promoted well. In RE, for example, pupils learn about the major faiths and traditions. The school, itself a multi-ethnic community, enables pupils to learn from one another about different foods, styles of living and customs that are different from their own. In some subjects, particularly in the arts, these customs are joyfully shared. For example, pupils learn to play the Indian tabla, work with Asian textile design and use recipes from a variety of continents. Native French and German language assistants provide insights into the social nuances of their own communities.
75. A good range of educational visits serves to enrich pupils' cultural education. Pupils have, for example, visited Stratford-upon-Avon, Oxford University, the Manchester Holocaust Museum and the Birmingham dance festival. They have also benefited from presentations by, for instance, a theatre group, a Bhangra dance company, a renaissance music "workshop" and a visiting writer. Staff and parents make additional contributions that include a presentation of Asian costume, extra music tuition and a Christmas play.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

76. From a very low base just over two years ago, the school now offers a high degree of care and support for its pupils. They feel secure, valued and encouraged. In turn, they respond with very positive attitudes and themselves play a significant part in maintaining an impressive climate of positive care. This deep level of appreciation has been achieved, in large measure, by the vision and energy of senior staff, who are always highly visible in asserting good attitudes and behaviour around the school. This strong model has underlined the priority given to sound order and civilised relationships. No compromise is made with disruptive or anti-social behaviour: it is firmly and swiftly extinguished. This has enabled staff to establish a climate conducive to good learning and positive relationships.
77. Policies for ensuring child protection and the care of "looked after" children are very thorough. They are backed up by a continual vigilance for pupils and effective training for staff. The impressive commitment and concern for pupils shown by senior staff are fully shared by three highly effective Heads of House, who lead teams of form tutors sensitively. All work energetically and cohesively to establish a secure environment for pupils.
78. The school's policy for health and safety is soundly based, and outside expertise has been brought in to establish the policy securely. Despite this good foundation, some elements were seen during the inspection that could present hazards. Dust extraction from cutting machines in technology workshops is inadequate; fume cupboards in the science laboratories have not been tested; and some potentially hazardous liquids are not properly secured in technician and caretakers' rooms. Additionally, the arrangements for looking after pupils who are unwell during the school day are unsatisfactory, and there is no facility (such as lockers) where pupils can safely store their often bulky belongings.

79. The school has developed, in a short period, a thorough set of policies to promote pupils' good attendance and behaviour and to eliminate bullying. These are not mere paper exercises. They are vigorously implemented by all staff, led by the senior group, and have become practical and effective solutions to a problem that seemed, only three years ago, to be intractable.
80. The school offers very good personal support and guidance for pupils. This has already shown clear signs of helping pupils to raise their aspirations and achieve levels closer to their potential. There are other measures currently in hand to offer further enhancement. Pupils' individual needs are quickly noted and action taken to secure appropriate help. Parents are kept fully in the picture and a full range of external agencies is deployed to provide the necessary support. Staff with pastoral responsibilities make themselves very readily available to pupils and are inventive at finding solutions to any difficulties that pupils face.
81. The school has a wide programme of mentoring. Most staff, at all levels, play a part in this, addressing pupils' emotional and behavioural needs as well as their academic progress and any evident underachievement. Pupils of the school, both current and past, play a positive role in these programmes. The school provides effective training for these "peer mentors". Senior pupils in the school look forward to being able, in turn, to pay something back to the school.
82. The quality of assessment in the school is variable, but good overall and shows strong signs of further improvement. The school's establishment of a comprehensive database to store, access and retrieve key information about pupils' attainments and progress is well in hand. The quality of assessment practice within different subject areas varies from satisfactory to good and is good overall. Marking is generally of a sound standard, but the use of assessment data to track pupils' progress and correct weaknesses requires greater consistency across the school. The system has been recently initiated whereby form tutors work with individual pupils to review and establish learning targets. It already provides positive information and motivation for pupils, staff and parents.
83. In contrast, the quality of annual reports to parents is unsatisfactory overall. There is insufficient space given to a clear description of pupils' current progress and attainments. The formal repetition of learning targets for each subject, often expressed in specialist language, occupies too much space and is not informative enough for parents. The language of teachers' written statements is sometimes imprecise and does not convey clearly enough what pupils know, understand and achieve in each subject.
84. The quality of assessment procedures for pupils with special educational needs within the school is good, although seriously impeded by external delay in the production of baseline data for Year 7 pupils in the current academic year. The Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are now of good quality for both statemented and "School Action Plus" pupils. Subject staff generally contribute well to their reviews. The initial assessment of newcomers to the school is sound.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

85. The school has strong links with its parents. The vast majority of parents who returned the pre-inspection questionnaire or attended the meeting for parents were very pleased with what the school does for their children. Both they and the general community around the school appreciate the substantial improvement that has taken place in children's education over the last two years and expressed gratitude for the change: they noted with pleasure that the school had improved dramatically from what was often perceived as a place of last resort to a school that was now highly desirable to parents and children.
86. Almost without exception, parents feel that their children are expected to work hard and give of their best. They believe (rightly) that the very high quality of senior management and the good standard of teaching are two major factors in the school's achievement and its turnaround to its present confident ethos. They feel that their children greatly enjoy school and expressed confidence in

approaching it about any problems or concerns. The parents who attended the pre-inspection meeting spoke enthusiastically about all aspects of the school. They expressed an unusually high degree of satisfaction with, for example, the way the school fulfils their children's potential.

87. There are no major issues of concern to the majority of parents, although a small proportion of parents expressed minor degrees of dissatisfaction. In contrast to the universal satisfaction at the parental meeting with the setting of homework, about one in seven who returned the questionnaire felt some unease about it, but did not specify its nature. About one in six wanted more information about their children's progress. The school is thorough in asking parents weekly for their view of the homework set. Inspection evidence indicates that the setting of homework is too patchy, but that the homework set is sound. The expectation of some parents for more than one annual report about their children's progress is reasonable.
88. The range of information provided by the school for parents is good overall. Termly newsletters, for example, are attractively written and interesting. The school's improvement and activities have been extensively reported in the local and national press. Its prospectus is well laid out, explicit and helpful in outline detail. In contrast, reports to parents about their children's progress are, as noted earlier, unsatisfactory overall, because they do not give enough clear information about pupils' attainments and progress. Most other information is produced to a professional standard. Parents cannot easily find out, however, about the content of the subjects their children will study in each year that they attend the school. In contrast, Year 11 bilingual prefects act as accomplished translators for those parents who require assistance.
89. The school takes very seriously its desire to help parents and the wider community to develop an informed interest in educational matters and their own further education. One major impetus has come from the school's community worker, a contribution highly praised by parents. Through this and other internal means the school not only enhances the life of the parental and wider community, but also vigorously draws into its own work the expertise of the local community and a wide academic network. The school's links with parents of pupils with special educational needs have been substantially improved. Most parents are very cooperative, although some with troubled relationships and circumstances do not support the school's efforts, despite firm encouragement.
90. Parents appreciate the fervent belief of the school in their children and the comprehensive means it uses to widen their academic and cultural horizons: these initiatives range, for instance, from a high-quality Year 11 Leavers' *Prom* to contacts with Oxford University. Its commitment to its parents has been recently extended by the formation of *The Hillcrest Parents' Group* and a Family Learning Weekend. Overall, the high reputation that the school now has with its parents and the local community is very well founded.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

91. The school has been transformed over the past two years by the influence of outstanding leadership. From a school that was demoralised and lacking the esteem of its community, it has become a thriving and optimistic centre of educational growth, inspiring staff, pupils and the wider community with the beneficial power of good education.
92. The school's aims and values are simple and direct, expressed in terms that can be understood by all. They celebrate success at all levels and encourage all to work to their full potential. They cherish the development of all staff. In a remarkably short time, pupils have made these principles their own, exemplifying them in the daily life of the school. The school is now a happy, secure, hard-working and successful community.
93. The influence of the principal on this remarkable transformation cannot be overstated. She offers forceful but humane leadership, shows vision and courage, and refuses to countenance failure. She has personally taken many risks to achieve these goals, but has always led by example and

remained highly visible – always present at the school gate, for example, to face down the vandals and drug-dealers who formerly tainted the school site. Her care and concern reflect the school's ambition to be a fully inclusive community. All staff, parents, pupils and external agencies have been positively touched by her vision and indefatigable buoyancy.

94. She has, in addition, been both fortunate and visionary in her choice of senior colleagues. The senior leadership group forms a very strong and highly effective team that successfully transmits the school's values by its own energy and enthusiasm as well as by the high quality of its teaching. They show a corporate and interdependent approach to the complex task of managing a school that is undergoing rapid, but necessary, change. They support and work for one another, but are not slow to express their own views. They are fierce and uncompromising in asserting the importance of high standards of teaching, learning and behaviour and in safeguarding the needs of often vulnerable children.
95. The evidence seen in classrooms and around the school shows clearly that the senior management's strong focus on quality has significantly improved the standard of teaching and pupils' learning and has recently secured a lift in pupils' attainments. The school's management has already demonstrated admirably in practice its commitment and capacity for successful school improvement. It is rightly committed to further improvement. Whilst many effective, new management procedures and systems have been instituted, the leadership group does not yet have in place a comprehensive management information system through which the school's overall performance, in all aspects of its work, can be precisely monitored, evaluated and (if necessary) adjusted.
96. The programme of change has seen a rapid turnover of staff at all levels. The principal and senior team have recognised the key role of middle managers and have appointed a very strong group of leaders at this level. They have also instituted an excellent programme of professional development in both educational and leadership skills, which has been enthusiastically taken up by staff. The leaders of subject and pastoral areas are already producing improved results and show the potential for further improvement.
97. The quality and effectiveness of the management and leadership of these middle managers is unusually high: it ranges from good to very good, and is very good overall. They readily cooperate with one another across subject boundaries and embrace innovation: once its educational benefits are established, they are prepared to test their own performance in front of colleagues.
98. Staff also thrive on both stimulus and challenge from groups external to the school. The principal has developed many significant links and networks that have harnessed outside expertise to the benefit of the school. In furtherance of the notion of a "Learning School", external surveys, audits and consultancies have been undertaken by, for example, university personnel. This imaginative collaboration has helped to improve such aspects as pupils' attitudes to learning, the development of middle managers and the integration of children for whom English is an additional language.
99. Some of these initiatives have served, creatively, to fill otherwise significant gaps in provision. The regular support of a university director of training in educational psychology, for instance, has provided both expert guidance for individual pupils as well as strategic advice to all staff on such issues as behaviour management. The statutory programme of performance review has been initiated very well. Staff view these procedures not merely as a formal obligation to undergo professional appraisal, but as an opportunity to develop their skills alongside those of their colleagues. There is a good programme of classroom observation which has (appropriately up to now) focused on teaching skills and attitudes. The school is now ready to move the focus of observations more to the precise outcomes of teaching – in terms of what pupils have actually learned and achieved.

