

INSPECTION REPORT

THE BARLOW RC HIGH SCHOOL

East Didsbury, Manchester

LEA area: Manchester

Unique reference number: 105581

Headteacher: Mr J Taylor

Lead inspector: Mr A Henderson

Dates of inspection: 13 – 16 October 2003

Inspection number: 258800

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:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11 – 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	935
School address:	Parrs Wood Road East Didsbury Manchester
Postcode:	M20 6BX
Telephone number:	0161 445 8053
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Fr Brendan Curley
Date of previous inspection:	19 January 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The Barlow High School is a voluntary aided Catholic comprehensive school for boys and girls aged 11-16. It is average in size and is regularly oversubscribed; at present, there are 935 pupils on roll with more girls than boys. The school serves a wide, diverse area which includes areas of social deprivation as well as relative affluence. All pupils are Catholics drawn from five parishes within the Salford Diocese. On entry to Year 7, pupils' attainments are above average in their Year 6 tests in English, mathematics and science, but are generally below average in other subjects. Results of other standardised tests at this stage indicate below average standards, with fewer high ability pupils than expected, together with weaknesses in aspects of literacy for a majority. The vast majority of pupils are indigenous white with the remainder mainly from mixed race or black origins. There are five pupils who have English as an additional language but none are at an early stage of learning English. Around 35 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is more than double the average. Some 10 per cent of pupils have special educational needs, mostly for moderate learning difficulties, which is below average. This includes an average proportion with statements of special need, most of whom have specific learning difficulties or behavioural problems. Since the previous inspection, the school has gained Sportsmark, and has been awarded Beacon School status and a Schools Achievement Award in recognition of its positive progress.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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30941	K Brammer	Team inspector	English English as an additional language
22985	J Sparkes	Team inspector	Science
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32329	A Stafford	Team inspector	Art and design
31779	V Harrison	Team inspector	Design and technology
23926	D Howorth	Team inspector	Geography Vocational
32122	J Straw	Team inspector	Citizenship History
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a successful and effective school that is providing a good education for its pupils. It has a number of significant strengths, not least its success in providing a very caring, supportive learning environment in which all pupils are valued and given very good opportunities to reach their personal and academic potential. **The school is well led, and provides satisfactory value for money.**

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Pupils achieve well as they move through the school because teaching is good.
- The care and provision for pupils' personal development are very good; their spiritual development is excellent.
- The curriculum, particularly for pupils aged 14-16, is innovative, flexible and provides very well for both academic and work-related courses, separately and in combination with each other.
- Very good enrichment activities and links with other schools and colleges benefit pupils' learning and are helping to raise standards.
- GCSE results in art and drama are well above average.
- The Ambrose Barlow Centre provides excellent support for pupils with difficulties.

But...

- The work of teachers and the impact of their teaching on pupils' learning are not consistently monitored and evaluated by all subject heads of department.
- Available data to assess pupils' performance is insufficiently analysed and used in departments for planning and for identifying how pupils could achieve even more effectively (particularly in Years 7 to 9).
- There are weaknesses in the management of the provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN).
- The incidence of fixed term exclusion is well above average.

The school has shown good improvement since the last inspection. Results have improved, notably for GCSE, as has attendance. Strengths in areas such as pastoral care and behaviour have been maintained. The school has responded effectively to the previous report, although there are still some issues to be resolved relating to the provision for pupils with SEN.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
	C	D	C	B

*Key: A – well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average
Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Overall, achievement in the school is good. Standards of work seen of pupils in Year 9 are average in English, mathematics and science, and in all other subjects. Standards at the end of Year 11 are also average in the majority of subjects, but are above average in art, history, physical education and music. Pupils achieve well through Years 7 to 11, and those taking history in Years 10 and 11 are achieving very well. Pupils with SEN make satisfactory progress, whilst those who are gifted and talented achieve well. There are no significant differences in the levels of achievement between boys and girls. Test results for 2003 improved from the previous year; at the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science standards were in line with the national average. GCSE results for 2003 also improved with 47 per cent of pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades. Since the last inspection GCSE results have improved at a faster rate than the national picture.

