

INSPECTION REPORT

THE WESTMINSTER SCHOOL

West Bromwich and Tipton

LEA area: Sandwell

Unique reference number: 132233

Headteacher: Mrs D Williams

Reporting inspector: Alastair Younger
23587

Dates of inspection: 23 - 26 September 2002

Inspection number: 249452

Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

© Crown copyright 2002

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community Special
Age range of pupils:	9 to 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Westminster Road West Bromwich West Midlands
Postcode:	B71 2JN
Telephone number:	0121 588 2421/5434
Fax number:	0121 588 5451
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs C Jackson
Date of previous inspection:	Not previously inspected

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
23587	A Younger	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? The school's results and achievements How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed?
9511	E A Longfield	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
1769	M Holohan	Team inspector	Geography Personal, health and social education	Quality and range of learning opportunities
21882	H Maskew	Team Inspector	History Special educational needs	
22391	N Smith	Team Inspector	Science Modern foreign languages Religious education	
30142	J Morris	Team Inspector	Mathematics Physical education	
10678	M Paull	Team Inspector	English English as an additional language	
20211	M Marra	Team Inspector	Design and technology Art Music	
20119	T Bell	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	

	Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
17288	M Warner	Team inspector	Supporting on information and communication technology	Supporting on how well is the school led and managed?

The inspection contractor was:

PkR Educational Consultants
6 Sherman Road
Bromley
Kent
BR1 3JH

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Complaints Manager
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved?	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	12
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	13
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	15
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	16
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	17
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	17
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	19
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	20
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	24

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Westminster is a school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. It was formed in September 2000, following the closure of five other schools for such pupils. There are currently 193 pupils on roll but this number fluctuates. At one point last year there were 293 pupils. There is a small group of primary aged pupils remaining from reorganisation but this group is not being replaced and future referrals will all be of secondary school age. This year a post 16 group for up to 18 pupils has been formed. There are two sites, five miles apart, but there are plans for a new school to be built on one of the sites sometime in the future. There are about twice as many boys as girls, similar to many schools of this type. Many pupils have additional difficulties, mainly of an emotional or behavioural nature (27 pupils) but also including pupils with autism (13 pupils), sensory impairment (4 pupils) and physical impairment (one pupil). In all cases moderate learning difficulty is the main reason for referral and attainment on entry is low. Thirty pupils are from Asian families and 27 of these come from families where English is not the main language spoken. Ten pupils have a Caribbean background. Well over half of all pupils are entitled to free school meals.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school. Good teaching results in pupils learning well. In relation to their learning difficulty pupils achieve well. The success of the school testifies to the very good leadership of the headteacher and the management skills of herself, governors and senior managers. Because the school is staffed for 250 pupils whilst only about 200 are on roll it is currently giving unsatisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- The leadership and management is strong; a good staff team is being built
- Teaching is good, it leads to pupils learning well and making good progress
- Pupils are well looked after. They are contented, safe and happy
- It is rapidly improving

What could be improved

- The amount of time spent teaching English to pupils in years 7-11
- Assessment; to use it more effectively to set individual targets for pupils or to help teachers to set precise learning objectives in lessons
- The lack of activities outside lessons and few opportunities for pupils to practise social skills
- The efficiency of the school, by resolving its overstaffing

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the action plan prepared by the appropriate authority.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

This is the school's first Ofsted inspection. Taking evidence from previous monitoring inspections and listening to staff, governors, parents and pupils, it is the view of the inspection team that it is a school that is rapidly improving. Pupils' more recent work is very much better than earlier work that was analysed by inspectors.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils achieve in relation to their individual targets.

Progress in:	by Year 6	by Year 9	by Year 11	by Year 13	Key very good A good B satisfactory C unsatisfactory D poor E
speaking and listening	B	B	B	**	
Reading	B	C	C	**	
Writing	B	B	B	**	
Mathematics	B	B	B	**	
personal, social and health education	C	C	C	**	
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	**	**	**	**	

* IEPs are individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs.

Pupil achievement overall is good. It is very similar for pupils of all ages except in English, where secondary age pupils have insufficient time to practice and reinforce what they have learned. As a result, reading improvement tails off at a lower level than would be expected. In mathematics most pupils make sufficient progress to gain good passes in Certificate of Achievement tests. A few gain passes in GCSE. All pupils improve their numeracy skills. In science, pupils benefit from an exciting programme and by the time they leave they are gaining passes in exams including GCSE. Achievement is good in physical education, religious education, French, art, design and technology and satisfactory in information and communication technology, geography, history and music. Achievement in personal social and health education is satisfactory and there are many signs that it is improving rapidly.

** Targets set for individual pupils are not sufficiently precise to facilitate the judgement of progress. After only three weeks it is not possible to make secure judgements about achievement at post 16 but the provision is good and teaching is good and this points to a healthy future.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Most pupils enjoy coming to school and arrive expecting to work and willing to do so. They conform well to the school's demands to wear their uniform conscientiously.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Satisfactory. During the inspection pupils behaved well in class and at break and lunchtimes. Many were delightfully polite and helpful. Records show that this is not always the case and bad behaviour in the past has given the school cause for concern. Last year 22 pupils were excluded for short periods of time.
Personal development and relationships	Satisfactory. Strong relationships between staff and pupils often contribute significantly to the quality of pupils' learning. Pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to develop more independence or exercise responsibility.
Attendance	Satisfactory. The school has better attendance than many similar schools. There is very little unauthorised absence.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 5 – 6	Years 7 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Good

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

The quality of teaching is very similar for pupils of all ages and on both sites. During the inspection about a quarter of teaching was very good and better and three quarters good and better. There was virtually no unsatisfactory teaching. Teaching is good in English, mathematics, science and personal, social and health education. It is good in all other subjects except geography, history and music, where it is satisfactory. Teachers succeed in making lessons interesting by incorporating different activities into lessons; they use available time well, even though short lessons impose limitations and they succeed well in teaching basic skills of numeracy and literacy. However, the marking of pupils' work is very variable in quality and often not good enough and there is often not enough variation in tasks for pupils of different ability. With one in six lessons being taught by temporary teachers, the occasional lack of subject knowledge and understanding of the nature of class groups weakens teaching.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. All subjects of the National Curriculum are taught, as is religious education. There is a weakness in that not enough time is dedicated to English in Years 7-11. Nevertheless, within subjects a good spread of experiences is achieved and numeracy and literacy are well incorporated into other subjects. There are not enough extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. Pupils are well supported. In no case is access to English a limiting factor in pupils' learning.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Satisfactory. Spiritual and moral issues are satisfactorily promoted. Multicultural education is good but not enough attention is paid to local culture. Social provision is satisfactory but weakened by the few opportunities pupils have to practise what they are taught.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pupils are very well looked after in a safe environment. Good attention is paid to improving attendance and procedures to improve behaviour are working. Although procedures for assessing pupils' work are satisfactory overall, the information gained is not being used to set clear, precise targets for pupils.