100. The governing body has been steadfast through the turbulence of the past few years. With a local commitment to the school and its community, governors have supported the programmes of change and have responded very well to the tasks of governance under such challenging circumstances. They are now beginning to establish the means to measure with accuracy the strengths and weaknesses of the school's performance. Their trust in the capacity of the principal and her senior colleagues to effect the necessary improvements has been well repaid.
101. The school's planning procedures are very good. The *School Improvement Plan* is of high quality. It focuses on each succeeding year, but takes a strategic position in reviewing the past and looking forward to the broad targets for the next three years. It has three appropriate strands – Teaching and Learning, Inclusion and the Learning School. Each is analysed into discrete areas of action and specific tasks. These are clear and measurable, with sound costings, trails of accountability and appropriate performance indicators. In similar vein, the action plan ensuing from the last visit by Her Majesty's Inspectorate is very thorough and precise.
102. The school's income and expenditure are close to the current national average and its basic budget is about average for schools in its local authority. The school appropriately carries forward a small surplus to allow for contingencies. Financial planning and management are very good and support very effectively the school's educational priorities. The school's improvement plan is costed in detail. Decisions on spending are carefully considered. A wide range of creative ideas has been, and is being, investigated – as, for instance, in the conversion of what was the caretaker's house into an inclusive support unit for pupils with a wide range of special educational needs.
103. Financial administration is very good. The bursar ensures that the principal, staff and governors are well informed about the school's financial situation. The recent external audit reported that financial administration was very effective. The two minor issues raised have been dealt with appropriately.
104. The governors are well informed about the school's finances. They are fully involved in discussing financial matters. They have recently become more active in taking the initiative in financial planning. As a non-teaching member of the governing body, the bursar ensures that the governing body is kept up to date with the school's financial planning and spending.
105. The specific grants and funds which the school receives are used very effectively – as, for example, those for staff training and professional development, which have proved to be of considerable benefit to the staff taking part. The funds for pupils with special educational needs are generally used well. There is, however, some inefficiency in the limited use of a costly, computer-based program for pupils with learning needs: staff who have the expertise are not always available and the room housing it is also used as a general teaching space. The school's use of new technologies is satisfactory. Pupils' attendance is tracked electronically and funds have already been allocated for electronic registration.
106. When purchasing services, the school takes the concept of best value carefully into consideration. It has, for example, investigated the contracts for maintenance of the buildings and grounds, catering and the supply of the school uniform. The installation of a closed-circuit television system has cut vandalism significantly and saved the school money.
107. The cost of teaching staff is above average, but is a below-average proportion of the school's budget. This is largely because many of the staff are relatively new to teaching and the average age of the school's staff is below average. The provision of teaching staff is very good overall. In history, however, a significant minority of the teaching in Years 7-9 is by non-specialists who lack the full expertise to enable pupils to make the same progress as those taught by the full specialist. There is not enough technical support for teachers in art, but the school is actively seeking to remedy this deficiency. The high spending on administrative and clerical staff provides effective support and enables teachers to concentrate on teaching rather than administrative tasks.

108. The arrangements for the professional development of staff are excellent. The school makes very effective use of both of its own staff and external providers to offer an impressive programme of professional development. The support for teachers new to teaching is very good indeed. The school has the capacity to be an unusually good provider of initial teacher training.
109. The accommodation is good for almost all subjects. Some rooms used for teaching English and modern foreign languages, however, are spread across the school site, so that teachers have to move resources around the school. The area for pupils with special educational needs is not available for those pupils at all times, as it is also heavily used as a general teaching room. The roof of the drama accommodation leaks in wet weather.
110. The school interior is generally clean. The carpets in classrooms and on many corridors help to create a calm atmosphere. The pupils' toilets, however, lack soap and mirrors, and there are no locks on some of the boys' toilets – an unacceptable situation that was raised as a concern by some pupils. The aesthetic potential of the site is yet to be fully exploited. There is little outside seating for pupils to use in good weather. The school requires plans to make the buildings accessible to people with disabilities.
111. The proportion of the budget spent on learning resources is well above average. This high spending was needed to deal with previously poor resourcing. The provision of learning resources overall is now good, but there are some shortages. There are insufficient textbooks in mathematics (where pupils cannot take books home) and in Years 7-9 in ICT (where teachers produce their own resources). There is not enough equipment for computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) in design and technology, although funds have recently been allocated to purchase more. Art lacks audio-visual equipment and music does not have enough ICT hardware.
112. The number of computers in the school is higher than average. The ICT rooms are heavily used for specialist ICT lessons, so that other subjects sometimes find it difficult to book them. Most departments, however, have a small amount of ICT equipment in their subject areas. All newly qualified teachers have been provided with a laptop computer to help them with their teaching and administrative tasks.
113. At the time of the inspection, the new library had just been completed, but not opened for pupils to use. It is a large and very attractive room, with considerable potential to provide a very good area for independent learning. The school employs a qualified librarian full-time, who has contributed her expertise well to developing the new facility. The current stock of books is, however, below that nationally recommended.

THE SCHOOL'S LINKS WITH ITS COMMUNITY

114. The school's involvement with the community is strong and makes a very good contribution to pupils' learning. The motto *Proud of our Success* affirms the school's belief in itself and its confidence in its value to those outside its gates. The school has given priority to its involvement with the local community as a way of raising pupils' aspirations and self-esteem. As public respect for the school has increased, so pupils' attitudes to learning have improved. The school speaks openly of its "transformation" (and outsiders agree) and proudly draws attention to the substantial, recent improvement in pupils' examination results.
115. The school's success has attracted the attention and praise of the educational community at national level. Such contacts have confirmed and validated the achievements of the school. The school has used its success to raise aspirations, and the local community has responded very positively. In the last two years, the school has moved from being under-subscribed to being much over-subscribed. It has secured the respect of its community, with the result that parents entrust their children to it with confidence.

116. The school has forged many beneficial links at local and national level. Full use has been made of funds available from a range of initiatives and projects, including participation in the local *Education Action Zone* (EAZ). In and around its reception area the school records and displays activities that show its involvement with the community. The notices are visually attractive and have a professional finish, so that both pupils and visitors readily recognise the importance that the school attaches to its community links.
117. The school sees itself not only as the provider of education to the next generation, but also as a source of rejuvenation to its community. It recognises and affirms diversity, with a commitment to inclusion. Vision and energy flow from the principal, and the school's commitment becomes a reality through the work of a range of people. The community link worker provides a systematic and imaginative programme of activities that is carefully planned and monitored. The role has developed, and continues to develop, in response to changes in the school and neighbourhood.
118. The involvement of parents in the life of the school has been a high priority. In order to raise pupils' achievement, the school involves parents in their children's education. The primary focus of the community link worker is on parents and, through them, to the wider community. The school started from a low base, because prior to the present leadership parents had lost hope in the school. The school starts with parents of low-attaining pupils in Year 7, inviting them to join the paired-reading project and giving them a *Reading Together* booklet, full of practical and helpful advice: parents, pupils and the school thus become joint partners in education through the development of literacy.
119. Local contacts include not only the usual professional agencies, but also nearby churches and mosques. A senior citizens' club meets regularly during the day. An old people's home close to the school provides opportunities for pupils to meet and learn from people of an older generation. Competitive sports and holiday activities extend the range of young people from other schools that pupils meet. Different ethnic and cultural groups use the school as a place of meeting. The *Cresta Club* for adults with learning disabilities is a significant and well-established service to local people. All these activities are part of day-to-day life for pupils at the school.
120. A recent, important development has been the school's acquisition of *The House*, a centre where the school supports vulnerable pupils and puts its inclusive policy into practice. It is also a place where outside agencies such as the police, social workers and other professionals meet individual pupils. *The House* embodies not only the school's commitment to meeting the needs of pupils in challenging circumstances, but also its willingness to show flexibility of response.
121. The school has forged links with other educational institutions at all levels. Examples include two teachers who each spend a day a week teaching PE in local primary schools and the head of modern foreign languages who lectures to students at Wolverhampton University. Strong links with primary schools help to ensure a smooth transition to the secondary stage of education. A particularly powerful link is provided by Progress Mentors. These are former pupils, now students at local colleges, who come back to help and support individual pupils on a one-to-one basis. These students are not only examples of success, but also living links to the next stage of education.
122. The school's commitment to its community and to lifelong learning is evident in its provision of adult education and leisure facilities. To ensure that the school is responsive to felt need, the governing body has a Community Advisory Committee, composed mainly of users.
123. The school's PSHE programme uses a wide range of inputs from outside agencies. In Years 7-8, pupils learn about the consequences of criminal activity through the use of courtroom drama and the involvement of the police. *Dying to Drive* is a local initiative in response to the number of deaths from illegal driving: its use in Year 9 aims to discourage pupils from taking and driving away vehicles. Also in Year 9, pupils benefit from the *Aim Higher* roadshow. In Year 10, pupils receive input from a theatre-in-education performance aimed at discouraging teenage pregnancy. In Year

11, pupils have a presentation from Sandwell Training Association on alternatives to higher education.

124. The school engages one-off projects such as the *Prison? Me? No Way!* programme. These allow outside agencies, including the police, to be seen by pupils as part of the way people live together in a law-abiding society. Zero-tolerance of drugs by the school has elicited a very positive response from pupils and the neighbourhood. The health education team has strengthened the position with its programme of healthy eating and living. The school further develops its links with the community through such performances as a production of *Bugsy Malone*.
125. Links with the community are a strength of the taught PSHE programme, but are less evident in other classroom-based subjects. The improvement in pupils' attitudes to school and to learning is excellent, but so far the school's involvement with the community has had less impact on the content and methods of teaching. Further enrichment from the community is also available at a global level through the Internet, although pupils extend their links with others around the world in only a limited way.
126. The school is geographically and socially at the heart of its local community. A Young Persons' Committee at the school has produced an ambitious proposal for the future that would extend and develop the role of the school as a centre for resources to the whole community. The young people have presented their ideas for the future of Netherton and the school's role in its regeneration to the officers and council of the local authority. The school understands and projects itself not as one institution among many, but as a focal centre that is aware of its context and history within the community and determined to use its power to shape the future.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

127. There are no major weaknesses in the school's provision. All its essentials are right. There are, however, a few aspects of its work that require further improvement. To enhance the good quality of education that pupils already receive, the governors and senior management of the school should:
- continue the successful drive to raise standards of achievement, with particular attention to the clarity and expansion of pupils' discussions, to pupils' learning with independence and to the intellectual opportunities offered to gifted and talented children (paragraphs 16 19 38 40 64);
 - establish a management information system about all key aspects of school life – particularly the model and data by which to judge accurately the academic performance of individual departments and the whole school (paragraphs 13 14 82 95);
 - ensure that all pupils receive their entitlement to modern foreign languages in Years 7-9 and to religious education in Year 10 (paragraphs 45 48);
 - ensure that suitable homework is set more regularly, in accordance with the school's homework timetable (paragraphs 42 87);
 - improve the content of reports to parents about pupils' progress, so that they give clear, jargon-free information about pupils' attainments and progress (paragraphs 83 87 88);
 - increase current provision in order to offer a daily act of collective worship for all pupils (paragraph 67);
 - ensure that a few health and safety deficiencies are remedied – in particular the provision of soap in toilets, full dust extraction in design and technology, and better rest facilities for children who become ill at school (paragraphs 78 110);
 - ensure that attendance registers are always marked carefully (paragraph 31);
 - improve the ease of access to the school's facilities for people with disabilities (paragraph 110); and
 - continue to enhance the school's aesthetic environment, both inside and outside, to match the high quality of provision admirably made in many aspects of its work (paragraph 110).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	158
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	97

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	10	45	65	36	2	0	0
Percentage	6	29	41	23	1	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	748
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	265

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	7
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	194

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	97

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	50
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	14

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	8.5	School data	0.7
National comparative data	7.8	National comparative data	1.2

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for 2001-2002.

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
	2002	70	71	141

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	27	32	32
	Girls	43	36	37
	Total	70	68	69
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	50 (42)	48 (47)	49 (43)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	24 (12)	18 (17)	12 (14)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	33	32	26
	Girls	46	38	39
	Total	79	70	65
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	56 (33)	50 (44)	46 (30)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	18 (12)	16 (21)	10 (5)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

Percentages in brackets refer to 2001.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	2002	55	62	117

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	17	52	55
	Girls	27	60	62
	Total	44	112	117
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	38 (16)	96 (77)	100 (93)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

Percentages in brackets refer to 2001.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	31.3 (21.9)
	National	39.8 (39.0)

Figures in brackets refer to 2001.