The pupils' personal qualities are good overall, fostered by very well planned programmes for citizenship and personal and social education. **Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good overall.** Pupils have positive attitudes to the school. The behaviour of most pupils is good, although some are less considerate. The school takes a very firm stance in relation to this unacceptable behaviour; as a result, the rate of fixed term exclusion is well above average. Attendance has improved markedly since the last inspection, now matches the national average, and is still improving.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching is good overall in all years, and is very good in history in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is good in most subjects, including English and science, throughout Years 7 to 11. There is little unsatisfactory teaching. Pupils' learning is good overall, and is enhanced by subject specialist staff, the variety of teaching strategies they use, and pupils' positive attitudes. Learning is more limited where the incidence of temporary teaching has affected continuity and challenge for pupils, for example, in design and technology. The curriculum is good overall. In Years 10 and 11 it is very good because the variety of academic and work-related courses ensure that programmes are flexible and matched well to pupils' aspirations and capabilities. The school takes good care of its pupils, and they are valued and respected. Links with parents are good, and these impact positively on children's learning, for example, by ensuring regular attendance and the completion of homework. The school has very effective partnerships with other schools and colleges; these benefit pupils' achievement and progress, for example, by ensuring rapid integration into the school in Year 7, and by enabling a growing range of work-related opportunities in Years 10 and 11.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher provides good leadership and is ensuring clear direction for the school with a growing emphasis on both raising standards and providing appropriate opportunities for pupils' personal development. The innovative curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is testimony to this, and also to the support of the senior management team. The school runs smoothly and effectively. Management is satisfactory overall – improvements are needed in the monitoring and evaluation of the work of teachers by subject heads, and in their use of assessment data to check whether pupils are making as much progress as they should. In other respects, both leadership and management of subjects are good. Governors are committed and hardworking. They have good knowledge of the school, and monitor its work, and particularly its finances, well.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very supportive of the school. They feel teaching is good, and that pupils are expected to work hard. Parents are particularly pleased with the arrangements for helping their children to settle in, and the way the school encourages them to become mature and responsible. Pupils are positive about the school in almost all areas. Concerns were raised about behaviour and bullying but inspectors' further discussion and observation did not reveal significant problems in either area.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are:

- Ensure that the work of teachers and the impact of their work on pupils' learning are monitored and evaluated by all subject heads on a regular basis.
- Ensure a consistent quality of subject management in relation to the analysis and use of assessment information by teachers to improve the achievement of all groups of pupils (particularly in Years 7 to 9).
- Improve the management of provision for pupils with special educational needs.
- Reduce fixed term exclusions.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 11, entering the school with close to, but below average standards and reaching average levels of attainment by the end of both Year 9 and Year 11. National test results in the core subjects are average and improving in Years 7-9. GCSE results are average overall, and improving faster than the national trend.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards improve as pupils move through the school, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils achieve very well in history in Years 10 and 11.
- GCSE results in art and drama are well above average.
- Pupils achieve well because they are well taught and are keen to learn.
- Pupils' improving levels of attendance, their good behaviour and positive attitudes are important factors in their good achievement.
- Pupils with emotional and behavioural problems are making excellent progress because of the outstanding support they receive through the Ambrose Barlow Centre.

But...

- Pupils with special educational needs make too little progress in improving their literacy skills.

Commentary

1. When pupils join the school at the beginning of Year 7 their standards are close to, but below average. Results in National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 6 have been improving, and in 2003 the proportions of pupils reaching expected levels in English, mathematics and science moved to above the national average. This is misleading in relation to pupils' overall standards. Standards in other subjects overall are below average on entry. In addition, the school administers further standardised tests in Year 7 which indicate that standards are approaching, but below average overall. The results of these tests provide a consistent picture for each year since the previous inspection, and confirm that the school has fewer higher ability pupils than usual, and that pupils' literacy scores are lower than usual.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2002

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	33.6 (33.9)	33.3 (33.0)
Mathematics	34.6 (34.8)	34.7 (34.4)
science	33.3 (32.8)	33.3 (33.1)