The school works well with parents. It involves them as much as possible by communicating regularly and providing information that they can understand. Parents receive a report annually, at the time of statutory reviews, but not a separate one that focuses clearly on telling them exactly what their children have learned in each subject of the curriculum.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher is very strong and, with the support of her senior staff, gives a very clear lead to the improvement of the school and the raising of standards. The co-ordination of subjects is rapidly improving.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Very good. Governors combine enthusiasm, optimism and action very well. They play a full role in appointing staff and have been successful in choosing the right people. They listen to the views of staff and visit regularly. This gives them a very good understanding of what is going on in the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. Formal monitoring of teaching is good when it happens but there is not enough of it. Nevertheless, there is sufficient informal monitoring to let managers know what is going on in classrooms. There is not enough monitoring of standards through assessment.
The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory. Through no fault of its own, the school has faced many difficulties in stabilising its budget. In the circumstances, it has done well to ensure that money has been wisely spent and best value sought.

The school is overstaffed. The local education authority has not stabilised a projection of how many pupils should be on roll. Accommodation is unsatisfactory overall. It is very well maintained and classrooms are large and welcoming but there is no library and accommodation for physical exercise and art limits the range of pupils' learning. Outdoor play areas are unstimulating. Resources are satisfactory overall but there is a limited number of computers for teachers to use in classrooms.

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 quality of teaching • The ease with which they can approach the school with concerns • The school's high expectations • The leadership and management of the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More work being sent home • Behaviour of pupils • Information about the progress their children are making • The range of activities being provided out of lessons

Parents are perceptive in where the strengths of the school lie. The inspection team agrees with them that there are not enough activities out of lessons and that improvements could be made in reporting more clearly on the progress their children are making. Whilst behaviour is satisfactory, it is understandable that parents want it to be better. The school has already taken on board parental views on homework and is now ensuring that a good amount is being sent home.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Good achievement in most subjects is the result of good teaching and pupils wanting to learn. There is very little difference in the achievements of pupils of different ages, gender or ethnicity because high staffing levels and good quality support for individuals ensure that all pupils get a lot of attention to help them to learn. All pupils have special educational needs relating to moderate learning difficulties. There are often additional complications, including emotional and behavioural problems and sensory impairment. As a result, attainment on entry is low in relation to age-related national averages. Tests at the end of Year 9 show that most pupils are performing at a level expected of pupils in Year 5 or 6 in a mainstream school. As the school has only been open for two years it is not possible to gauge trends in attainment from examination results. Nevertheless, a growing number of pupils are gaining success in examinations including GCSE in mathematics, science, art, design and technology, information and communication technology and also Certificate of Achievement in nine subjects, including religious education. Several pupils also gain passes in GNVQ information and communication technology. Target setting for individual pupils is not good enough and this makes it impossible to judge progress against these targets.
2. Achievement in English is good for primary aged pupils and satisfactory for secondary aged pupils. The difference is in the amount of time they are taught the subject rather than the quality of the teaching. Secondary pupils at Westminster are taught English for a much smaller part of the timetable than in most other schools. Although they are well taught in this time and the school's strategy for improving literacy across all subjects is good, this still leaves a shortfall. The result is most evident in the fact that pupils' reading ages level off at between eight and nine years by the time they leave, rather than between nine and ten years which is more common in schools of this type.
3. Achievement in mathematics and numeracy is good for pupils of all ages. The results of tests at the end of Year 9 show pupils to have achieved well in relation to expectations and by the time they leave they are achieving success in examinations. Last year, 20 pupils were entered for the GCSE full course in mathematics and 16 passed, two of them gaining 'E' grades. In addition, 39 pupils took Certificate of Achievement examinations, 29 gaining distinctions.
4. Achievement in science is good for pupils of all ages. Pupils learn about the environment and the implications of interfering with nature. They discuss the effects of acid rain on buildings. The curriculum is very good and links with many subjects are built into lesson plans. These include measuring temperature in experiments on energy conservation and measuring length accurately.
5. Pupils achieve well in information and communication technology lessons but computers are not used well enough in other subjects to contribute significantly and this slows progress. In other subjects achievement is good in physical education, religious education, modern foreign languages, art, design and technology and satisfactory in geography, history and music. Achievement in personal, social and health education has been satisfactory over the past year but there are many signs that it is improving rapidly.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

6. Pupils are enthusiastic about school life. They arrive at school cheerfully and quickly settle to the day's activities. Pride is evident in the lack of graffiti and litter on both sites and the way they conform in wearing the school uniform. In lessons they usually join in wholeheartedly with activities however physically or mentally challenging.
7. Pupils are polite and courteous; they hold doors open for adults and always have a thank you and a smile waiting for anyone who helps them. Movement around the school is civilised, pupils moving around sensibly and being aware of others. At break times, pupils chat pleasantly to one another and play games in small groups. They are open and forthright in their conversation with visitors, enthusing, for instance, about a geography trip where they had collected fossils. Occasionally, usually when they are bored, behaviour lapses and pupils become unco-operative. This slows their own learning and interferes with that of others. Particularly good behaviour and attitudes are evident in many physical education lessons. In one lesson, where older pupils were learning basketball skills, their enthusiasm to improve their performance played a big part in the success of the lesson. In contrast, Year 9 pupils in a music lesson demonstrated increasingly immature behaviour as four boys showed indifference to learning, or the feelings of others.
8. The high rate of exclusions, 48 in total, over the last academic year was largely due to the behaviour of a small minority of pupils. Their indiscretions merited exclusion and demonstrated that the inclusion of a significant number of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties in a school where most pupils have moderate learning difficulties was never going to be easy. It was also caused by the bringing together of groups from different schools and the rivalries that inevitably existed as a result. As these teething problems are overcome the rate of exclusion is rapidly falling and has ceased to be a major concern.
9. Pupils and staff get on well together. Pupils recognise that staff will listen to them at any time and will always try to help them. Pupils' relationships with each other are also good, demonstrated in the way they show interest in one another's achievements and celebrate success. Small class groups and high staffing levels result in pupils often being over supported and not having to take enough responsibility for their own learning. There is very little independent learning. Pupils are not sufficiently encouraged to pursue simple research and even if they were, the lack of a suitable library would limit possibilities.
10. Although attendance figures are below those set for all schools nationally, they are similar to other schools of the same type. Punctuality is not a problem. Pupils move quickly and efficiently between lessons and lessons start and finish on time.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

11. Most teaching is at least good. It is of a similar standard for pupils of all ages and on both sites. Unsatisfactory teaching is rare but occasionally occurs when pupils take advantage of temporary teachers who have not had the opportunity to build up the strong relationships with pupils that characterise and strengthen most teaching. These relationships underpin the success of teaching; they give pupils the confidence to express themselves and help teachers to establish realistic expectations.
12. All teachers have wholeheartedly embraced the importance of promoting basic skills, especially literacy, in their lessons. They do so by introducing pupils to an ever-

increasing range of words that help them to understand what is being taught and describe what they have learned in lessons. In subjects such as history, geography and religious education, pupils are being helped to write factual accounts in exercises that broaden their writing skills. In science and design and technology, numeracy skills are being well taught as pupils learn how to measure and to read scales and gauges.