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:		
	Intermed-Pt 1	29	97%
	Foundatn-Pt 1	21	86%
	National		n/a

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British – Indian
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
578	82	2
1	0	0
1	0	0
32	10	1
1	0	0
8	1	0
11	0	0
13	1	0
66	9	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
10	8	1
2	0	0
4	0	0
1	0	0
17	0	0
1	0	0

The 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)	45.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.5

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	19
Total aggregate hours worked per week	507

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72.7
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.6
Key Stage 4	20.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	2,176,479
Total expenditure	2,179,427
Expenditure per pupil	3,163
Balance brought forward from previous year	12,987
Balance carried forward to next year	10,039

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	27.6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	34.2

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
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	748
Number of questionnaires returned	129

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	52	40	5	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	55	43	2	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	55	39	4	1	1
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	48	36	10	3	3
The teaching is good.	54	41	3	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	46	37	15	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	55	34	4	5	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	77	21	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	44	46	8	2	0
The school is well led and managed.	68	27	3	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	58	34	8	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	57	32	5	0	6

Other issues raised by parents

There were additional comments from parents on 11 of the questionnaires returned.

Amongst the positive points mentioned were:

- The dramatic improvement in the quality of education that the school now provides.
- The high quality of the school's leadership and management.

Amongst the few concerns expressed in questionnaires were:

- The size of some classes and the occasional absence of marking.

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 **good**.

Strengths:

- The progress made by most pupils in Years 7 –11.
- The leadership and management of the department.
- Teachers' subject knowledge, high expectations and planning.
- Pupils' positive attitudes towards the subject.

Areas for improvement:

- Further improvement in pupils' overall standard of literacy.
- The attainment of boys in external tests and examinations.
- Insufficient use of ICT in lessons.
- The use of data to track pupils' attainment in Key Stage 3.

128. On entry to the school in Year 7, the proportion of pupils who have reached the benchmark of at least Level 4 in the national primary tests is well below the national average. Over the period 1998-2002, results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 were well below the benchmark of Level 5. Results at Level 6 over the same period have slowly improved, with the proportion in 2002 double what it was in 2001. When compared with the attainment of pupils in comprehensive schools from a similar socio-economic background, pupils' performance is above average. The overall attainment of girls in these tests is significantly higher than that of boys.
129. In GCSE English language in 2002, the proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C was below the national average, but (at 46 per cent of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C) more than the double the 21 per cent it had been in the previous two years. The attainment of girls was much higher than that of boys in 2002: 67 per cent of girls, a high proportion, gained one of the highest (A*-C) grades, a figure more than double the 31 per cent of boys who reached this level. The percentage of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C for English literature in 2002 was below the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining an A*-C grade in English language in this school was much higher than normally obtained in schools of a similar kind. This good level of GCSE result has been achieved partly by the normal course teaching being effectively supplemented by the focused work (often targeted on coursework) of an Advanced Skills teacher.
130. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall standard in English is below the national average. Most pupils read fluently and with expression. They confidently apply appropriate reading strategies to ensure accuracy when reading aloud. Most pupils identify and recall information from texts effectively and select appropriate references to support a point of view. A minority of pupils, however, are not confident when interpreting the meanings of texts and need small prompts to support and guide their responses. Pupils' standard of writing is broadly average overall, reflecting the attention teachers give to planning, modelling answers and presentational skills. A significant minority of pupils, however, experience difficulty in organising and sequencing their ideas for writing. Pupils listen well, but tend to speak indistinctly and infrequently give extended answers.
131. Much work is carefully prepared and drafted. Pupils in a Year 7 class, for example, reading *Across the Barricades* by Joan Lingard, researched Irish history, including the Battle of the Boyne, to understand some of the social problems in the novel. In another Year 7 class, beginning a theme on the structure of horror stories, pupils revised their knowledge of narrative structure before considering what they knew about the qualities of horror stories – such as “to have the evil come

from an unexpected place” – in order to prepare for their own writing. In a Year 8 class, pupils checked the characteristics of five story openings, including *The Iron Man* by Ted Hughes, before working in groups to draft a spidergram and noting such key elements as characterisation and atmosphere. Pupils in a Year 9 class, studying Act 1, Scene 7 from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, worked out how Lady Macbeth persuaded Macbeth to kill Duncan, noting lines such as “Live a coward”, “Art thou afeard?” and “Hath it slept since?”. Then, working in role, they spoke these words with expression and feeling and experienced something of the strength of Lady Macbeth’s anger and frustration. All these tasks helped pupils to understand the importance of the authors’ use of language.

132. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, make good progress overall in Years 7-9. The effective implementation of the national Key Stage 3 Strategy in lesson planning, including the use of lesson objectives, has helped to increase pupils’ progress. Pupils in a Year 8 class, for example, clapped the syllables in *Jonathan Partridge*, counted the increasing number of syllables in three alliterative words (such as “dark”, “dashing” and “dastardly”), then deepened their knowledge of syllables and alliteration by working in groups to draft one line of poetry, using the same model. Sometimes, however, teachers contribute too much themselves to oral discussions in lessons, so impeding pupils’ own development of key concepts and resulting in insufficient progress.
133. By the end of Year 11, pupils’ overall level of attainment is broadly average. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs and English as an additional language, make good progress. The progress of high-attaining pupils is also good, because they reflect more readily, for example, upon their insights into the writers’ use of language and the impact of imagery on the reader.
134. Pupils in a Year 10 class, for instance, studying the poem, *Cold Knap Lake* by Gillian Clarke, worked in pairs to consider how the poet created meaning and images. They deepened their understanding of the poem as they annotated their copies, noting their interpretations of lines such as “my mother gave a stranger’s child her breath” and considered the extent to which that line contained a hint of jealousy. A lower-attaining class in Year 10 watched a demonstration of toast-making and quickly recognised the importance of the sequence of actions to make toast, but found the task of drafting a succinct and unambiguous set of instructions difficult.
135. Pupils’ insight is often deepened by thoughtfully planned inputs from teachers. A Year 11 class, for example, studying the poem, *Nothing’s Changed*, by Tatamkhulu Afrika, began to understand something of the context in which the poem was written, as they watched a video in which the poet talked about the political, social and economic background of South Africa before reading his poem. This visual and interpretative commentary deepened pupils’ understanding, as they then went on to discuss the similarities and differences between *Nothing’s Changed* and another of his poems, *The Beggar*.
136. Pupils’ overall standard of writing is average by the end of Year 11. Assignments for GCSE are planned carefully by the majority of pupils and incorporate appropriate references from literature to support points of view. The written work of higher-attaining pupils is generally coherent and clearly argued, often including more detailed interpretations of texts – as, for example, when pupils synthesise and structure balanced responses that compare the experience of school in Carol Ann Duffy’s poem, *Mrs Tilscher’s Class*, with the experiences of school described in novels. The overall standard of pupils’ use of Standard English is satisfactory. Pupils’ standard of speaking is average, although sometimes unclear. Their listening is generally above average. Although most pupils readily incorporate appropriate terminology when discussing a writer’s use of language, probing and extended discussions are rare.
137. Pupils’ attitudes to the subject are good overall. Pupils behave well in class. Their interest and enthusiasm are usually good, particularly when they can take a full part in class activities. The subject contributes very substantially to pupils’ all-round personal development.

138. Teaching is good overall throughout Years 7-11. Specialist teachers use their subject knowledge creatively to guide and motivate pupils to learn thoroughly. The majority of lessons are carefully planned and frequently include starter activities and plenary sessions, particularly in Years 7-9. Teachers' giving of examples of how to write and annotate texts – as, for instance, by using a whiteboard or a projector presentation – helps to focus pupils' learning well. In most lessons, pupils are praised appropriately for their success in learning.
139. Extracurricular activities have included theatre trips to *The Globe* and the Royal Shakespeare Company, national poetry day, world book day, subject support and shadowing the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway book awards.
140. The leadership and management of the department are good. The head of department, supported by a very able second in department, provides a clear sense of vision and purpose in consolidating and improving English in the school. After a period of time during which staffing was difficult, there are now all specialist teachers, including three newly qualified teachers, in the department. The English handbook provides reasonable guidance on the day-to-day running of the department. The good schemes of work have been revised to incorporate aspects of the national Key Stage 3 Strategy across Years 7 and 8. Further work is planned to extend the strategy's guidance into Year 9 and to ensure that the scheme of work formally includes aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, as well as citizenship. Only informal links exist between English and drama, so limiting the impact that a combined approach to the assessment of pupils' speaking and listening capabilities could achieve – as, for example, at the end of Year 9.
141. The marking of pupils' work is inconsistently done. Whilst data is used to track pupils' attainment in Years 10-11, it is not formally collated in Years 7-9, with the result that the department is unable to monitor pupils' attainment and progress effectively. No use of ICT was seen in the subject during the inspection, but other evidence indicates that the department encourages pupils to word process their GCSE coursework and to use the Internet to retrieve suitable information.
142. The standard of literacy across other subjects in the curriculum is close to average overall. Most pupils read with reasonable fluency and expression. In all subjects pupils can effectively retrieve essential information from their reading. The quality of pupils' writing is around average overall. Its strongest features are handwriting, presentation and spelling. In all subjects appropriate writing activities are set for pupils. Most pupils can plan and structure their work appropriately. Note-taking is a stronger feature than usual in design and technology and in PE. Pupils contribute well in group discussions. A significant minority, however, need to speak up in class. Pupils tend to offer short (and quite often one word) answers, when more extended replies and explanations are called for. Pupils usually listen more carefully and intently than is normally found.

Drama

143. The subject is taught throughout the school. In Years 7-9, however, the timetable does not enable all pupils to have a weekly lesson of drama. At the end of Year 11, pupils are entered for GCSE drama: in 2002, one third of the pupils entered for the examination gained a grade in the range A*-C.
144. Pupils' attitudes towards the subject are good in Years 7-9 and very good in Years 10-11. The quality of teaching is good overall across the school. The subject is well managed and coordinated. Schemes of work for Years 7-9 have recently been revised to ensure appropriate coverage and progression. Further revisions are planned to include spiritual, social and moral aspects of the curriculum as well as elements of citizenship. The assessment of pupils' GCSE work is very effectively undertaken and a review of assessment procedures in Years 7-9 is in hand.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths:

- Pupils achieve well in the subject.
- The quality of teaching is good.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- A good use of assessment helps pupils to improve the quality of their work.

Areas for improvement:

- The overall standard of work is not yet high enough, though improving.
- Pupils do not use ICT enough.
- Textbooks are in short supply.

145. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9, results in 2002 were well below the national average. The results were, however, in line with those achieved in schools of a similar kind and were an improvement on those of 2001. Pupils did not do as well overall in mathematics as they did in English and science. Boys and girls gained broadly similar results. Standards on entry are rising, but remain well below the national average. Most pupils do at least as well as expected in the first three years of secondary education. They are closer to the national average at the end of Year 9 than they were when they entered the school. This represents good progress.
146. Results in GCSE in 2002 were well below the national average, but all pupils entered for the examination gained a recorded grade – a position better than found nationally. There was no overall difference between the results of boys and girls. Pupils tend to do less well in mathematics than in most of their other subjects, but results are improving at a faster rate than is usual nationally. Most pupils gain grades at least as good as those they could expect from their earlier attainment and in Years 10 and 11 pupils' standards move towards the national average. These indicators mean that pupils continue to make good progress.
147. Work seen during the inspection from pupils in Year 9 and in Year 11 was well below the national average overall, but their starting-point when they entered the school was even further below the national average. Arithmetical skills are improving. One of the reasons for this is the National Numeracy Strategy: for instance, pupils often practise arithmetic at the start of a lesson. Pupils lack confidence, however, in many aspects of the subject. Many have difficulty, for example, in combining several operations and, for this reason, are not skilled in using and applying their mathematics. Pupils carefully draw graphs from the information they have collected, but it is rare for them to describe what the graph shows.
148. Higher-attaining pupils use algebra with confidence. Lower-attaining pupils draw simple graphs and charts. Gifted and talented pupils do not follow any special programme, but the work for them in class is well tailored to their needs. Many of these pupils benefit from attending the Mathematics Club, where they are given extra teaching that helps them to reach higher levels. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. This is because they are taught in smaller groups and are often supported by a classroom assistant. Frequently, they have difficulties remembering instructions, but teachers and classroom assistants help them by repeating instructions, step by step.
149. The standard of work of Year 11 pupils is well below the national average overall. Most pupils have a sound basis of arithmetical, graphical and spatial skills. They make good progress in Years 10 and 11. Girls generally reach slightly higher standards than boys. Higher-attaining pupils are competent in numerical and most algebraic skills. They apply their learning well in their coursework.