There were 188 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. From this beginning pupils make good progress because teaching is good and their attitudes to school are positive. By the end of Year 9 standards are average in all subjects. The trend in National Curriculum test results has been one of performance in line with the national average and rising at a similar rate. In 2002, test results in English, mathematics and science were in line with the national average, whilst for 2003 improvements in each subject ensured that the school's targets were achieved. Results in mathematics matched the national average, and were slightly above in both English and science. In recent years, boys at the school have performed at similar rates to the girls, and the gap between the two is closer than the national picture.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2002

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	43.5 (45.5)	49.9 (48.4)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	85.3 (78.1)	90.9 (90.9)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	94 (92)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	38.3 (34.7)	39.8 (38.7)

There were 184 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. Since the last inspection the trend of GCSE results at the end of Year 11 has been average but rising at a faster rate than the national improvement. In 2002, pupils did better than expected from their Year 9 test scores in 2000 and their achievement was good. Although no national data is yet available for 2003, the school's results improved for A*-C grades. The average points score was maintained, and matched the school's target. Although the school's results across the full range of A*-G grades were below average, this resulted from the very positive action taken by the school in its curriculum provision. About 20 pupils, mainly boys, in 2002 and 2003 were only entered for a few GCSE examinations as they were following alternative courses matched closely to their aspirations and needs. When this, together with pupils' starting points in Year 7, is taken into account, pupils achieved well in GCSE examinations in both 2002 and 2003. Girls do better overall at GCSE than boys, moving ahead from the situation at the end of Year 9, and the gap is slightly wider than the national difference. This is in part a reflection of the greater involvement of boys in non-GCSE courses, but the school is aware of the need to raise achievement especially among the boys. Most importantly, the curriculum has been broadened in Years 10 and 11 giving a wider choice, and other strategies such as mentoring for pupils have been successfully introduced. Pupils' progress is starting to be tracked over time, and potential underachievement is tackled through mentoring. Pupils, especially boys, say that this individual help and wider choice is supporting them well and helping them to achieve better.
4. In 2002, the last year for which national data is available, GCSE results were high in art and drama. They were well above average in French and above average in English literature, geography and history. They were well below average in ICT where staffing problems have now been resolved with a fresh impetus to the work. In other subjects, results were broadly average.
5. Standards of work at the end of Year 9 seen during the inspection are average in all subjects, and represent good achievement overall when compared to the standards when pupils started at the school.
6. Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 are also average overall. By the end of Year 11 standards are above average in art, music, physical education, and in history where pupils are achieving particularly well in response to very good teaching. In mathematics, modern foreign languages, ICT, and design and technology standards are average and achievement is satisfactory. Whilst teaching is satisfactory in these subjects, the impact of staffing instability in recent years has affected progress in some, whilst more use of the language pupils are learning would improve their progress in French and some Spanish lessons. In all other subjects standards are average, and pupils are achieving well overall in response to good teaching.
7. Standards of literacy are average, although the contribution of other subjects to the development of pupils' literacy skills is variable. Numeracy is also average. The development of mathematics across the curriculum is satisfactory although not consistently

provided in all subjects. Standards in taught lessons in ICT have improved and are now average. The development of ICT through work in other subjects is inconsistent because of issues of access and shortage of specialist equipment. Subjects have all identified where they would use ICT in their courses, but some are not yet realising their plans.

8. Although pupils with special educational needs generally attain the standards they are capable of and make satisfactory progress, some pupils with the weakest literacy skills, especially in reading, make unsatisfactory progress because they receive insufficient specialist teaching, either individually or in small groups. Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties who attend the Ambrose Barlow Centre make excellent progress, learning to manage their behaviour more effectively, improving their attendance and raising their self-esteem.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes to work and their relationships with each other and with staff are good. Most behaviour is good, but exclusions are well above average. Attendance is now in line with national averages and punctuality is satisfactory. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development overall are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' spiritual development is excellent.
- Most pupils respond well to the school's high expectations of behaviour so that their behaviour in lessons and around the school is good.
- The Ambrose Barlow Centre is making a strong contribution to pupils' personal development and behaviour.