13. Lessons are made varied and interesting. They often capture pupils' imagination and this results in pupils co-operating and behaving well. Most teachers are adept at spotting when pupils are losing interest or becoming confused and use support staff well to help them. Learning support practitioners are making a strong contribution to pupils' learning by helping them to read texts and questions as well as preventing pupils from misbehaving. In a way this weakens some teaching because it results in teachers not sufficiently preparing work that pupils can read for themselves. This happens because individual education plans are rarely referred to in lesson planning and in any case do not describe what strategies are being considered to help pupils learn more independently and effectively. Science teaching is a notable exception. Here, individual targets are clearly stated and work is well tailored to individual need.
14. Occasionally, teaching is weakened by limitations in teachers' subject knowledge. This is most evident when temporary teachers cover lessons outside their own specialism. The problem is compounded by the fact that almost one in six of all lessons is currently being taught by temporary teachers or those on short-term contracts. Another area where teachers' lack of confidence is evident is in the use of computers. As a result, they are often not used to their full potential.
15. The quality of marking is very variable. At its best it is giving pupils good, immediate feedback about how well they have done and offers guidance as to where improvements could be made. At its worst it is doing neither. Too much work is acknowledged by a tick or a cross. There is a perfectly good marking policy but many teachers are ignoring it. As a result, assessment gets off to a bad start because teachers are not sufficiently recording pupils' progress on a day-to-day basis.
16. Lessons of 30 minutes result in some of them, especially practical ones, being rushed. Sometimes this is evident in not enough time being spent on checking what pupils have remembered from previous lessons and sometimes in teachers not having time to summarise what has been learned in the current lesson. This slows learning as pupils are not being reassured about their successes or alerted about areas of weakness.

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

17. The curriculum provides pupils with access to all of the subjects of the National Curriculum and also religious education and personal, social and health education. However, insufficient time is devoted to the teaching of English, especially for pupils in Years 7-11. This is resulting in an imbalance in the curriculum and pupils not achieving as much as they could in English. The current timetable splits the day into ten 30 minute periods. This gives a lot of flexibility but results in many single-period lessons being rushed. The timetable also restricts the amount of time available at lunch and break times for pupils to mix socially and to participate in extra-curricular activities. As a result, there are not enough extra-curricular activities.
18. From the start of this year the school has started to provide for pupils aged 16 plus. A good curriculum has been planned for these pupils. It covers skills in subjects such as English, mathematics and the use of computers and should also prepare pupils well for adult life through a well-structured programme of personal, social and health education as well as citizenship.
19. There are good procedures for the teaching of basic literacy and numeracy skills. In literacy these make a significant contribution to compensating for the shortage in time spent teaching English. Planning for nearly all subjects shows that pupils are being given many opportunities to practise and develop their literacy skills, such as when they write a description of an earthquake in geography or complete a sheet of personal preferences in personal, social and health education.
20. Pupils' personal development is effectively promoted. Staff recognise when pupils have tried hard and are quick to offer praise. Pupils are made to feel good about themselves and recognise that they can contribute to the happiness and success of others. These all help to promote pupils' spiritual development. Staff are good at explaining the importance of good behaviour to pupils but the high degree of support given to pupils in lessons reduces opportunities for them to demonstrate their moral development. Too often, pupils are reliant on adults managing their behaviour rather than being given opportunities to demonstrate growing maturity and self-control. Teachers often get pupils to work together on activities and thus foster the benefits of co-operation. All pupils are taught good manners and staff set a good example. Social development is slowed though by the very short periods in the school day, such as lunchtimes and breaks, when pupils are given the opportunity to mix with others from outside their own class. It is good to see pupils being made aware of the things that people from different cultures value but not enough effort is being made to celebrate the cultural wealth of the area. There are insufficient visits to local places of interest. The programme for personal, social and health education is currently satisfactory. Very recent changes in the management of the subject and the introduction of external accreditation through the ASDAN course are bringing about rapid improvement, especially through a much more thorough approach to teaching pupils about important topics such as healthy eating, sex education and the dangers of drugs.
21. Pupils with additional special educational needs are well looked after. Those with hearing impairment are helped by staff who sign and help them to communicate. Pupils with autistic tendencies or behavioural difficulties are supported through effective withdrawal groups and additional support in classrooms. Learning support practitioners make a valuable contribution to behaviour management, helping pupils to

concentrate and learn. All pupils with physical needs, hearing and visual impairment are fully included in all activities, well supported by staff.

22. Close links have been established with the *Connexions* organisation. This provides a wide range of careers advice and work experience opportunities. The work experience programme is a particular success, enabling pupils to undertake placements as varied as shop work, tyre fitting or working in an office. Sensible advice and the organisation of careers conventions gives pupils a wide range of information, including college courses, from which to choose.
23. Links with the community are evolving. Productive relationships have been established with local residents who keep an eye on the property during out-of-school hours. This is helping to reduce vandalism and theft. Local businesses support the school through the opportunities given to the older pupils for work experience and the donation of prizes for raffles and towards the school's harvest celebrations. The Asian Women's Support Group has given valuable assistance with work experience placements. Links are also being strengthened with local secondary schools through a summer school, joint residential experiences and Saturday clubs. Westminster also shares staff skills with primary schools in helping them to train special needs co-ordinators.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

24. The school ensures that pupils are safe and well looked after. Child protection procedures are correctly observed and all staff are well trained and kept well informed about any changes. Health and safety is given the attention it deserves and first aid procedures are carefully observed. First aiders are well supported by regular visits from the school nurse.
25. There are good procedures to monitor and promote good behaviour. These are greatly helping to improve behaviour and reduce exclusions. As a result, pupils are learning more because classrooms are settled. When behaviour is weaker it is often because teachers are not closely following the clear directions provided for all staff. Valuable assistance is given to targeted pupils through the behaviour support programme. Individuals are given effective support and helped to develop strategies for avoiding conflict. Good attention is paid to getting rid of bullying. Assemblies and personal, social and health education lessons often focus on the importance of being nice to other people and not taking advantage of them. Pupils and parents know that any incidents will be dealt with promptly. Good relationships often underpin strategies for improving and monitoring behaviour and personal development. Staff are alert and responsive to pupils' needs.
26. A new assessment co-ordinator has established satisfactory procedures for assessing and recording pupils' achievement and progress. Implementation of these remains variable. It is good in science but less effective in other subjects. This inconsistent application, even in the basic issue of following a marking policy, means that pupils' achievements are not wholly recognised and learning slows because the important motivation of celebrating success is not being fully capitalised upon. Assessment information is not used comprehensively to guide curricular planning. Individual education plans are vague and targets very imprecise. As a result, they are not effective. No reference is made in class to pupils' personal targets for literacy, numeracy or personal development. This weakens planning and occasionally results in all pupils in a class being taught exactly the same, irrespective of their ability or previous achievement. Nevertheless, much has been improved this year. Reading is

being tested and results analysed. Simple tests are being given to pupils to help teachers to plan for individuals. This is well established in subjects such as religious education, science and music. Pupils are becoming more involved in setting targets for themselves and contributing to the evaluation of their work. Annual reviews are well established and provide a summary of progress over the year.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