They plan statistical investigations confidently and describe their work well, but are less skilled at evaluating what they have found. Pupils with lower levels of attainment increase their ability to present data, but find algebra difficult. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, because the work is well suited to their needs.

150. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress. Most of these pupils are not at an early stage of learning English and so can take a full part in lessons. The few who are still learning the basics of the language are usually supported well, so that they can be given carefully worded explanations and instructions. This helps them to develop their ability to use English as well as to learn mathematics.
151. Throughout the school, pupils show good attitudes to the subject and behave well. They respond very willingly to teachers' questions and are prepared to work hard. Books are well cared for and the overall standard of presentation is good. Only when pupils find the work is too difficult for them do they slip off the tasks they have been set.
152. Teaching is good overall. It was good (or better) in nearly three-quarters of the lessons seen and only one lesson was unsatisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers plan work well to meet the needs of all the pupils in class. They set demanding, yet realistic, time-limits for each task, with the result that pupils work hard. Many pupils lack confidence in their mathematical skills, so teachers regularly inform pupils that they are making progress. In one good lesson, the teacher kept referring to the plan for the lesson on the board, asking "Do you think we've learnt this now? I do." This approach inspired confidence in the pupils. Teachers' expectations are generally very high.
153. Many pupils have difficulty describing their work. Because of this weakness, average and lower-attaining pupils do not give a full picture of their examination coursework. In the best lessons, teachers work effectively to develop pupils' ability to explain their work – not accepting an answer, for example, without asking "Why?". This technique develops pupils' mathematical understanding at the same time as increasing their powers of expression.
154. In less successful lessons, the work is too difficult for pupils or is presented in a poor order. Pupils did not learn as well when they did not know why they were studying a certain topic. In a very good lesson, in contrast, Year 10 pupils knew why they were learning about percentages, because the teacher referred to taxation. Pupils responded with interest to a telling anecdote about betting tax and, because they were interested, applied themselves very well to their learning in this lesson.
155. All work is regularly marked. The best examples of marking provide pupils with very helpful comments. These comments tell pupils why their work is as good as it is. When a pupil has made an error, this is carefully identified and explained. Where marking is less effective, pupils simply know whether their answer is correct or not. In some books important spelling errors are not corrected.
156. Pupils with special educational needs are well taught. Teachers know exactly what the pupils have already learned and skilfully build upon what pupils can do. Lessons for these pupils contain a wide variety of activities, so that pupils do not become bored or lose motivation. Year 7 pupils, for example, learned about angles by attempting to turn through a given angle with their eyes closed, cutting out shapes, answering questions for the class at the whiteboard and through oral questions. The good pace of this lesson kept pupils interested. They learned well, because the teacher had planned several different ways to teach them about angles.
157. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Good improvement has been made in the short time since the previous inspection. The teaching plans for the subject are very clear and provide substantial support, especially for teachers new to the school. All the documents for the subject are stored on computer. This means that they are easily kept up to date and are easy to

use. A very thorough system for monitoring the progress of pupils has been established, so that teachers quickly know if any pupil is falling behind.

158. The school has found it very difficult to appoint specialist teachers of the subject. Five advertisements had to be placed, for instance, to attract two suitable teachers. The head of department monitors the work of his team thoroughly in many ways, including the observation of lessons. He has rapidly developed a successful team of teachers, placing especial importance on training.
159. The accommodation for the subject is good. Rooms are of a good size, allowing ample room for movement and for pupils to work in groups. Currently, there are not enough textbooks for pupils to have their own. When pupils have to share a book in class, they may not always be able to find the information they need as quickly as if they had their own book. In addition, pupils cannot use textbooks at home. In some lessons, this leads to teachers not being able to set the homework they would like the pupils to do. Pupils do not use ICT sufficiently in mathematics lessons. This is because, until very recently, it was difficult for teachers to book a room with computers. The new computer room now removes this problem and promises to allow pupils to develop their mathematical skills more effectively through a greater use of computers.
160. Overall, in other subjects across the curriculum, more pupils than usual do not reach the average level of numeracy found nationally. This lower level of competence does not, however, prevent pupils from undertaking relevant work in any of their subjects. The standard of numerical capability that pupils have when they enter the school is rising and the standard continues to rise in the school as a result of the national Key Stage 3 Strategy. A group of teachers from all subjects meets regularly to plan the development of pupils' numerical skills. An effective and unusual feature of their work is the "pledge" that each subject gives to take on an additional numerical activity. Numerical skills are developed well in many subjects: these include geography (where pupils carefully analyse data and draw accurate graphs) and design and technology (where pupils estimate and measure materials appropriately).

SCIENCE

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

Strengths:

- Implementation of the national Key Stage 3 Strategy for science.
- The improving GCSE examination results.
- The overall quality of teaching.
- The leadership and management offered by the head of department.

Areas for improvement:

- The consistency of sharing attainment grades with pupils, so that they can progress better.
- The encouragement of more discussion and debate by pupils.

161. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, their overall attainment in the subject is well below the national average. Over the last three years, pupils' overall attainment in the national tests carried out at the end of Year 9 has remained well below the national average, although pupils made good progress overall from Year 7 in 1999 to the end of Year 9 in 2002. Boys and girls do equally well. Overall, tests results at the end of Year 9 have improved each year since 2000, so that they are now above the average for schools with a similar socio-economic background.
162. Most pupils in Years 10-11 follow the typical national pattern of taking GCSE double-award science. The 2001 and 2002 GCSE results were well below the national average, but, when compared with schools serving similar socio-economic areas, the GCSE examination results in 2002 were slightly

above the group average. In both 2001 and 2002, however, pupils tended to do less well in science than they did in many of their other subjects.

163. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall level of attainment is below average, although most pupils are making satisfactory progress from their low level of entry in Year 7. In a Year 9 class, for example, pupils correctly linked the rate of release of oxygen gas by the common pond weed, elodea to the intensity of a light source on the rate of photosynthesis. Pupils then related this to the depth of the plant in the pond.
164. Overall, pupils in the lowest sets acquire reasonable, basic scientific skills and use appropriate vocabulary when conversing with teachers, but are generally weak at explaining in writing what they have understood. Pupils with special learning needs are assigned to one teaching set in each year group. Their diverse needs, even with a learning support assistant present, quite often result in progress being slow during practical lessons. Where a specialist teacher of pupils with special educational needs is used – as, for example, with a Year 9 group seen – pupils make good progress on all fronts, making marked gains in literacy as well as acquiring a satisfactory amount of scientific knowledge and understanding. This improved progress was particularly evident in a lesson that focused on food and the release of carbon dioxide from the body. High-attaining pupils generally make satisfactory progress.
165. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall attainment is below the national average. Pupils in the higher sets in Years 10-11 achieve a good standard of work that is commensurate with their ability, because they are prepared to work hard and receive strong encouragement from their teachers. Those pupils in lower sets working towards a Certificate of Achievement make satisfactory progress. In the majority of lessons, however, pupils have little opportunity to explore their views and understanding of scientific issues. There is room for many to acquire greater depth of knowledge and understanding through more demanding questioning and debate with their teachers and peers.
166. Pupils in mid- and lower-attaining sets come to lessons well prepared with writing implements. This enables graphs and tables to be constructed quickly and to a good standard. Pupils in Years 7-9 are instructed to present their work in a systematic way – as, for example, by carefully structuring their writing and with an appropriate layout of tables and diagrams. In Years 10-11 these good practices are maintained. In contrast, the word processing of practical assignments and producing tables by means of spreadsheets is insufficiently used (or promoted), thereby curtailing the highest levels of presentation.
167. In some lessons, pupils try out their ideas well and make thoughtful predictions for practical investigations, whilst in others teachers move too swiftly through their "recipe" for an experiment. The spelling of both scientific and common words is average overall. The drafting of written work is, however, rarely practised and scientific arguments are insufficiently developed in both written and oral work. Occasionally, lessons include sections with an emphasis on the understanding and evaluative aspects of investigational work: overall, however, pupils have insufficient practice, especially in GCSE assignments, in acquiring these skills.
168. Throughout the school, pupils enjoy their practical work and readily acquire new skills. They handle equipment safely and correctly. They practise numerical processes in topics more than is normally seen: pupils in Year 11, for example, correctly used negative indices. Pupils generally manipulate data well – as, for instance, in equations, formulae and graphs, although pupils in mid-range classes often do not give sufficient attention to detail and accuracy when plotting data.
169. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are seldom less than good and usually very good. Pupils are enthusiastic and usually conscientious and hard-working. In many classes, pupils participate actively, putting their hands up to questions and disappointed when they are not asked for their response. Pupils form good relationships with their peers and teachers. They work harmoniously in mixed gender and ethnic groups.

170. The quality of teaching ranges from very good to satisfactory, but is good overall throughout the school: two in every three lessons seen were well (or very well) taught. Teachers have a secure knowledge and in-depth understanding of the topics being covered. The best lessons incorporate detailed planning, the sharing of lesson objectives with pupils, carefully timed, short sequences of activities, a suitable variety of exposition, practical investigations, penetrating question-and-answer sessions, a work summary on the board and a plenary session. Teachers are aware of the different ways in which individual pupils learn, but no examples were seen where a topic was presented in more than one mode.
171. In lessons where teachers incorporate examples from daily life, pupils come alive and begin to show much interest. This was seen, for example, in classes in Years 10 and 11, when refraction was linked to spectacles, and transformers to low-voltage electrical appliances. Textbooks are used effectively in class and pupils are often encouraged to read aloud, thus enhancing their literacy skills. Staff offer many demonstrations that illustrate scientific concepts and stress the most important aspects of topics: during the inspection these included the by-products of cigarette smoking, the release of oxygen from hydrogen peroxide, transformers and rates of reactions.
172. Staff mark books in a consistent way, usually complying with the department's policy. Where the marking is thorough, comments are constructive, often lengthy and helpfully suggest ways how work may be improved. A weakness is that comments are seldom followed up and that pupils often continue with their previous practices.
173. Staff have a useful bank of short exercises to begin lessons and engage the attention of pupils. The beginnings of lessons are usually crisp and purposeful. The ends of lessons do not, however, always finish with sufficient emphasis on what pupils have learned. In many lessons, teachers' questioning techniques seldom progress beyond the level of recalling facts and information covered a few minutes earlier. In a very good Year 7 lesson on electromagnetism, however, pupils were left in no doubt about the features that contribute to the construction of an electromagnet, because of the summaries and plenary session built into the lesson. The use of homework is sound overall, with most classes receiving some every week. Revision classes are popular with pupils prior to the national Year 9 tests and GCSE modular examinations.
174. A highly committed head of department leads a team of conscientious teachers effectively. She offers very good leadership to the other members of the department. There is also a good system for supporting teachers new to the department. The department has come a long way in the two years since she was appointed. The national Key Stage 3 Science Strategy is being systematically implemented and has already increased the interest shown in the subject by pupils. The department's development plan is clear, comprehensive, monitored regularly and kept up to date. The departmental schemes of work are good. The department's system for analysing pupils' attainments and achievements is satisfactory and improving, but assessment information is insufficiently shared with pupils.
175. The department has five full-time members of staff, but relies on some other teachers to teach the subject. Whilst these staff are competent teachers, they do not have the benefit of working in their own laboratories – a limitation that restricts a quick response to any unexpected topic or illustration. Practical work was effectively supported during the inspection by two full-time technicians, although one was temporarily brought in for the week of the inspection: for a few weeks prior to the inspection one technician had coped alone with the large amount of practical work undertaken in the department because of the illness of the other.
176. The Internet, digital projectors and data-logging equipment were used appropriately during the inspection to illustrate important aspects or increase pupils' expertise. In a Year 8 lesson on the solar system, for example, appropriate software successfully showed the characteristics that a new planet would need to exist. The department has a small stock of data-logging equipment, but only a small range of probes and sensors, so restricting their use to demonstrations rather than whole-class activity.