But...

- Fixed period exclusions are well above national averages, and need to be reduced by developing alternative sanctions and improved behaviour management strategies.

Commentary

9. Pupils have positive views about the school and are keen to come to school and to participate in school life and activities. The attendance officer phones home to check on any unexplained absence. Parents appreciate this care and it has helped to improve attendance.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.8	School data	0.2
National data	7.8	National data	1.2

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

10. Teachers successfully establish an orderly atmosphere in the classroom so that pupils can learn effectively. Pupils are clear about the behaviour standards the school sets and the stages of sanctions. They respect their teachers and generally work co-operatively and quietly in lessons. However, in a few lessons, some pupils can behave immaturely or be reluctant to co-operate with their regular teacher or a temporary teacher and this slows the pace of learning for everyone.
11. Around the school pupils behave well. Prefects and duty monitors responsibly help with the running of the school. At breaks and lunch times pupils generally mix harmoniously across age and ethnic groupings. Pupils feel safe in the school and confident in the abilities of the pastoral staff to sort any conflicts that may occur. The school is orderly, the narrow corridors

do not help smooth movement of pupils, and the canteen is vibrant but noisy. Overall pupils show a pride in their school and respect for each other.

12. The attitudes of pupils with special educational needs are good. They cooperate with their teachers and get on well together. Pupils with the most severe emotional and behavioural difficulties who work in the Ambrose Barlow Centre show respect and consideration for their teachers and adult helpers; their behaviour in class is nearly always good. This provision makes a valuable contribution to pupils' personal development, providing excellent adult role models and encouraging pupils to be considerate to other pupils and to adults generally.

Exclusions

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	790	197	1
White – Irish	43	2	0
White – any other White background	14	10	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	18	13	0
Mixed – White and Black African	18	13	0
Mixed – White and Asian	4	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	17	3	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	10	1	0
Black or Black British – African	7	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	4	4	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	15	12	0

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

13. The school uses permanent exclusion as a last resort and has been successful in reducing the number of permanent exclusions to a very low level. Improving behaviour levels have been established by a firm stance on what is unacceptable and will result in a fixed period exclusion. Most pupils respond to the clear expectations and behave well. Some present a considerable challenge in their behaviour, however, and last year 15 per cent of pupils in the school were excluded for at least one day, which represents a significant amount of lost schooling. Boys are more likely to be excluded than girls.
14. Whilst this unequivocal stance is having positive impact in modifying the behaviour of some difficult pupils, there are weaknesses in the management of exclusions. There needs to be a clear line of responsibility to reintegrate pupils into the school on the day of their return. Exclusions are not yet monitored, for example, by ethnicity, year group or repeated individual incidences, so as to identify trends and tackle particular problems. Not enough emphasis is placed on alternative sanctions at present, nor on sharing widely the very good behaviour management strategies that are proving so effective in the Ambrose Barlow Centre.
15. Pupils' spiritual development is excellent. Their social and cultural development is very good and their moral development is good, making these aspects of personal development very good overall.