27. The majority of parents are very supportive of the school. In particular, almost all agree that their children enjoy coming to school, are expected to work hard and are well taught. Most parents feel comfortable in approaching the school with concerns or problems. Inspection evidence confirms the positive views of the parents.
28. Appropriate information is given to parents about the work of the school. The prospectus contains all the important information for pupils joining the school. Good, regular newsletters provide a full account of activities and details of forthcoming events. The Governors Annual Report gives a clear picture of school life during the first year. Parents are given the opportunity to discuss their children's progress at the annual review meetings. One concern of parents is the information they receive about their children's progress. Confusion arises because the school does not send out a report at the end of each year but relies on the report produced for annual review meetings. This works well when reviews are held in the summer term but not otherwise. It would greatly improve reporting if an end of year report was produced.
29. Parents make a satisfactory contribution to pupils' learning and the life of the school. The majority of parents attended and enjoyed a Presentation Evening, held in the Town Hall, when pupils' achievements in schoolwork, sport, attendance and outstanding contributions to the school life were celebrated. This evening providing recognition and reward helps to raise the pupils' self-esteem. Parents support their children's learning as they hear them read and help with homework.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

30. The headteacher is very good. She has not enjoyed the easiest of passages in the reorganisation of five schools into one and the inevitable discontent that this has caused amongst certain staff. Nevertheless, she has been very single-minded and has demonstrated great skill in improving morale and getting staff to focus on improving pupils' learning rather than pursuing their own agendas. She has a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has good plans to build upon strengths and eliminate weaknesses. When concern was raised in a monitoring visit by the local education authority about differing teaching standards on the two sites, intervention was speedy and, as a result, teaching is now of similar quality on both sites. There is a very effective management structure, which results in managers knowing exactly where their responsibilities lie. Tasks are carried out conscientiously and well by the deputy and assistant headteachers. The quality of subject leadership and management is rapidly developing in important areas. Recent appointments show vision, backed up by the skill to improve standards, particularly in personal, health and social education.
31. The governing body has been very effective in helping the school to become more effective. The governors are proud of their school and work effectively to ensure that it keeps getting better. A lot of time has been spent interviewing and appointing staff to fill key roles, including the headteacher, and they have made few mistakes. There is mutual admiration between governors and the headteacher and this has fostered a strong feeling of support and single-mindedness between both parties. The governing

body has been a great support to the headteacher in dealings with the local authority and has been particularly helpful in sorting out financial issues over the past year.

32. On the insistence of the headteacher, the work of the school has been closely monitored by the local education authority. Advisors have visited regularly and reported back to the school when they have found strengths and weaknesses. These reports have been used well to address weaknesses, especially a perceived difference in standards between the two sites. The headteacher implemented several changes and this inspection noted that standards on the two sites are now very much in line. Formal observation of teaching, however, has been limited. Teachers adhere rigidly to guidance issued by professional associations and are not willing to be observed more than the minimum level. This indicates that monitoring of teaching is still seen by them as a threat rather than as a positive opportunity for improvement.
33. Finance has been satisfactorily managed but there have been teething problems caused by uncertainty over the budget set by the local education authority. Two years ago this resulted in a projected overspend which was averted by governors and never materialised. The budget has still not stabilised and there are ongoing negotiations between the school and the local education authority over funding for post 16 provision and the total number of places that are being funded. In the circumstances, governors and finance managers have worked well together to ensure that all spending is carefully accounted for. What the school has not sufficiently come to terms with is that spending on staffing is high for the numbers and type of pupils on roll. The budget currently sustains this but is unlikely to do so for much longer.
34. The school is generously staffed. Recent appointments from mainstream schools have improved subject knowledge and the experience and skills of staff to develop the curriculum to meet the learning needs of the pupils. In addition, there has been a good programme of training to develop the skills of existing staff. This is supported by satisfactory induction of new staff. Training to improve the teaching of literacy and numeracy has been very good. Learning support practitioners provide very good support, helping pupils with their learning and social needs.
35. The accommodation is clean and good displays of work on both sites help to create a welcoming learning environment. The senior site manager has excelled in keeping the school environment tidy and well maintained. However, there is no specialist library area on either site to foster independent learning through reading and research, and accommodation limits opportunities in physical education. Outdoor play areas are unstimulating, with few resources for play, socialising or relaxation.
36. Learning resources are satisfactory. There are not enough computers in classrooms. Whilst recognising that security is a big issue, it has to be recognised that the lack of such resources is limiting pupils' learning.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

37. In order to improve the school and raise standards the school should now
 - Increase the amount of time spent teaching English to pupils in years 7-11 (paragraphs 2, 17 and 38)
 - Improve assessment by using it more effectively to set individual targets for pupils and to help teachers to set precise learning objectives in lessons (paragraphs 1, 13, 26, 43 and 48)

- Increase the range of activities outside lessons to give pupils more opportunities to practise social skills (paragraphs 17 and 20)
- Improve the efficiency of the school by resolving staffing issues (paragraphs 13, 32 and 34)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

79

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

24

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	5	15	40	17	2	0	0
Percentage	6	19	51	21	3	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than one percentage point

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

No of pupils

Number of pupils on the school's roll

193

Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals

116

English as an additional language

No of pupils

Number of pupils with English as an additional language

27

Pupil mobility in the last school year

No of pupils

Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission

15

Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving

22

Attendance

Authorised absence

%

School data

10.03

Unauthorised absence

%

School data

2.3

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	160	41	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	19	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	10	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	10	3	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2	3	0
Chinese	0	0	0
Any other ethnic group	0	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Financial information

Qualified teachers and classes: Y3 – Post 16

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	34
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	6
Average class size	9

Education support staff: Y3 – Post 16

Total number of education support staff	32
Total aggregate hours worked per week	1053

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial year	2000-2001
----------------	-----------

	£
Total income	2439756
Total expenditure	2267563
Expenditure per pupil	9733
Balance brought forward from previous year	101452
Balance carried forward to next year	273645

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	20*
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	55*
<hr/>	
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	4*
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1*
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	3*

FTE means full-time equivalent.