A recently opened computer suite in the school has extended the number of opportunities for classes to gain access to the Internet. In a Year 10 lesson, pupils actively searched for websites, successfully selected appropriate information and then prepared digital slide-shows.

177. The laboratories are in a satisfactory condition overall, but some require gas and/or water supplies. Attractive displays make the learning environment more appealing. The department has built up generally satisfactory links with contributory primary schools. It has made good overall progress since the last inspection, particularly on improving the standards attained at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE results, when compared with schools serving similar catchment areas.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths:

- The overall standard attained in GCSE examinations.
- The very good quality of teaching and learning throughout the department.
- Pupils' rate of progress.

Areas for improvement:

- The provision of audio-visual equipment.
- The provision of technical help.

178. The overall standard of work is above average by the end of both Year 9 and Year 11. Pupils' level of achievement, taking into account their below average overall standard of work on entry to the school, is good in Years 7-11.
179. The GCSE results in 2002 were close to the national average for the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C; all the pupils entered for the examination gained a grade in the range A*-G. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher grades was much greater in 2002 than in 2001. In 2001 (but not in 2002), pupils tended to achieve better in this subject than they did in most of their other subjects.
180. By the end of Year 9, as a result of the very good teaching they receive, pupils know common technical terms, can recall the artists they have studied and have appropriate opportunities to draw, paint and work creatively, using wire and plaster. They work confidently at computers to research artists or, for example, to collect Surrealist images. Sketchbooks are used well not only for drawing, experimentation and research, but also to recover what has previously been learned in order to answer teachers' questions. Pupils generally work harmoniously together in the starter activities that ensure a brisk start to lessons as well as improving pupils' learning and collaboration. Many pupils give muttered replies, however, rather than speaking clearly. Handwriting and the presentation of written work are of a good standard. Spelling is usually accurate.
181. Those pupils in Year 9 with special educational needs, those who are gifted and talented and those for whom English is an additional language are clearly identified by teachers. The open-ended nature of the tasks set ensures that all needs are suitably catered for. Because there is not an extensive amount of written work in the subject, pupils with literacy problems are not disadvantaged. Boys and girls do equally well in lessons because of the wide range of oral, visual and sensory strategies used by teachers. Gifted and talented pupils are also offered extra enrichment activities.
182. By the end of Year 11, the overall standard of work is above the national average. Higher-attaining pupils use brainstorming well, when planning for their forthcoming examination. One girl of Asian heritage, for example, identified many ideas for the theme "Arabesques" as a preliminary activity

before starting to use books and computers to research the topic further. In a sculpture group, composed mainly of boys, the achievement of all the pupils was impressive. The chairs for an artist, the large wire and tissue-paper insects as well as the ceramics all indicated an individuality of approach to a common theme. All these pupils showed commitment to their work and a determination to succeed.

183. Most pupils produce a standard of drawing, research and development of ideas that is higher than that normally found nationally for their age. A number of pupils attain even higher standards. The system of review sheets produced by pupils, for each unit of work, is a strength of this provision. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
184. Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are very good. Pupils generally support one another well and benefit from each other's strengths. This is particularly evident, in all year groups, when pupils work with computers. On one occasion, when a pupil tried to disrupt a starter activity in a Year 9 class, the rest of the class soon showed the offender that such actions were not acceptable.
185. Teaching ranges from good to very good and is very good overall. The strengths of the department lie in their team approach to literacy, numeracy and ICT as well as their provision of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, including citizenship. Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding of examination requirements are very secure: as a result, pupils not only learn to enjoy creative processes, but also to appreciate what qualities examiners are looking for in their work. Teachers are very generous with their time, with many pupils benefiting from the art club and after-school activities.
186. Assessment data is used well to set targets for the future. A baseline drawing test and the regular dating of sketchbook work ensure that teachers have a clear idea of how pupils are progressing through Years 7-11. Record cards are detailed, but manageable. Teachers do not always, however, use assessment opportunities fully within their teaching. On one occasion, the teacher asked pupils to evaluate one another's work and to identify what they would need to do to be more successful. A failure to allow the pupils to share this information with the class or to make a permanent visual record of what had emerged lessened the value of the activity. The teacher did not know how pupils regarded the work in progress and the pupils missed an opportunity for further reflecting on their work before they left the room.
187. Reports to parents do not give clear written messages about standards, achievement and what pupils still need to do to improve further. Homework was set regularly during the inspection, except for Year 11 pupils who were starting their final examination preparation. Opportunities are, however, missed to allow pupils to read aloud and to give extended replies.
188. The subject leader has a clear vision for the subject and good management skills to see that ideas enter practice. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection in improving record-keeping and in using ICT. The lack of audio-visual equipment prevents videotapes being used to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding of artists. Similarly, the lack of a technician imposes an undue strain on hard-working teachers.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths:

- Pupils' participation in civic activities and taking responsible action.
- The integration of citizenship into the whole school's curriculum and activities.

Areas for improvement:

- The monitoring of citizenship across all subjects.
- The assessment of pupils' work.
- Further training of pupils in council procedures, including decision-making and representation.

189. There are no national norms available for this subject against which pupils' attainment and experience can be measured. The evidence of lessons and of records of pupils' participation in relevant activities, however, indicates that their attainment is broadly average by the end of Years 9 and 11. Both pupils and the school's provision have, however, the potential in future years to reach above average standards in all the required curricular areas.
190. The quality of learning in Years 7-9 is good overall. Pupils clarify and extend their knowledge of a wide range of relevant matters, such as aspects of the law and the impact on individuals and the community of, for instance, healthy eating, drugs and alcohol abuse. Pupils in Year 7 have worked with a group of parents to make lap blankets for a local care home. In Year 8, all pupils undertake some work as receptionists.
191. Learning and progress are also good in Years 10-11, when pupils learn, for example, about becoming parents and the impending world of work. There is an increased emphasis on practical activities at this stage, particularly through a prominent and effective prefect system and through involvement in the school councils. A few pupils have gained election to the local Young Persons' Parliament and one pupil from the school has been elected to the national layer of this parliament.
192. Across all age groups, pupils are genuinely involved in aspects of running the school. They have, for instance, contributed important ideas for aspects of the school's refurbishment and (at the time of the inspection) were deciding on the requirements for a school minibus. Pupils gain a good understanding of democratic representation through activities in the house, school and executive councils. Prefects adopt a strong, sensitive and increasingly effective leadership role in these councils. In general, however, pupils have insufficient skills in procedural matters and in speaking clearly and coherently in the meetings.
193. A strength of the school's provision lies in its overall aims (and considerable success) to promote self-confidence and a sense of ownership in its pupils. These aims fit comfortably with the requirements of the citizenship curriculum. The school has a prominent, permanent and regularly updated display of most events connected with its citizenship work, complete with photographs, dates and year groups taking part. This serves not only as a clear record of its achievements, but also as a motivation for pupils to take a pride in community service.
194. Teaching ranges from excellent to (very rarely) unsatisfactory, but is good overall. Lessons are planned effectively and good use is made of commercial materials, including videorecordings. Some lessons are designed to enable pupils to undertake a little research and there are usually good opportunities for pupils to formulate their own views. Overall, literacy is taught satisfactorily, with key citizenship words written on the board. In lessons where teachers use skilful question-and-answer techniques, pupils usually make prominent contributions. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make good progress in the subject.

195. Pupils have very good attitudes to the subject, particularly in practical activities. In some lessons, their interest and attentiveness increase as the lesson develops – as, for example, in a lesson for pupils in Year 9 when they watched a videorecording of the effects of alcohol abuse. Pupils enjoy working in pairs and groups to discuss issues. Behaviour is very good in most lessons.
196. The subject is well coordinated by the humanities coordinator. Whilst much good work has been done so far to locate and guide the lessons on citizenship, the subject requires further careful monitoring to locate exactly where in the curriculum and how well the teaching is done. Procedures have yet to be devised for assessing the quality of pupils' practical activities and the work done in lessons.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths:

- The very good quality of teaching and learning.
- The improved standards in GCSE examinations.
- The progress of all groups of pupils in Years 7-11.
- The very good leadership and management of the department.

Areas for improvement:

- The amount of independent learning undertaken by pupils.
- The provision for, and further use of, computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM).

197. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall standard of work is average. In 2002, teachers' formal assessments of pupils' work indicated that more pupils reached the national benchmark of Level 5 than the proportion that do so nationally. An average proportion of pupils reach the higher Level 6.
198. In GCSE in 2002, pupils gained a below average proportion of grades A*-C and an average proportion of grades A*-G. Girls tended to attain higher standards than boys. Results have improved over the past three years, with the best results coming in 2002.
199. By the end of Year 9, most pupils achieve well, as a result of the good learning opportunities offered, the very good teaching they experience and the quality of resources available. They make good progress. The best achievement seen was where Year 9 pupils used a computer-aided sewing machine to create designs in embroidery. In two Year 9 classes seen, the high number of pupils with special educational needs and those pupils for whom English is an additional language had their needs well met. Although neither class contained gifted and talented pupils, teachers' planning indicates that they are identified in other classes and their needs catered for.
200. In a textiles lesson, for example, pupils learned how to use a suitable computer program before laying out paper patterns of a hat design on fabric. The challenge was to waste the least possible material. Most pupils had good cutting-out skills, but limited spatial awareness. One boy, for example, had great difficulty in understanding that, if he folded his fabric in two, he would be able to cut two pieces at once. In a food lesson, lower-attaining pupils were inspired by the creative inventiveness of a visiting, professional cake decorator. The majority of pupils successfully made a penguin shape from black and white roll-out icing. Writing frames help pupils to make notes and to undertake satisfactorily both descriptive and evaluative writing. Reading aloud is a regular feature in food technology. Pupils have no difficulty reading from the whiteboard, when word-processed information is projected onto a screen. Pupils do not find reading easy, however, when the teacher's handwriting is poorly formed.

201. By the end of Year 11, the work observed in lessons and in pupils' work-folders indicates that the overall standard is now above average in practical work. The standard of handwriting and presentation is generally good. Pupils' spelling in drafted work is usually better than on their worksheets. Pupils read texts aloud confidently. Their listening skills are good, but the clarity of their oral presentations is below average. Pupils have their highest level of skill in food technology and of creativity in textiles.
202. Pupils make good progress in Years 10-11 and achieve well in their chosen area of study. They are well supported by the range of visual, auditory and sensory experiences that are provided. By these means, all pupils benefit from the information given and the ideas explored. Appropriate music was played, for example, in a food lesson to help one Year 11 class associate different savoury dips with their country of origin. Learning is often fun and effectively adds a spiritual and multi-cultural dimension to the work.
203. In a product-design lesson, lower attainers (mainly boys) were put through a series of active learning exercises, linked to revision. They had no time to go off task as they were introduced to the complexities of the vacuum-forming machine, followed by an introduction to the wood-turning lathe. In a construction lesson, another group of lower-attaining boys learned much about a wide range of traditional tools, brought in taken by an external lecturer. In textiles, an all-girl class rose admirably to the challenge of working in groups to model insects and butterflies from the materials provided. Their previously produced decorative waistcoats, architectural panels and sketchbooks revealed a thoughtful level of creativity.
204. Pupils in Years 10-11 use computers well, particularly for data-analysis and graphs. Computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) is used for logo designs in textiles, but other areas of technology are still waiting for suitable equipment and software. Laptops are well used by teachers to present information to pupils. In all design and technology rooms key words are prominently displayed and regularly consulted. Numeracy is promoted well: pupils are encouraged to estimate, measure and (where appropriate) use calculators – as, for example, when working out the percentages of ingredients in food lessons. Talented pupils are identified and given very good opportunities: some, for instance, designed a new fruit dessert, taking this task very seriously as they learned how to combat enzymic browning in fruit products.
205. Pupils' attitudes are very good and their behaviour is generally good. Relationships with teachers and other adults are very positive. Boys and girls work well together. The only exceptions seen to this very good picture were after a wet break (when Year 9 pupils were restless) and in a lesson on flight (when Year 10 boys behaved like much younger children in the excitement of making their planes fly).
206. Teaching is very good overall: it is always at least satisfactory and was very good (or outstanding) in over half the lessons seen. Teachers work best in their specialist areas, but some adapt well as they move from one area to another. Their subject knowledge is very good. Teachers plan their lessons very effectively, considering carefully the needs of all attainment levels of pupils. Test information is used well to set targets: pupils know the level or grade at which they are working as well as what they need to do to improve. Homework is very appropriately set for the age group and for different abilities. Expectations are generally very high. Marking is helpful, with pupils responding well to the advice offered. Reports to parents, in contrast, are inconsistent, with only some teachers telling parents how their children might improve.
207. All teaching follows the three-part plan of a starter, practical tasks and a conclusion. In most cases, the starter activities are very effective in involving pupils and preparing them for the task ahead. Objectives are clearly identified and shared with pupils. Rarely, however, are opportunities taken to involve pupils in identifying what success criteria might look like or to return to these before the end of lessons.