16. The school's Christian mission is at the heart of all it stands for and pervades all its activities. The spiritual life of the school is very strong. This is seen in the quality of relationships within the school and the positive attitudes of the pupils towards the school, their teachers and each other. The pupils benefit from, and enjoy, a wide range of opportunities to attend Mass, go on Retreats and celebrate all the major Christian festivals. Morning assemblies and form tutor periods provide regular opportunities for spiritual reflection and prayer.
17. Pupils learn about the differences between right and wrong in assemblies, form times, personal and social education lessons and in many other subjects within the curriculum, including religious education, science, citizenship and history. For example, during the inspection pupils in Year 8 were engaged in discussing the Jamie Bulger case and considering the appropriateness of the punishments handed down by the law. In geography pupils consider the dangers of global warming and study the economic problems associated with different parts of Italy.
18. Social development is encouraged through the many opportunities provided in the school to take part in fundraising. Many charities are supported each year including support for an orphanage in Bolivia, parties for local elderly people, and making and sending clothes to a home for young mothers and babies. The School Council is used very effectively to give pupils an opportunity to air their views and prefects an opportunity to develop their leadership skills. The Ambrose Barlow Centre provides a very positive and caring environment for pupils to grow and flourish.
19. Pupils are provided with a curriculum that promotes good understanding and appreciation of their own culture and that of other local people as well as the world-wide community.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Overall, the school provides a good quality of education for its pupils. Teaching is good in most cases although more use could be made of data on academic performance in tracking and promoting pupils' progress. The curriculum is good with very strong enrichment opportunities. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. Pupils receive good care, guidance and support. The school has good links with parents, and works very well with the wider community and partner schools and colleges.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. Assessment is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and effectively use a variety of teaching strategies and activities to promote good learning.
- Planning is good with clear, shared objectives that benefit pupils' learning.
- Good classroom management ensures pupils behave well, enjoy good relationships, and good use is made of lesson time.
- Pupils work hard and are keen to do well.
- Teaching in the Ambrose Barlow Centre is excellent.

But...

- More use needs to be made of prior attainment data in tracking pupils' progress.
- Targets are not used as effectively as they could be to help pupils improve their work.
- The teaching of literacy skills is not well developed in all subjects.
- Insufficient records are kept of the progress made by pupils with special educational needs who use Successmaker.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 125 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2 (2%)	18 (14%)	57 (46%)	42 (34%)	6 (5%)	0	0

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.

Commentary

20. Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. Teachers plan lessons effectively with careful sequencing to promote pupils' understanding. Their classroom management is good with resources to hand to ensure time is used effectively. They manage pupil behaviour well. In most lessons teachers have high expectations, which enables pupils to learn well and make good progress. However, there is insufficient challenge in some lessons in modern foreign languages, design technology and mathematics. Relationships are very good and pupils are well motivated. As a result, pupils apply themselves to their work diligently, presenting their work neatly, and make good progress. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which they use effectively. They successfully use a wide range of teaching strategies and a variety of activities to promote good learning, but do not always include opportunities for independent learning. Both parents and pupils comment very favourably on the quality of teaching throughout the school.
21. Just six lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory, all in Years 7-9, shared across five subjects. Three were in Year 9, and in these unsatisfactory pupil attitudes restricted progress and achievement. In the remainder, common weaknesses were a lack of challenge and structure in the learning and a consequent lack of pace and urgency in the lessons that combined to limit achievement and progress.
22. The teaching of literacy is not sufficiently well developed in all subjects. There is very good practice in science, art, history and geography, but opportunities for developing extended writing and critical reading skills are missed in other subjects. Opportunities for pupils to discuss and explain their reasoning are not fully explored in mathematics and physical education. The teaching of mathematics across the curriculum lacks systematic planning, so again opportunities to develop pupils' mathematics skills are often lost. There is insufficient use of ICT in the teaching of mathematics, art, and design and technology.
23. Assessment of pupils' performance and the setting of targets for achievement at the end of Year 11 are satisfactory. Use of assessment is satisfactory overall, and good in history. Prior attainment data is not yet used consistently across the school to monitor pupils' progress, and the use of examination results analysis to improve teaching and learning is not yet established in all departments. All pupils have target grades based on National Curriculum levels in Years 7 to 9 and on GCSE grades in Years 10 and 11; however, these are not always accurate. Attainment grades in some subjects are not linked to National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades. Improvement is needed in modern foreign languages, physical education, and design and technology. Homework is set regularly and marking is at least satisfactory; it is good in modern foreign languages, science, history and mathematics. However, not all teachers provide sufficient detail to help pupils understand how their work compares to national standards and what they need to do to improve.
24. The highest attainers and those pupils identified as gifted and talented receive good teaching. The school identifies, at an early stage, pupils with particular gifts and talents and/or overall high ability. This information is shared with all teachers who provide appropriately challenging work and learning opportunities to enable these pupils to move forward at a pace suited to their capabilities. The arrangements for providing for pupils for whom English is an additional language are less secure because there is no school policy. However, some are included in the gifted and talented group, and their needs are monitored and supported effectively.

25. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs ensures that they achieve satisfactorily. Relationships are very supportive and encourage pupils to want to learn. Pupils are well managed and lessons go according to plan. In some lessons good use is made of pupils' Individual Education Plans, but in others there is little reference to pupil targets. Unsatisfactory use is made of the school's integrated learning system, Successmaker, to support pupils' learning. Pupils are not tested before and after being on the programme and there are no records kept of how they are doing so as to monitor their progress. Teaching in the Ambrose Barlow Centre is excellent. Teachers and adult support assistants have very good experience in teaching pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and know the strategies to use to help pupils improve.

The curriculum

Overall, the curricular provision is good. A very good programme of enrichment enhances the taught curriculum and contributes to pupils' very good personal development. Accommodation, staffing and learning resources are sufficient.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The breadth and balance of the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 are very good.
- The provision of a variety of vocational and work-related education is strong.
- Very good programmes of extra-curricular activity and enrichment in sport and the arts enhance pupils' achievement and personal development.
- Curriculum planning, development and innovation have led to a very good improvement of the provision.
- There are no major weaknesses but, as yet, there are no records to indicate the extent to which the 55 per cent of pupils who do not take ICT as a subject in Years 10 and 11 receive their full entitlement in this subject.

Commentary

26. The curriculum provides very good opportunities for boys and girls of all abilities, aptitudes and backgrounds. Provision is much improved since the previous inspection. Statutory requirements are now fully met. Learning opportunities are well planned to ensure progression and support pupils' good achievement throughout the school.
27. In Years 7 to 9 the provision of modern languages is much better than that usually found because the majority of pupils take a second modern language in Years 8 and 9.
28. Curricular provision is very good in Years 10 and 11. An innovative feature of the curriculum is the five pathways that pupils can follow in Year 10. This makes the curriculum more interesting, relevant and appropriate for all pupils. It is carefully matched to the aptitudes and aspirations of the pupils. Pupils can mix and match academic and vocational subjects alongside more practical courses. This is an exciting, very well planned and challenging curriculum and higher-attaining pupils who successfully complete their courses will gain between 12 and 15 GCSEs. Middle attainers can gain up to 12 GCSEs and the lowest-attaining pupils will take four. It provides for all pupils to achieve their capabilities and maximises equality of access and opportunity. These recent developments have not yet had time to have full impact on standards and results.
29. There is some very successful work-related learning that is caringly and effectively arranged for disaffected pupils mainly, but not exclusively, in Year 11. During the inspection a visit was made to a pupil on a work placement. He now has a 100 per cent attendance and is keeping out of trouble. He spoke highly of the opportunity for him to learn new skills and has recently begun an NVQ level 1 course. Other such pupils are learning hairdressing or developing skills in the sport and leisure industry. These pupils take very few GCSEs and therefore

skew the school's examination results negatively. However, the arrangements are a major factor in the improvement of attendance from 88 to 92 per cent.