* figures are distorted by the complexities of closing five schools and the opening of one new school.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

200

Number of questionnaires returned

59

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	51	36	8	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	47	39	8	2	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	44	37	15	3	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	37	29	22	8	2
The teaching is good.	64	25	0	2	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	46	27	15	8	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	63	25	5	3	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	59	36	3	2	0
The school works closely with parents.	46	29	15	5	3
The school is well led and managed.	46	32	5	3	12
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	51	34	7	7	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	31	29	14	10	17

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

ENGLISH

38. Teaching in English is good, and primary aged pupils' achievements are comparable with other similar schools. In Years 7-11, where the teaching time drops to 12 per cent of the timetable, pupils achieve well in lessons as a result of good teaching but over time they make satisfactory progress. The impact of time shortage is lessened by good teaching, and by good use of the time that is allocated to the subject. There is also good implementation of the National Literacy Strategy across the school and many good cross-curricular links which make a significant contribution to achievement in English.
39. Careful attention is given to encouraging speaking and listening. Most lessons provide planned opportunities for pupils to ask and answer questions. Pupils listen carefully in class and respond appropriately. Many pupils are hesitant in their speaking but teachers and other pupils are patient, giving them time and opportunity to express their views. Many pupils find it difficult to engage in lively discussion or debate in an interactive way, but the quality of discussion as a whole is good when the low starting point is taken into consideration. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, students worked in pairs to identify facts contained in a newspaper article. They engaged well in the activity and commented on how much they enjoyed it. Several pupils contributed relatively sophisticated views as to how incidents are reported in the press.
40. Records show that improvement in reading is good at the lower age range but falls off, especially in Years 10 and 11. This is common in schools of this type as the need for pupils to master more complex skills comes into play. Here, though many pupils are levelling off with a reading age between eight and nine years rather than between nine and ten, more often found in similar schools. Nevertheless, there is much evidence of enjoyment of stories and poetry in lessons and in the displays of prolific work throughout the school, which has been the result of reading a very wide variety of material across the whole curriculum. Pupils of all ages enjoy stories and take their cue from teachers' expressive reading and enthusiasm for the written word. Teachers use a wide vocabulary, and the use of key word wall displays as well as word processed examples of the pupils' own work, making it eminently readable, all combine to make a valuable contribution to the enhancement of reading skills at every opportunity within the school.
41. Achievement in writing is good. Pupils do a great deal of writing, which often starts with a worksheet for inserting certain words in a sentence about a topic, but which is then used as the basis for writing whole sentences or passages in their exercise books. Throughout the school pupils draft and redraft and edit their work, and make good use of computers for the presentation of their final versions. Pupils are encouraged to form letters correctly, and they learn and understand the meaning of punctuation to clarify their writing as it develops. They check spellings with dictionaries or by means of word lists, which they build up for themselves with the help of the teacher or classroom assistants. Handwriting is rarely joined, which makes it cumbersome and difficult to read, and as pupils begin to write more, and more quickly, spacing between words tends to become a bigger problem. As most pupils have adequate hand control and letter formation, the transition from printed to cursive script should not be difficult to achieve although there will always be some

pupils who manage better when printing their letters. The drafting and editing of work ensures that the content of much of the final presentation of written work is of high quality, often using quite sophisticated vocabulary or complex sentences. The range is also impressive, so that pupils' work displays in one room may well include good quality examples by many different pupils in a class on history, geography, or science, for example, as well as English.

42. The school demonstrates good implementation of the National Literacy Strategy and medium- and short-term planning follow the strategy guidelines closely. Pupils with English as an additional language are very well cared for, and there is no difference generally between their standards and those of other pupils within the school. There are two interpreters for the school, who liaise with pupils and their parents and who can act as language interpreters or help to explain cultural differences where necessary. The school is considering offering Punjabi as an additional curriculum language.
43. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. It is never less than satisfactory. Teamwork between teachers and learning support practitioners is very good, with equal respect for each other and positive and often humorous impact on pupils and their learning. This ensures that very positive relationships are established between adults with various roles and the pupils, promoting very good behaviour in lessons. There is meticulous planning by all teachers, and schemes are all in place, well written according to the National Curriculum targets and guidelines, with good continuity and progression for pupils as a result. Individual education plans are in place but not as yet fully developed, and at times the links between the plans and the curriculum teaching are not very clear. This is reflected in some lessons where greater differentiation would result in a closer match between teaching and individual learning needs. Development of the plans to increase differentiation of curriculum access will have the effect of stretching each individual pupil's achievements further, ensuring even greater progression and raising of standards generally, as well as promoting active independent learning skills and research. Homework is regularly set, although return of completed work is variable. Marking in English is good, and reflects good learning feedback and careful monitoring of pupils' progress.
44. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic, and the school benefits from their expertise. The secondary co-ordinator is developing the planning and recording procedures well, and there is a great deal of planned support among teaching colleagues, made possible because of overstaffing generally despite the shortage of English specialists. In-service training is good for English, and good relationships have also built up with local advisers and subject specialists. Teaching and learning is well monitored and action plans for development have been identified for the subject. Literacy development is well in hand for younger pupils, and at the senior level is promoted well through cross-curricular links.
45. Although the range of books and other resources is good overall, and books are very well kept and accessible, storage facilities are limited on both sites, and there is no library facility. This is not conducive to promotion of independent research or reading for pleasure, and at the senior level the time allocation for English hardly allows for any quality involvement in such activities. Similarly, the brevity of breaks and lunchtimes militates against extra-curricular activities that might be useful to extend English skills. English makes a very good contribution to other curriculum subjects and to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and some pupils have been encouraged to take books home, a practice which works well, with benefits wider than the simple practice of reading. Pupils study a range of texts which

illustrate many cultures, beliefs and moral issues, and they are given opportunities to write and talk about their experiences and thoughts in an atmosphere of careful consideration and trust.