208. The quality of leadership and management is very good. The subject leader has been instrumental in orchestrating major changes to the accommodation, staffing and resources. Excellent links have been made with local schools, further education colleges and industry. As an Advanced Skills teacher, the subject leader sets a very high standard. The department is well served by two hard-working technicians. Now that the department is on a firmer footing, more opportunities are required for pupils to learn with greater independence. The department does not have enough equipment and software for CAD/CAM. A range of health and safety issues discussed during the inspection (including dust extraction) require attention. Very good progress has been made on addressing all the issues raised by the previous inspection, including the improvement of teaching and learning.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths:

- Pupils' good progress in the subject.
- Teachers' very good planning and very high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour.
- Pupils' very positive attitudes and behaviour.
- The very good leadership and management of the subject.

Areas for improvement:

- The inadequate amount of time to teach the subject in sufficient depth in Years 7-9.
- The lack of a scheme of work for Years 10-11.
- Greater opportunity for fieldwork and the use of ICT in Years 7-9.

209. Pupils' overall attainment by the end of Year 9 is below the national average. When teachers assessed pupils' work in 2002 at the end of Year 9, their results suggested that the overall standard was well below average. During the inspection, the overall standard of work seen was below average.
210. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall attainment is average. There were no candidates for the GCSE examination in 2002, but the results in 2001 were well below the national average. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was higher than this and in line with that expected nationally.
211. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of the main features of landscapes (such as rivers), environments (such as the tropical rainforest) and geographical issues in different parts of the world. In Year 8, for example, pupils clearly understand why people move from one country to another. In one lesson they used this understanding to give convincing reasons for the large numbers of migrants wishing to move to the USA from Mexico. Pupils in Year 9 have a satisfactory understanding of what the tropical rainforest is like and the changes to that environment, owing to the work of such people as timber companies and farmers. They understand that people have different views about these changes and use the information they gather to form well-reasoned opinions.
212. In Year 11, pupils have a sound understanding of how landscapes are shaped – as, for instance, by volcanic action. Pupils in Year 10 have a basic understanding of why volcanoes erupt and give clear examples of the effects of eruptions on the landscape and on people living nearby in both developed and less well-developed countries. They have a sound knowledge of geographical terms. Higher-attaining pupils have a good knowledge of geographical models and use them effectively to describe, for example, how land is used in cities.

213. Pupils have satisfactory geographical skills. They collect information efficiently from such diverse resource materials as maps, newspapers and pictures. They take accurate notes from the video-clips they are shown. Pupils have a weak knowledge, however, of where places are, as they do not use atlases confidently. In Years 10-11, pupils have a good understanding of the methods of geographical enquiry in collecting and analysing data, drawing conclusions and evaluating the effectiveness of the methods they have used. Written work is often accurate but brief, and lacks the depth and detail required.
214. Pupils make good progress throughout the school in gaining knowledge, understanding and skills. Those with special educational needs make good progress, because teachers know them well and match work closely to their needs. Higher-attaining pupils also make good progress, but often are not presented with sufficiently challenging materials to deepen their understanding adequately. Pupils at an early stage of learning English are effectively supported by classroom assistants and make sound progress.
215. The quality of teaching is very good overall and some of it is outstanding. Teachers quickly establish a very purposeful and industrious atmosphere, because lessons are always well prepared, start promptly and begin with a brisk "starter" activity that quickly gains pupils' attention and interest. Lesson planning is often excellent. A variety of lively and stimulating activities is provided. These involve all pupils in work in pairs, groups or as a whole class, using thoughtfully selected resources and delivered at a breathtaking pace. As a result, pupils are inspired to be fully involved in the lesson, work hard at a brisk speed, listen attentively, complete work accurately and make good progress.
216. In one lesson in Year 9, for instance, pupils studied the effects of cutting down the rainforest in Brazil. They quickly reviewed previous work, rapidly considered the lesson objectives, watched an inspiring series of photographic images of the rainforest before and after its destruction, and shared their views with the class. They then worked energetically in groups to consider the standpoints of different people, discussed their thoughtful findings, considered their own viewpoint and finally reviewed the lesson objectives to assess the excellent progress they had made.
217. Teachers manage pupils very skilfully. They are friendly but firm, with the result that pupils invariably work hard, behave very well and maintain their concentration throughout. A great strength of the teaching is that the highest standards of work, behaviour and attitude are expected of the pupils, who respond by working hard to achieve the high standards set by their teachers. When pupils are asked to work in pairs or groups, they cooperate effectively with one another, because the work is well organised, purposeful and interesting. Books are always marked up to date, with clear comments on what pupils have done wrong and how they can improve. During the inspection, worthwhile and relevant homework was set regularly.
218. Leadership of very good quality gives the subject a clear sense of direction and purpose. Management is very effective. The department has well-focused plans for the future and strategies to improve standards, based on a close monitoring of teaching and careful analysis of examination results. The time allocated to teach the subject in Years 7-9 is inadequate, because there is not enough time to teach the National Curriculum in sufficient depth and detail. The subject is taught in a large, well-equipped, specialist room, which is enhanced by well-presented displays of pupils' work.
219. The scheme of work for Years 7-9 is detailed, well planned and informative, but there is no similar scheme for Years 10-11 to build on earlier work and to provide a firm basis for planning the content and sequence of lessons. The limited opportunities for fieldwork and for pupils to develop their ICT skills in Years 7-9 do not sufficiently support the examination coursework in Years 10-11. The department has improved considerably during the last two years and has the capacity and commitment to raise standards still further.

HISTORY

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

Strengths:

- The very good quality of teaching in Years 10-11.
- Pupils' mature attitudes to the subject and to learning.
- Excellent relationships.
- The very good overall leadership and management of the department.

Areas for improvement:

- The high proportion of lessons in Years 7-9 taught by non-specialists.
- The limited use of ICT.

220. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall level of attainment is below that expected nationally. Most pupils begin Year 7 with a level of attainment that is well below average. In 2001 and 2002, teachers assessed their pupils' work at the end of Year 9 as well below the national average. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was below average, although a small proportion was above average.
221. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C in GCSE was below the national average in 2002. It was well below average in 2000 and 2001. The percentage of pupils obtaining grades A*-C doubled between 2000 and 2002. Very few pupils, however, gain an A or A* grade. Nevertheless, overall, the results represent good progress from the standard pupils reached at the end of Year 9. This progress is largely due to very good teaching and to pupils' commitment to their work.
222. Most pupils in Years 7-9 have good knowledge and understanding about the past. They usually recall well work done in previous lessons, so that teachers can move on to new work quickly. An end-of-topic test done by pupils in Year 9 showed that they had remembered well their work on town conditions in the nineteenth century. They identified and explained changes convincingly. The higher attainers interpreted satisfactorily graphs showing population changes.
223. The majority of pupils in Years 7-9 use historical sources competently to build up a picture of past events. They make valid deductions and support them with appropriate evidence. Pupils in an upper set in Year 7, for instance, used a wide range of sources well to describe life in Britain in 1066. Higher-attaining pupils successfully assess the reliability and usefulness of sources. Lower-attaining pupils use sources adequately for information. High attainers explain well the reasons for actions taken in the past – as, for example, in their work on the abolition of slavery.
224. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have sound knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. In Year 11, for example, they understood some of the differences between communist and capitalist states. The highest attainers use a range of historical sources well. A small group of pupils in Year 10 successfully used complex, demanding extracts from newspapers to compare the views of journalists and historians on appeasement in the 1930s and on current events. The high attainers explain successfully why events have happened – as, for instance, in their work on the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in Russia in 1917. They write very well at length. Lower attainers have poor recall of their work, include irrelevant detail in practice examination answers and find the evaluation of sources difficult.
225. Most pupils make good progress in learning about the past, in understanding why events have happened and in developing the capacity to use and evaluate historical sources. In the lessons taught by the specialist teacher, pupils often make very good progress. The progress of pupils

taught by non-specialist teaching is not as good as it should be, because staff lack the subject-specific expertise to deepen pupils' understanding and historical skills sufficiently. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, although the majority attain well below average standards.

226. The vast majority of pupils throughout the school have a very positive approach to their work, show interest and enthusiasm and are good learners. The standard of behaviour is very good overall. Relationships are excellent. Pupils are prepared to work hard for their teachers.
227. The quality of teaching in Years 7-9 is good overall. It is much better in lessons taught by the specialist teacher (who is very confident about subject content and historical skills) than in lessons taught by the non-specialists, whose teaching is nevertheless usually satisfactory. Teaching is very good in Years 10 and 11, where all lessons are taught by the specialist teacher: these pupils make very good, and sometimes excellent, progress. The progress of pupils in classes taught by the non-specialists, however, is usually just satisfactory. Teachers use an appropriate variety of learning methods, including individual, paired and group work. They make a very good contribution to the development of pupils' literacy. Relatively little use, however, is made of ICT as a teaching and learning tool.
228. In the best lessons, the teacher's subject knowledge is excellent and is communicated very effectively, so that pupils acquire very good understanding about the past. The lessons are planned well and the work is demanding and interesting. Pupils are successfully motivated to try hard and achieve well. A group of pupils in Year 9, for example, used extracts from a videorecording about the Paris Exhibition of 1900 to build up a picture of life in Europe just before World War 1. The teacher provided a framework for pupils to record their findings and paused the video to check that pupils understood the vocabulary used. As a follow-up, pupils were asked to summarise their findings in a short paragraph, which some then read aloud to the class. The accounts showed excellent learning.
229. In less successful lessons, teachers are less confident with subject content and historical skills. Sometimes the resources used are too difficult, whilst in other lessons appropriate resources are not used well. Teachers do not always check that the activity set has actually resulted in pupils learning what they expected them to learn. A group of pupils in Year 8, for instance, created a map to show the defeat of the Armada, but several could not tell the story of the defeat, even when they had completed the map.
230. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department is committed to improving standards: the improvement in GCSE attainment in the past two years is an indication of his success. The department makes an excellent contribution to the school's citizenship programme. The work of the department is monitored effectively. The high proportion of lessons in Years 7-9 taught by non-specialists is a weakness, as is the very limited use of ICT for teaching and learning.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths:

- Teachers' good subject knowledge.
- Well-prepared lessons and resources.
- Pupils' very good behaviour and positive attitudes to the subject.
- Good leadership and management.

Areas for improvement:

- Pupils' overall standard of attainment.
- The accuracy of assessment in Years 7-9.
- The use and impact of ICT across most subjects.