30. Opportunities for enrichment are very good. The enrichment of learning in English is excellent and every pupil in the school is involved with positive impact on their attainment. Year 7 take part in a creative writing residential course. A "poetry live" course involves Year 11 pupils. Links with the local media leads to Year 9 pupils taking part in film making, Year 11 pupils working with local journalists and Year 11 pupils running a school radio station. Over 60 Year 11 pupils are working with the local sixth form college on a media project. A similar number of Year 10 pupils are working with a local advertising agent in preparing their GCSE coursework. Furthermore, the school offers additional classes to help boost pupils' learning in preparation for national tests and examinations. All these activities create a real interest and excitement about the subject and they add significantly to pupils' achievement and personal development.
31. A very good range of sporting activities attended by well over half of pupils makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development and achievement in physical education. The school has received the Sportsmark Award in recognition of this provision. The work with local primary schools and special schools is particularly strong and regular events are held where pupils from both schools work alongside each other.
32. Extra-curricular music activities are well attended by pupils. The school choir and bands perform regularly in the community and high numbers of pupils are enthusiastically preparing for the school's next major production, *Return to the Forbidden Planet*.
33. Additional activities are offered to pupils in science, art, ICT, history, and design and technology. These all contribute to pupils' interest in school and their achievement. There are many opportunities to be an active citizen through the charitable activities and the work of the school council. Very good opportunities for reflection and personal development are offered through the group retreats. Parents and pupils are appreciative of wide range of extra activities.
34. The curriculum opportunities for pupils with special educational needs are satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs in Years 7 to 9 have full access to the National Curriculum and all statutory requirements are met. However, there are very few opportunities for pupils to improve their reading, for example, through corrective reading programmes, and pupils with very weak reading skills get insufficient support. There is excellent curriculum provision for pupils who attend the Ambrose Barlow Centre through programmes to help them modify and improve their behaviour. Curricular provision is good in Years 10 and 11. The Youth Award Challenge from the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) affords pupils the opportunity, through various challenges, to develop key skills in areas such as information technology. However, as in Years 7 to 9 there are insufficient opportunities for pupils with very weak basic literacy skills to have specialist teaching in reading, writing and spelling, either in small groups or individually.
35. The provision of personal, social and health education (PSHE) is good because it is well planned and is taught effectively by the form tutors. The quality of the programme is monitored well and pupils complete questionnaires as to the effectiveness of some modules; as a result the programme is continually being refined and developed appropriately. Issues relating to sex and drugs education are covered well. Careers education is good and prepares pupils well for the next stages of their life. Pupils value the programme.
36. The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is satisfactory. The level of subject qualification is good. There are no current vacancies, but the incidence of temporary appointments is high in design and technology; whilst teaching here is satisfactory, the pace of subject development has been limited by the uncertain arrangements. Technical staff undertake a valuable role in assisting and supporting

teachers. The secretarial, clerical and site management staff make a significant contribution to the smooth day-to-day running of the school. Learning resources are sufficient to meet the needs of the curriculum. Facilities for ICT have improved, but some subjects like English have access problems, and CAD/CAM use is a weakness in design and technology. Book provision is also improved, with good texts in history and citizenship. Accommodation is satisfactory overall. However, the school is at its limits and there is very little spare space. Recent improvements have provided improved office accommodation, and the library is presently being upgraded and refurbished. Shortcomings remain, however, with narrow corridors and stairs. Disabled access is restricted. There are insufficient science laboratories, and some practical lessons take place in classrooms that are too small. There is a good specialist drama hall, but provision for art is cramped, and food technology requires refurbishment. Most toilet facilities are adequate, and refurbishment is planned in consultation with pupils.

Care, guidance and support

The school cares for its pupils well. They are given very good support and guidance. The school seeks and acts on pupils' views effectively.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Procedures to help pupils settle into the school are very good.
 - Pupils are given very good personal support, because the pastoral team is strong and the school employs additional designated staff to help. The Ambrose Barlow centre makes an outstanding contribution to this.
 - Pupils are given very good guidance, because there is regular monitoring of their progress and effective personal social, health and careers education.
 - Pupils feel their views are valued, as the school council is an effective mechanism for change.
- But...
- Procedures for tracking the progress of pupils with SEN are not secure.

Commentary

37. Parents are pleased with the individual care and attention given to their children. Induction procedures are very good and enable pupils to settle quickly. Form teachers generally stay with their class as they move up through the school and establish very constructive relationships. The form periods in the mornings are used well and make for a positive start to the day. There are regular pastoral meetings to exchange and analyse information about pupils and this leads to a high standard of day-to-day care. However, there is scope to develop further monitoring of pastoral data by ability groups or ethnicity so as to identify trends, and to help in targeting support where required.
38. There is an unusually wide range of support strategies for pupils. The school welfare officer gives very valuable support to pupils with personal or practical difficulties. The part time school attendance officer contacts parents about their children's absence. A mediator helps to resolve conflicts and acts as an intermediary between school and home to resolve any problems. The Ambrose Barlow Centre provides excellent support for pupils with difficulties. Pupils for whom English is an additional language receive good support from pastoral staff.
39. Each term pupils are given informative tracking reports of their effort and attainment in each subject. Through these and the regular marking of their work pupils know how well they are doing. The school is starting to identify pupils who are underachieving and provide them with effective additional help. During the inspection week a group of Year 10 pupils attended an excellent study skills seminar held at the school which enhanced their range of learning strategies. Access to careers education is good. External "Connexions" staff meet with pupils at the school to give them impartial guidance to choose their next stage of education or