MATHEMATICS

46. By the age of 11, pupils competently count forwards and backwards, understand fractions such as halves and quarters, tell the time and handle money with increasing confidence. By the age of 14, pupils are gaining in confidence, referring to number lines to help them count forwards and backwards and calculate sequences. They complete simple calculations involving time and money and recognise shapes including triangles and rectangles. They gather information methodically and transfer it to simple graphs. In one lesson, higher achievers were correctly calculating the total price of two items chosen from a mail order catalogue. By the age of 16, pupils are gaining passes in exams that reflect their good progress.
47. Teaching is good but very variable. It ranges from very good to unsatisfactory. Temporary teachers are currently teaching a large number of lessons and limited subject knowledge is occasionally evident. The analysis of earlier work shows this to be a temporary setback and points to teaching often being better than that seen during the inspection. Teachers make good use of praise and the very good relationships they form with pupils greatly contribute to pupils' willingness to learn. When teaching is at its best, tasks are well matched to each individual. This means they face suitable challenges that enable them to use what they have remembered from previous lessons to achieve success in the current one. Good questioning involves all pupils and is at its best in the mental arithmetic starter activities to each lesson. The large number of adults in most lessons allows pupils to get a lot of individual attention and greatly helps to keep the classroom settled so that all pupils can concentrate. Weaker teaching is characterised by lack of challenge, especially for higher-achieving pupils. In less successful lessons work is not building upon what pupils already know, time is wasted and learning slows. An example of this is when pupils spend most of a lesson drawing coins, where the emphasis is on neatness rather than developing numeracy skills. Occasionally, limited specialist knowledge results in lessons where opportunities are missed to link learning to practical situations. As a result, pupils tend to lose interest and become restless.
48. Although pupils' progress is assessed, results are rarely being used to build up a good picture of progress either for individuals or groups. Best practice is seen with primary aged pupils where computer programs are well used to help teachers to record progress. Generally, however, there is inconsistency in assessment and, in particular, lack of guidance to pupils as to how they can improve. Marking of work is not good enough. It is not giving clear guidance to pupils on how to improve. An exception is the Year 9 group at Tipton, where marking gives clear guidance and sets future targets for pupils. Here, also, good records are kept.

49. Good displays in classrooms help to generate interest in numeracy and teachers are using good quality resources to help pupils to learn. Limited use is made of computer programmes to support and extend learning and understanding. Staff training is encouraging staff in all subject areas to recognise opportunities where they can support the learning of numeracy skills and this is increasingly contributing to pupils' progress.

SCIENCE

50. Good achievement in science results from good teaching, a wide range of learning opportunities and high expectations. Primary aged pupils explain what happens when food goes mouldy and describe the effects of viruses and germs, recognising the benefits of keeping fresh food in a refrigerator. They use a suitable range of scientific vocabulary including *bacteria* and *fungi* and, when studying forces, recognise the bigger the push, the further an object goes. By the age of 14, pupils explain the differences between acids and alkalis and describe how they are used in everyday life. They have separated mixtures using filter paper and developed an understanding of energy saving and environmental issues. Links with other subjects are clear; literacy improves with the use of scientific language. Pupils' growing understanding of a healthy diet enriches personal development. Mathematical skills are used in reading and measuring heat gauges and recording their findings. By the age of 16, pupils understand the differences between herbivores and carnivores, hunter and prey. They measure mass in experiments and consider the effects of acid rain on the environment. With good reference to everyday life, using a mountain bike as an example, pupils learn how to choose the right materials for specific jobs and test samples for these qualities. These exercises involve pupils in measuring, predicting, investigating, designing and recording.
51. The best teaching results from well-organised activities and skilful classroom practice. These combine to produce an environment that promotes very effective learning for pupils of all abilities. Good support is given to individuals and those with additional needs are given extra help where necessary. Individual education plans are used very well in planning to ensure that every pupil is able to achieve well. Lessons are lively and interesting and pupils concentrate because they are fully engaged. As a result, pupils enjoy science and learn well. Independence and choice are successfully promoted as pupils choose partners to work with and primary pupils help each other to complete their tasks.

ART AND DESIGN

52. Good achievement in art results from good teaching, planning and resourcing. Teachers are enthusiastic and informed about their subject and this results in very good pupil attitudes to art, especially amongst secondary aged pupils. Pupils take pride in their work and concentrate for long periods in attempting to improve finished pieces. Secondary aged pupils experiment with watercolour techniques and give attention to light and shade, and foreground and background when creating pictures of an industrial landscape. More advanced learning includes using digital imagery to explore facial features and expressions. Pupils work with considerable accuracy when drawing a half-face image from a photograph. Drawing skills are further improved through introducing softer media such as charcoal and pastels. By the age of 16, pupils are copying the floral designs of William Morris and creating prints in a simple repeat pattern. Higher achievers are extending this to design their own wallpaper and wrapping paper. Pupils explore the work of the Art Nouveau movement

and interpret the intricate designs and tracings in their work as they create plate decorations.

53. Accommodation is limiting the learning of skills in three-dimensional work and results in a bias towards pictorial work: painting, collage, printing and observational drawing. Homework and the use of sketchbooks feature strongly in promoting learning and by Year 11 pupils are making self-evaluations and critical analyses of their work. As a result, they are meeting with a good degree of success in GCSE examinations. Art makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development, especially cultural and social, through presenting pupils with opportunities to consider conventions and traditions in artwork and to compare one culture with another.

CITIZENSHIP

54. As a newly introduced subject there is insufficient evidence at this early stage of term to make secure judgements about achievement but the school is making very good progress in developing a programme to promote citizenship for all pupils. It is studied by pupils of all ages. Pupils on both sites have been asked how they feel about the school and have written comments on an eye-catching display in the form of a brick wall. There has been a positive response. Comments include, 'we have good friends', 'we don't have racism', and 'we don't have bullying'. Pupils are involved in discussing issues such as bullying, which was the theme for the week of the inspection.
55. Up to the age of 11, pupils follow the *You and Me* programme, a story related activity with an emphasis on discussion. From the age of 11 pupils follow Asdan certificated courses. The enthusiasm of the co-ordinator to promote social behaviour and citizenship programmes is clearly evident. Pupils have developed a badge award for citizenship and during the course of the inspection three badges were presented at an assembly. The pupils wore the badges with pride. The school has received support from the Birmingham Advisory and Support Service team and adopted the benchmark for citizenship as an emerging school.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

56. Achievement is strongest amongst pupils of secondary school age. The new joint leadership has vision and purpose and more recent work is of a higher standard than that from last year, suggesting that improved management is resulting in higher achievement. Teaching is good, occasionally better, such as in an excellent food technology lesson for Year 7 pupils where pupils learned particularly well because the lesson was so well organised and the teacher so confident. Pupils arrived ready to work hard, listened carefully and wasted no time in producing high quality cakes. Generally, good planning and resourcing ensures that pupils' interest is maintained in lessons. As a result, they work intently and enthusiastically. Year 6 pupils accurately cut and glue textiles to produce finger puppets. They apply these same skills further in decorating wooden spatulas with hair and facial features, using cut fabrics. Innovative teaching of older pupils ensures that previously learned skills are put to effective use. Jointing, cutting and gluing skills are developed further when pupils produce models incorporating moving parts. In textiles, higher-achieving secondary aged pupils use sewing machines adeptly and safely when attaching cut out felt letters to a background to spell their names. In food technology, they make sensible suggestions about fillings when making pastry parcels. The shortness of many lessons limits the development of preparatory skills or routines relating to tidying up. Many Year 11 pupils gain the *Taste of Success* award in food technology.

57. Detailed monitoring and assessment of skills and understanding makes a great contribution to pupils' learning by enabling teachers to set appropriately challenging work. As a result, all pupils are learning well. Design and technology makes a good contribution to personal and social development and is a growing strength of the school.