231. Pupils' overall level of attainment on entry to the school is well below average. Although pupils improve their ICT skills in Years 7-9, their attainment by the end of Year 9 is below average. In 2002, teachers' assessments indicated that an average proportion of pupils reached at least Level 5. The school realises, however, that this assessment was over-optimistic.
232. There have been no GCSE full-course entries in the subject up to the present time. In this academic year, the school has introduced both full and short GCSE courses, and a vocational course is also being run. The work of Year 11 pupils indicates that the overall standard of attainment is below average. The school is committed to raising standards of work and to the wider use of ICT.
233. By the end of Year 9, most pupils are confident in the use of ICT applications, including word processing, desktop publishing, databases, spreadsheets and use of the Internet. They apply these skills in carrying out projects – as, for example, on fitness. In Year 7, for instance, they quickly learn how to use the network and passwords and how to access their work folders. They employ relevant ICT vocabulary in their lessons and use the Internet as a resource for images. They produce a range of leaflets and logos, write poems and acquire a satisfactory understanding of different fonts and layouts. They learn to use simple spreadsheets.
234. Pupils in Year 8 develop satisfactorily their understanding of such core office applications as graphics, databases and presentation software. They improve their desktop publishing and Internet skills and design websites as part of a project. They learn the theory behind these applications and become aware of the social implications of using computers. They also learn to use spreadsheets for problem-solving activities.
235. In Years 10 and 11, pupils carry out satisfactorily such research-based projects as improving communications between a cinema and its customers. They assume the roles of consultants, design websites, do mail-merge and produce project reports. They set out the details of the hardware and software used and the alternatives available, and analyse and evaluate their projects soundly. They carry out spreadsheet work of good quality and do more complex work, using word processing. They produce suitable pieces of writing on topics as varied as Brussels, satellites and earthquakes. They also become familiar with public domain software.
236. Overall, most pupils make satisfactory progress throughout the school. Higher-attaining pupils make good progress and move quickly to more complex tasks. The department is helping all pupils to do better by running homework clubs and breakfast clubs. Homework is set regularly. The marking of pupils' work is sound and gives them appropriate support and guidance.

237. Pupils' attitudes are generally positive and their behaviour very good. Pupils show interest and motivation to learn and participate well in lessons. Most demonstrate persistence in learning and work at a good pace, taking responsibility for their own learning. Pupils generally respond well to teachers' questioning. Both pupils with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented work well.
238. The quality of specialist teaching ranges from satisfactory to very good, and is good overall. Electronic presentations are used effectively in ICT lessons to enhance the quality of learning. Teachers prepare their work well and have good subject knowledge. Where teaching is good or very good, lessons have a clear structure, expectations are high, the pace of learning is appropriate, pupils are fully involved in lessons and the learning atmosphere is productive. The interaction between teachers and pupils is good. Plenary sessions are used well to consolidate learning. On occasions, however, a better balance is required between teachers' directions and the opportunities for pupils to contribute to lessons.
239. Satisfactory attention is paid in lessons to literacy and numeracy. Specialist vocabulary such as "templates", "navigation" and "cells" is carefully explained. There are suitable opportunities for pupils to use numerical data and formulae in lessons on spreadsheets. All pupils are supported through sensitive teacher interventions. Pupils enjoy using ICT at school and believe it is important that they have strong ICT skills. Lessons advance their knowledge and skills soundly and prepare them well for the world of work.
240. The leadership and management of the subject are good. A new head of ICT was appointed in September 2002. She has produced comprehensive, thorough documentation, including schemes of work. The Key Stage 3 scheme of work takes appropriate account of the ICT strand in the National Strategy. There is good communication within the department and meetings are minuted. The work of all staff is suitably monitored and evaluated.
241. Staffing and resources within the department are adequate, although there is a shortage of textbooks in Years 7-9. Departmental accommodation is adequate: there are two computer suites, one of which was set up only recently. The latter is a very pleasant suite, with good quality displays. A technician gives strong support to the subject. Senior managers have appropriate procedures in place to ensure that software licences are purchased and that safe use is made of the Internet. The school's ratio of computers to pupils (1:4) is better than the minimum of 1:7 that is nationally recommended.
242. The school has made broadly satisfactory progress in ICT since the last inspection. It is better resourced and a coordinator for cross-curricular ICT has been appointed. He has been in post for only a few weeks, but has already begun to help departments to improve the use of ICT in teaching and learning. Most members of staff have successfully completed a *New Opportunities Fund* ICT-training programme, although the school has not formally evaluated it.
243. The use and impact of ICT across the curriculum is variable: some departments use it regularly, whilst others are in the process of developing it. It is used fairly regularly in science, art, design and technology, and modern foreign languages, but not enough in English and mathematics. Science uses ICT for data-logging, PE and RE use the Internet for research, and design and technology make some use of computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM). Electronic presentations are a prominent feature of a minority of lessons. These capture pupils' attention and provide motivation to learn.
244. Overall, however, the school does not have an effective system for auditing, monitoring and evaluating the contribution of all subjects to the development of pupils' ICT capability. As a result, the use of ICT by subject departments is inconsistent and uncoordinated. The ICT department is, however, now well placed to play a leading role in enhancing the cross-curricular use of ICT and making further improvements in practice.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths:

- The department is very well led and managed.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good.
- The department contributes well to pupils' social and cultural development.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards of work are not high enough.
- Pupils' aural and oral skills are weak.
- The requirements of the National Curriculum are not met fully in Years 7-9.

245. The department has experienced a serious lack of continuity in teaching in recent years because of the school's inability to recruit and retain teachers of high quality. Some pupils, for example, have had as many as ten different teachers. An entirely new department was formed in September 2002, under the leadership of an Advanced Skills teacher. The new head of department has rapidly put in place effective strategies to raise standards to required levels, but these will take a little time to come to fruition. There are encouraging signs of a strong rise in standards, but weaknesses remain, most noticeably in pupils' aural and oral skills. Standards are not yet high enough. The continuity of teaching is being affected once again by the long-term sickness of a recently appointed French teacher.
246. The proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the range A*-C in the full-course GCSE examinations in 2002 in French and German was significantly below the national average. The trend over the last three years in French has been downward. The results in German showed an improvement over those of 2001, but were well below the results for 2000. All pupils entered for the examination in French and German attained a grade in the range A*-G. There was little difference in the overall performance of boys and girls. Pupils tend to do worse in modern foreign languages than they do in most of their other subjects.
247. Pupils in Year 10 have the option to begin the study of Urdu. All pupils who were entered for the GCSE examination in this language attained a grade in the range A*-E and six of the ten pupils attained a grade in the range A*-C. Results have generally been consistent over the last three years. In the one lesson observed in Year 11, the teaching was good. The whole lesson was conducted in Urdu and pupils were challenged well. They worked productively and responded well to the teacher.
248. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2002 suggested that pupils' overall level of attainment was a little below average. Evidence from Years 9 and 10 during the inspection, however, indicates that pupils' overall level of attainment in French and German by the end of Year 9 is well below average. Standards are improving, particularly in pupils' written work, with the result that many pupils are close to the expected level. Nevertheless, these pupils generally lack the degree of accuracy that is evident in some of the work in Year 7.
249. Pupils have paid insufficient attention in the past to such basic elements of grammar as the use of capital letters for nouns in German and of accents in French. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 9, for instance, are not secure in the use of the perfect tense, because accents are often omitted from the past participles of *-er* verbs. In a lesson in Year 9, when they constructed sentences concerning the use of *on peut*, not all pupils used an infinitive correctly to complete the task. Many pupils copy correctly, but make mistakes when writing independently, because their knowledge is insecure and they do not check their work sufficiently.

250. Pupils' aural and oral skills are weak in Years 8 and 9, because they have not been sufficiently trained in the past. Pupils generally lack confidence in both these skills. In a Year 8 French class, however, pupils showed good understanding of a recipe for making pancakes. They were able to place the sequence of many of the actions involved into the correct order.
251. Pupils' overall level of attainment by the end of Year 11 in French and German is well below average. Aural and oral skills are weak. In a Year 11 French lesson, pupils lacked confidence and competence in reading aloud. In a Year 10 lesson, pupils' pronunciation was often anglicised. In a Year 11 German lesson, pupils had difficulty in extracting the correct times for television programmes from a conversation on cassette. Lower-attaining pupils in Year 11 lacked the basic vocabulary to complete role-play conversations in preparation for their examination. In their written work in Year 11, pupils in French lack consistency in the correct use of different tenses, and in German find difficulty with word order and with case-endings after prepositions.
252. The achievement and rate of progress of most pupils are satisfactory. Since September, pupils have been steadily acquiring some of the basic skills they have lacked. They have learned, for example, the correct endings of verbs in each language, the correct use of the accusative case in German and the past and future tenses in French that will help them to reach higher levels in the languages. Higher-attaining pupils in German in Year 10 have improved their writing considerably in a short time. New vocabulary is carefully recorded in exercise books. Teachers ensure that pupils understand basic grammatical terms, when they introduce new constructions. The progress of pupils with special educational needs, those who are learning English as an additional language and the gifted and talented is similar to that of other pupils.
253. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally good. Pupils respond well to their teachers, apply themselves to their tasks and listen attentively. In a Year 7 lesson in German, their attitudes and behaviour were exemplary. They were well motivated, keen to learn and cooperated enthusiastically with their teacher. As a result, they made very good progress in the lesson.
254. The quality of teaching ranges from very good to satisfactory, and is satisfactory overall. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject and plan well. Every lesson has a suitable starter activity. Objectives are shared with pupils, so that they know what they have to learn. Many lessons contain a good visual element (particularly those with electronic presentations) that is stimulating and keeps pupils alert. Most lessons end with an evaluation of what has been learned. Homework is set appropriately to extend class work. Pupils' work is marked well, with targets and comments to help pupils to improve. Chorus work is used well to consolidate vocabulary, but occasionally there is insufficient challenge offered to individuals afterwards to help them to gain in confidence.
255. In a very good lesson in German in Year 7, for instance, pupils learned how to tell the time. The lesson started with paired work that consolidated pupils' knowledge of numbers. During the course of the lesson, pupils learned the hour, the quarters, the half hour and the minutes. They translated six sentences correctly into German. The lesson ended with a listening exercise to consolidate what pupils had learned. Pupils worked productively and maintained their concentration and interest throughout. A range of different activities and number games kept lower-attaining pupils in a Year 8 French class working until the very end of the lesson.
256. The department is very effectively led and managed. The recently appointed head of department has made significant progress in organisation and administration. She has high expectations and is committed to raising very quickly the profile and the standards of modern foreign languages. The two language rooms have been completely refurbished and contain good displays, although seating is tight for some very large sets. The department makes a good contribution to pupils' social and cultural development. Good use is made of ICT both in enhancing the quality of teaching and in effective administration. A substantial number of pupils in Years 7-9 do not learn a language and the requirements of the National Curriculum are therefore not fully met. Pupils have regular contact with native speakers. The services of the French assistant are being used well to cover the long-

term sickness of the French teacher, but the department lacks an experienced specialist teacher of French. There is good liaison with a local university.

MUSIC

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

Strengths:

- The consistency with which good quality teaching is provided.
- The procedures for assessing pupils' work.
- The range of extracurricular activities provided.

Areas for improvement:

- Pupils' attainment, particularly in Years 10-11.
- The number of pupils taking the GCSE examination.
- The provision of computerised work-stations.

257. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 9, their overall attainment is in line with the national pattern in performance, composition and listening. The head of music was appointed only in September 2002. Before that time, there had been very patchy provision in the subject and no formal assessments of pupils' standards of work had been carried out.
258. By the end of Year 9, pupils perform and compose to an average standard, using electronic keyboards, percussion instruments, some orchestral instruments and the singing voice. In order to learn and reinforce their knowledge and use of the rudiments, pupils use the keyboards: many still rely on letter names being written on the keyboard, but most use a mixture of staff notation and letter names. Pupils can play such short diatonic tunes as the *Eastenders* theme, sometimes adding the root of a chord as accompaniment. They learn about the instruments of Western music as well as instruments used in other parts of the world. Indian classical and folk music features strongly in the curriculum.
259. Pupils' overall attainment by the end of Year 11 is below the national average. In the 2000 and 2001 GCSE examinations, taken together, six out of 15 pupils gained grades in the range A*-C. One pupil gained an A* grade. No pupils were entered for the examination in 2002.
260. In the work seen during the inspection, the overall standard of performance, composition and listening was below average by the end of Year 11. In the present Year 11, for instance, only one pupil plays an individual instrument (the clarinet) to a good standard. Most pupils use the electronic keyboard to reproduce or compose pieces and to build up their knowledge of scales, chords and musical form. Most of these pupils are attempting the GCSE course with limited prior experience of music. Consequently, there is a heavy emphasis on learning the "building blocks" of time, tune and harmony. They also learn satisfactorily about influences of composers – as, for example, Ravi Shankar's connection with the Beatles in the 1960s.
261. The quality of learning in Years 7-9 is good overall. Pupils enter the school with an overall educational attainment that is well below average and with varied musical experience. Early lessons focus on such musical elements and rudiments as note values, scales and chords. Many pupils are capable of learning challenging tasks quite quickly. One Year 7 class that included a large number of pupils with special educational needs, for example, learned how to select the notes of chords from a diatonic scale and then to play chords in root position and in first and second inversions.