GEOGRAPHY

58. This is a subject where recent achievement has been much better than in the past. It is currently satisfactory but, by improving the coordinator role, the development of external accreditation and improved curriculum planning are having an accelerating effect on pupils' learning.

59. Previous work shows that adequate ranges of topics are covered. Primary aged pupils show an understanding of climate and of climate change together with the use of key words such as "weather" and "temperature". Although the teaching of primary pupils is satisfactory, a lot of the work looks boring, with an overemphasis on copying and a failure to mark the work in a way that would make pupils aware of what they need to do to improve. The same is also true of the work of Years 7, 8 and 9, where undue emphasis on copying and a lack of opportunities for pupils, especially the higher attaining, to work independently slows their personal development. Pupils in Year 9 have compared facts about countries such as Italy and Kenya but their work is all recorded on worksheets and suggests a lack of imagination. This term there has been an improvement in teaching and more varied learning opportunities are being presented to pupils. Literacy and numeracy skills are better promoted through the learning of specific vocabulary, and activities, such as drawing bar graphs of rainfall, allow pupils to practise their maths skills.

60. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have benefited from working towards external examinations and this has improved teaching and learning. The change in teaching emphasis from worksheets to experimental and observational work is clearly having a positive effect. In a lesson for Year 10 pupils on physical hazards such as earthquakes the teacher seized the opportunity of a recent local earthquake to capture the pupils' attention and to have them describe their own personal feelings of when the earthquake occurred. Pupils' learning was further enhanced by experimental work of an imaginative and stimulating nature.

61. These improvements are lifting standards but there are still areas for future development. Although opportunities to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills have been identified and incorporated into lessons, computers are still not used enough. In an effort to raise standards further, the subject co-ordinator has recognised the need to further develop the range of external examinations available for pupils to ensure that higher-attaining pupils are appropriately challenged. A system of assessment to ensure that pupils' achievements are recorded and monitored is also to be introduced to replace one that leans more heavily to reporting what has been taught rather than what has been learned.

HISTORY

62. Pupils successfully follow the National Curriculum and achieve satisfactorily; this leads on to older pupils being taught an accredited course (Certificate of Achievement) which leads to an external qualification. Last year, ten pupils were entered, one pupil gaining a distinction, three achieving merits and the rest passing successfully.
63. Analysis of primary aged pupils' work shows that they make satisfactory progress. They recognise events as happening long before they were born and identify the characteristics of people from different periods such as Roman soldiers, Anglo-Saxons and kings and queens of Tudor times. Higher-attaining pupils accurately describe aspects of Roman sport and spectacles, identifying an arena as an amphitheatre. Lower-attaining pupils write simple sentences to describe a battle at the end of the Wars of the Roses. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 study events in the order they happened, from England in 1500 to India in the colonial period. Lower-attaining pupils struggle with handwriting and the presentation of their work. They rely on filling in gaps in comprehension exercises to show what they know and understand.
64. By Year 11 most pupils have a satisfactory understanding of historical events. Higher-attaining pupils read fluently from texts about workhouses, taken from the Internet, in a good exercise that helped them to understand the powers of computers as well as history. They recognised the harsh conditions in which the destitute found themselves and discussed the rights and wrongs of the system. Lower-attaining pupils found the work more difficult and required a lot of support from learning support practitioners.
65. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7, 8 and 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In most lessons expectations are high, lessons move at a good pace and pupils are stimulated. The teacher uses a good level of appropriate vocabulary and pupils are challenged to listen and respond. Relationships with pupils are very good. Weaker teaching results when lessons are unimaginative and demotivating, relying overmuch on worksheets and copying notes from the board. This affects learning since pupils are not encouraged to work independently. Better teaching involves effective questioning to establish what pupils have learned and helps pupils to organise their thoughts so they can write imaginative articles. The school's marking policy is not sufficiently followed. Some work is not marked at all. Teachers are not using assessment to help them to decide what has been learned and what needs to be reinforced in future lessons. This slows learning and results in gaps in pupils' understanding of history.
66. There is a good programme of work but the lack of stimulating resources that teachers can use to enliven lessons results in lessons that rely too much on discussion, copying from the board and use of worksheets. As a result, some pupils lose interest midway through lessons and learning slows.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

67. Pupils of all ages achieve standards only a little below their mainstream counterparts. What is more, standards are improving as new schemes of work, resources and staff training begin to impact on teaching and learning. Much of this is due to recent improvements in the line-management of the subject.
68. By the age of 11, pupils are using computers confidently, entering text accurately and, with a little support, loading and running different programs. By the age of 14 pupils

are using a digital camera, downloading images to include in their work. They are using spreadsheets to record information and higher-attaining pupils are using computers to draw a good variety of graphs. Pupils are preparing simple documents for publishing, taking care with presentation and appearance. Higher-achieving pupils are accessing information from the Internet, combining pictures from web sites with their own text.

69. By the age of 16 pupils are selecting specific information from databases. They successfully use these databases to produce graphs and sort information. They set up simple spreadsheets and produce business stationery. Higher-achieving pupils use communication systems such as e-mail, fax and telephones effectively. All pupils learn about how computers have become a part of life in the wider world. Lower-achieving pupils are held back by limitations in their reading rather than their computer skills.
70. Good teaching stems from planning that meets the needs of all pupils. Support staff have a good understanding of computers and offer valuable help to teachers and pupils. Lower-attaining pupils are given simpler work and are well supported to help them understand and higher-attaining pupils are set more challenging work to extend them. Assessment is well used, particularly with older pupils, to keep a check on what has been learned and to help teachers to plan future work well matched to individual need. Particularly good assessment is seen in Years 10 and 11, where assessment is linked to external examinations, involves pupils and provides clear evidence of good progress to motivate them. Pupils are keen and confidence increases with the gentle encouragement of teaching and support staff.
71. As teachers become more confident they use computers more in other subjects. However, too many teachers still lack confidence and there is a limited amount of software available for their use. As a result, computers are not fully exploited across all subjects and relatively little use of them is observed in other lessons. This slows overall progress.

FRENCH

72. Pupils' achievements in French are good. By age 11, pupils greet each other by saying 'bonjour'. They are aware of the vocabulary for different parts of their body, labelling diagrams and matching pictures and words. By the age of 14, pupils have extended vocabulary, for instance by playing games which encourage them to speak about the weather. Pupils use phrases such as 'j'ai faim' (I am hungry) when they talk about food and record details about their school and their clothes. They learn French words for animals and colours and complete shopping lists or menus in French. Pupils are encouraged to correct each other's work and do so confidently. This greatly helps their learning, involving them in the checking of work, spotting other pupils' mistakes and offering suggestions as to how it could be improved. By the age of 16, pupils write about their hobbies in pieces of work that are examined and lead to qualifications.
73. Teaching is good. Lessons are well prepared and incorporate activities that challenge, stimulate and reward. Resources, many of them created by teachers themselves, are well used to capture and maintain pupils' interest. Care is taken to ensure that lessons incorporate opportunities for pupils to listen to, read and speak French. Pupils' work is well displayed and is well used to promote further interest. Teaching is enthusiastic and sympathetic, mixing French and English speaking well. Care is taken to involve every pupil, with good use of eye contact and facial gesture.

74. Staffing has improved over the recent past with the appointment of a French speaking teacher. The need for a more specific approach to assessment and its use to inform curriculum planning has been correctly identified as a priority for development. There is currently inconsistency in marking and recording.

MUSIC

75. Achievement is satisfactory for all pupils up to the age of 14. The subject is not taught to older pupils. Teaching is satisfactory, but variable; it is weakened when lessons become too complicated and pupils lose interest. Better teaching often concentrates on promoting performance; pupils enjoy this and responses and attitudes are better. Performance is underpinned with a good assessment and recording programme that accurately charts pupils' progress. The best teaching is for primary aged pupils where joy, fun and enjoyment are obvious as pupils sing nursery rhymes with confidence and clap in time with tunes. By the time they are 14, many pupils are reading simple notation and playing tunes on electronic keyboards. Music offers a strong social and cultural dimension to the curriculum, and cross-curricular links with French, English, mathematics and history are also good. Social history is a strong feature of work at Year 9, when pupils listen to the work of Scott Joplin (The Entertainer), Paul Simon (Graceland) and the blues of John Lee Hooker. Music is viewed as integral to school life and the co-ordinator is working towards pupils' performances becoming a regular feature of assemblies. This is a very positive development.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

76. Achievement in physical education is good. In addition to becoming fitter, pupils develop more self-confidence and their personal and social skills improve. The new co-ordinator is very enthusiastic and her good teaching and organisation are leading to improving the achievement of all pupils.
77. By the age of 11 pupils have played invasion and striking games, learned dance sequences, performed gymnastics and participated in athletic activities and swimming. By the age of 14 they have further developed attacking and defensive skills in games such as basketball and short tennis. In a Year 7 basketball lesson, for instance, pupils learned the skill of taking big and small steps to vary and improve movement. Pupils are involved in self-review of good practice and this is contributing to the good promotion of speaking and listening skills. Accommodation limits the range of activities in which the pupils can participate and this is particularly felt in Years 10 and 11 where the lack of access to appropriate facilities in the school results in pupils being unable to be entered for the Certificate of Achievement examination. Nevertheless, pupils remain keen to improve, as was seen as they practised dribbling and passing skills to help them play better basketball. There is excellent interaction, with pupils encouraging and supporting each other.

78. Good teaching is the norm and it is often even better. Teachers have good subject knowledge, plan well, are enthusiastic and provide good role models for pupils. All pupils, irrespective of their physical condition, benefit well from this good teaching. High expectations are evident whether relating to changing into kit, developing personal and social skills or getting pupils to try harder. Good inclusion of all pupils is promoted, for example by using different weight balls in basketball, encouraging pupils in pairs work, and effectively involving learning support practitioners.
79. Assessment is a weakness. Records do not indicate what pupils have achieved or where they need additional support. In particular, small step improvements are not being identified. Opportunities to be involved in accreditation are currently limited to the Sandwell swimming scheme and an internal athletics award. The limitations in the award schemes on offer and the few organised lunchtime and after-school activities restrict opportunities for pupils to extend the personal and social aspects of physical education.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

80. Achievement in religious education is good in all age groups. It is leading to pupils gaining good results in accredited coursework. By the age of 11, pupils have learned about good and evil as explained in bible stories and parables. They identify symbols of the great religions and have compared feasts and festivals such as Christmas, Diwali, and Passover. By the age of 14, pupils have increased their awareness of religious festivals and the importance of religion to the civilised world. They develop respect for people of faiths other than their own and the way they worship. This all points to them consolidating their appreciation of the fact that people worship God in many different ways. Pupils talk about good times and what makes a good day. In their work on the basics of Christianity they know the symbolism and the names of the major parts of Holy Communion. By the time they are 16, pupils are becoming aware of a number of ways to consider the Trinity. When discussing family, pupils consider sophisticated ideas about appearances and how it is possible to be more than one thing at once, for example brother, friend and footballer.
81. Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and often incorporate a very good range of resources, artefacts and activities to make them interesting. Teachers make sure that all pupils take part. As a result, pupils eagerly identify a paten and a chalice when studying Communion. A wide range of teaching styles is used. Perceptive questioning is used to help assess progress and to encourage conversation, for instance about feelings. Learning objectives are made clear; teachers and support staff provide lots of clues and examples to illustrate the message. Teachers encourage pupils to think and express themselves clearly. Classes are well managed and no time is lost. Occasionally, poor behaviour slows learning because behaviour management programmes are not always applied correctly. A weakness evident in pupils' past work is inconsistent marking. It is not providing a record of how far pupils have come or giving pupils sufficient guidance as to how they can do even better. More recent work is being much better marked.
82. The recently appointed co-ordinator has written new schemes of work to closely reflect the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Over the past year assessment has been unsatisfactory and inconsistent but the new schemes of work, opportunities for accreditation and records of achievement all provide a good base for the future.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION

83. Pupils' achievements in personal, social and health education have been satisfactory over the past year. However, recent improvements in the management of the subject, curriculum planning and the introduction of external accreditation have given rise to better achievement this term.
84. Primary aged pupils show development of personal awareness and an understanding of their rights and responsibilities. A significant amount of recent work, including assemblies, has been centred on the theme of bullying. Discussion based work involves pupils in consideration of the effects of bullying. This current work has a much clearer structure than the work of the previous year when lessons were often taken by temporary teaching staff.
85. Pupils between the ages of 11 and 14 develop better self-awareness as they consider their place in the school. A good lesson for Year 7 pupils had them 'navigating' the school using maps to help them locate classrooms and staff. In another well-taught lesson they considered the giving of 'surprises' to people who are close to them. Discussion showed increasing maturity and insight as pupils identified people they would like to surprise and what would please them. By Year 9, pupils have learned about their developing sexuality and the responsibilities this incurs. They have also become much more aware of the uses and abuses of drugs. The recent rewriting of the policy and the use of external agencies such as the school nurses and the local authority drug education team have increased the effectiveness of this provision. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are prepared well for life after school. The wide range of activities considers subjects as diverse as time management, personal hygiene and the dangers of drugs.
86. Monitoring of pupils' work and the improvement of marking and assessment is recognised as a weakness and is one of the new co-ordinator's priorities for improvement. The most significant change is the recent introduction of external accreditation through the ASDAN examination, which has provided the school with a clear focus and has led to some interesting work including current work on the media, involving a combination of discussion and displays.