262. Pupils make good progress on the keyboard and in learning notation. They also learn about musical devices (for example, the trill and staccato playing) as well as about jazz, popular music, and the medieval and classical periods. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make good progress. Individuals with special musical talent are given good opportunities to show what they can do in their lessons. Individual lessons are provided for all who wish to learn an instrument and pupils in Year 7 are offered free lessons.
263. In Years 10-11, most pupils learn well and make good progress, often starting from a very modest level of musical skill and knowledge. The requirements of the GCSE course help to motivate pupils to reach appropriate standards in performing, composing and musical understanding. In one lesson, pupils in Year 10 covered a great deal of work: they developed group improvisations on a simple chord sequence, analysed and criticised one another's pieces, practised rhythmic patterning and learned how to recognise intervals aurally.
264. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are good overall throughout the school. Most pupils are interested in their lessons, approaching the tasks set for them willingly and energetically. In most lessons, very little time is wasted. Behaviour is very good. Pupils in Year 10 noticeably develop a mature approach, in which they cooperate very well with the teacher and with one another. This enables them to cover much work in lessons and to make good progress. They make very good use of practice rooms, where they work hard without direct supervision.
265. Teaching ranges from excellent to satisfactory and is good overall. In the best lessons, teachers use their own musical expertise to present examples, play to pupils and accompany them. The teaching of literacy is good. Teachers always write important musical terms on the board and insist that pupils spell and use the terms correctly. Pupils' writing of background information on composers and styles is done well, with good attention to grammar, spelling and presentation.
266. Teachers always prepare lessons in detail, with the sections of lessons timed. In all lessons, pupils are managed well, and sometimes very well. In several of the better lessons seen, the teacher did not need to admonish pupils or wait for attention, because the lessons were very fluently delivered, giving pupils no cause for inattention. Appropriate, individual help is given to pupils with special educational needs in order to clarify their tasks – a process that usually happens without slowing down the pace of lessons. Pupils' work in progress is assessed well: pupils are encouraged to be realistic in assessing their own work and that of their peers.
267. The department is well led and managed by a newly qualified teacher. Instrumental lessons are effectively timetabled. Pupils in Years 10-11 make good use of ICT for their written work. There are, however, insufficient computerised work-stations to enable all pupils in Years 7-9 to have appropriate experience of this aspect of ICT. Assessment procedures are good, with very detailed attention paid to the accurate use of National Curriculum levels. The overall monitoring of pupils' standards of attainment is thoroughly done.
268. The department runs several extracurricular groups, including a 30-strong orchestra, choir, keyboard club, tabla group, woodwind and recorder groups, and music recording group. The head of music is now ready to be more selective with these groups, in order to achieve higher standards. This intention, together with the growing number of pupils who receive individual lessons, promises to raise the general profile of the department and to help to improve results in the GCSE examination. The subject makes a good contribution to the social and cultural life of the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths:

- The quality of teaching is very good.
- Pupils' attitudes to the subject are excellent.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- The outstanding work in dance.

Areas for improvement:

- Marking is not detailed enough to help pupils to improve their written work.

269. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall level of attainment is above average. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall standard of performance in practical aspects of the subject is well above average. A GCSE course was introduced in 2000. Whilst results of the first group to take the examination in 2002 were well below the national average, there are clear indications that the overall standard has improved since then. Standards are particularly high in dance, now being taken by a large number of pupils. The sports coaching award, for which pupils are working with both determination and interest, is helping pupils to improve their expertise and their communication skills.
270. By the end of Year 9, the overall standard of attainment in practical activities is above average, especially in dance, where pupils progress very well. In athletics, girls made good progress in a lesson on shot-putting, increasing their understanding of technique and applying the main principles effectively in order to improve their performances. Year 7 boys progress satisfactorily in soccer, showing sound understanding of basic passing skills and the necessity of creating space. Girls progress very well in netball and show quick improvement in passing and catching skills. Pupils' capability in trampolining is broadly in line with the national picture, but there is not enough equipment to allow pupils to have sufficient practice.
271. In all years, pupils with special educational needs are very well integrated into lessons and make very good progress. The department is careful to ensure that these pupils are able to cope with the skills being practised and that, where necessary, adapted equipment is used. Pupils for whom English is an additional language also receive careful attention in all years and make good progress.
272. In both Years 10 and 11, pupils work extremely well individually, in small groups and as whole classes to produce outstandingly good work in dance – in particular, high quality and technically advanced movement. Large groups perform well-choreographed and extended sequences of dance. Pupils make good progress and achieve well in games. Boys and girls have good passing and catching skills in netball and in volleyball serve consistently well. They play to a good standard in badminton.
273. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. Remarkably few pupils miss lessons without valid reasons. An atmosphere of enthusiasm and enjoyment permeates lessons. Boys and girls listen intently, when required to do so, and make sustained efforts to improve. Whenever there are tasks to be done, such as moving equipment, all assist readily and smoothly until they are completed. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. There is always good cooperation and collaboration amongst pupils in lessons.
274. Overall, the standard of teaching is very good throughout the school. Preparation is always detailed and lessons have precise learning objectives that teachers always share with pupils. This practice ensures that there is always a clear purpose to lessons. Lessons proceed with pace and purpose, and often with pleasant good humour. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They teach

lessons very confidently and have high expectations of pupils. The learning needs of pupils of all levels of ability are carefully considered. Some marking of pupils' written work, however, does not have sufficiently informative comments to help pupils to understand how they can improve their standards.

275. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department gives clear leadership – as is reflected in high standards of policy documentation, in schemes of work and in lesson notes. Aims, objectives and schemes of work are thorough. The curriculum, recently adjusted, meets all requirements of the National Curriculum and ensures that pupils of all ability levels have an appropriate range of experiences in the subject. Information and communication technology is very well used within the department for both administration and the production of teaching materials. Video-cameras are regularly used to allow pupils on examination courses to analyse their activities. Many excellent displays are both informative for pupils and celebrate their achievements.
276. Accommodation is good. The gymnasium and sports hall are clean, well maintained and safe. A very good, floodlit, “artificial turf” area for games includes separate cricket nets. There is, however, no designated classroom in which to teach the GCSE course. As a result, some teaching resources are thinly spread, thereby occasionally causing difficulty for teachers and pupils. The extracurricular programme is good. Both boys' and girls' school teams are entered into leagues, and a significant number take part regularly in competitive sport and in dance productions. Teachers provide a regular series of clubs for pupils after school. There is an annual skiing trip, the last being to the French Alps.
277. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, with the department continually seeking to improve. The curriculum has been adjusted to include a narrower range of activities in an attempt to raise standards.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **good**.

Strengths:

- Pupils learn and achieve well.
- The quality of teaching is good in Years 7-9 and very good in Years 10-11.
- Pupils display good attitudes to the subject.

Areas for improvement:

- There is not enough teaching of the subject in Year 10.
- Marking does not always show pupils how they can improve.

278. In 2002, the school entered pupils for the GCSE full- and short-course examinations for the first time. In the full-course examination, both the proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C and their average point score were well above the national pattern for the subject. In the short-course examination, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C was below average, although pupils' average point score was in line with the national picture.
279. There are no national standards in the subject for 14 year olds. In the work seen during the inspection, however, the attainment of pupils in Year 9 was broadly in line with the expectations of the local Agreed Syllabus for their age. Pupils have a sound knowledge and understanding of, for example, the richness and diversity of religion, of the place of Christianity and other principal religions in the country, and of their origins and distinctive features. They have a satisfactory grasp of religious language, concepts and ideas. They understand why the beliefs of practising members of faith communities are important to them and how they shape their lives. They can make a

personal, informed response to religious questions. Their evaluative skills are, however, generally below average.

280. In work seen during the inspection, the attainment of Year 11 pupils studying for the GCSE examinations was above average. Comparisons with 2002 are not entirely valid, because of the small number who follow the full course and the increased number that now pursue the short course. The attainment of those Year 11 pupils who are not entered for GCSE but follow the Certificate of Achievement syllabus in religious education is also above course expectations for their age. Overall, pupils' attainment is above the mid-expectation of the Agreed Syllabus for Year 11 pupils.
281. Both boys and girls, of all levels of prior attainment, achieve well throughout the school, making good progress both in lessons and over longer periods of time. This is because they are taught well, come to lessons keen to learn and work hard. Boys achieve as highly as girls, because they are given clear, short-term targets in closely planned lessons. Both higher-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs achieve well, because work is well matched to their individual needs. Pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding develop progressively, because they are challenged with work of increasing depth and complexity as they move through the school. For example, by the end of Year 9 they have grasped Christian, Moslem and Buddhist beliefs about the afterlife. By the end of Year 11, they evaluate different religious and secular responses to a range of ethical issues – such as those surrounding the concept of the sanctity of life.
282. The overall quality of teaching and learning was good in Years 7-9 and very good in Years 10-11. Where learning is promoted the strongest, teachers have a very good grasp of their subject, know clearly what they wish pupils to learn, routinely share their aims with them and review how far they have been achieved at the end of lessons. They plan lessons very well to achieve these aims, catching and holding pupils' interest through a wide variety of imaginative and challenging tasks that are well matched to pupils' abilities.
283. Low-attaining pupils in Year 8, for example, studying festivals linked to Easter, were led to grasp the meaning of celebration through the creation of Mardi Gras masks. Year 9 pupils made good gains in understanding the ethical issues surrounding human responsibility for animal welfare. This was because the teacher made very effective use of group work for pupils to plan and present campaign speeches on animal rights, drawing on both Christian and secular thinking. Year 11 pupils' understanding of the ethical issues surrounding euthanasia was extended through group work that prepared and presented the cases for the prosecution and defence in a mock trial, based on a real-life case study of assisted suicide.
284. Pupils with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic and faith backgrounds learn well, because teachers create a secure ethos in class, in which all feel confident and valued. They can take risks in the contributions they make, knowing that their teachers and peers will receive their contributions with respect. Teachers set worthwhile homework of a kind that appropriately extends what has been learned in class. This good teaching is underpinned by teachers' high expectations of pupils and the very good relationships, based on mutual respect and caring, that are fostered in class. Where teaching is weaker, pupils are not always given enough opportunities to explore and test out their own ideas in discussion. Although most marking is conscientious and supportive, it does not do enough to help pupils to understand how they can do better.
285. The head of the humanities faculty exercises effective leadership and good day-to-day management of the subject. He gives good support to non-specialist teachers and to the newly qualified specialist teacher who teaches most of the lessons. There has been good improvement overall since the previous inspection. Standards have been raised very substantially. This is because of very significant improvements in all years to the quality of teaching, to pupils' attitudes and behaviour, and to schemes of work, together with the introduction of GCSE examination courses.

286. In contrast, the provision made for teaching the Agreed Syllabus to the majority of Year 10 pupils who do not follow either the GCSE short-course syllabus or the Certificate of Achievement syllabus is poor. The time allocated to teaching the Agreed Syllabus within the PSHE programme is wholly inadequate for it to be studied in the breadth and depth required. Furthermore, the organisation of the provision (whereby the subject is taught only in the summer term) prevents pupils from building systematically on their prior knowledge and making appropriate progress. This provision does not meet statutory requirements. Overall, however, the quality of provision for the subject is good.