the world of work. Year 11 have opportunities to go to a summer school at a university which helps to raise their aspirations.

40. The school is developing effective ways for pupils to become more involved in the setting and reviewing of their personal targets with a dedicated target setting day. The school council is effectively involved in school decision making. The council is currently helping to design the refurbishment of the school cloakrooms. Pupils have been involved in drawing up the school's mission statement, enhancing their sense of ownership in the school and its values.
41. Procedures for identifying pupils with special educational needs are not secure. Although attainment on entry to the school is lower than average, the school has a below average number of pupils identified as needing extra support. Good use is made of primary school results and other tests, but pupils are not all tested for reading and therefore their development in this very important skill cannot be monitored. Tracking of progress in this, and other key areas of learning, is unsatisfactory. Individual Education Plans are in place and their quality has improved since the previous inspection. They are now satisfactory. Teaching assistants give effective support in the classroom but they do not report back, on a lesson-by-lesson basis, how pupils are achieving against their targets and pupils' progress in this regard is not monitored. Pupils in the Ambrose Barlow Centre are given excellent support to help them manage their negative behaviour and improve their confidence and self-esteem.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's good quality links with parents have a positive impact on pupils' achievement. Very good community, school and college links enrich pupils' learning.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents regard the school highly; there is a good partnership between school and home.
- Communication between school and home is good and parents are effectively consulted. The annual written reports on pupils' progress are satisfactory, but attainment information could be clearer.
- Community links make a sustained and very beneficial contribution to pupils' achievement, particularly in the creative arts.
- The very good educational partnerships with local schools and colleges enable staff to exchange good practice and enrich pupils' learning and study activities.

Commentary

42. Parents are very pleased with the care and education their children receive. The school sends home termly tracking information about effort and attainment, which keeps parents well informed about each child's progress. The annual written reports on pupils' progress meet statutory requirements and paint a suitably individual picture, but could usefully provide more information about strengths and weaknesses in subjects and ways to improve, so that parents can help at home. The attainment grades used in Years 7 to 9 make it difficult to compare attainment to that expected nationally for pupils of similar ages.
43. The school enjoys the confidence of all the communities it serves. The parents and friends association provides good support for the school with social and fundraising events, and acts as a sounding board for school policies. Parents contributed generously to provide lockers for the pupils and are currently helping to fund the new learning resource area. The school effectively consults parents as, for example, in recent decisions about school uniform. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are kept well informed about their children's progress and are fully consulted and involved in annual reviews.

44. The school has developed very good links with the community, other schools and colleges supported by involvement in two national initiatives (Creative Arts Partnership in Education, and the Creative Partnership Initiative). Teachers willingly exchange good practice with a cluster of other schools. Pupils have a wide range of choice of vocational provision due to the effective links with colleges and local employers. Pupils identified as gifted and talented have an exciting range of enrichment activities, including national competitions and events shared with local schools. During the inspection week a group of pupils entered a mathematics challenge at a nearby school. Pupils with identified special needs work together with pupils at a local special school and this raises their self-esteem. Pupils enjoy sports links with other schools and the school hosts an integrated “able “and “disabled” sports day. As part of the excellent Creative Partnership Initiative, groups of pupils have worked with local newspapers, advertising agencies and artists. These firsthand experiences help to raise attainment.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. Good leadership by the headteacher along with good support from governors and senior staff are ensuring good progress. Governance is good, and school management is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher and governors have made a strong impact in creating a vision for the development and further improvement of the school, whilst retaining the high level of care and concern for individual pupils.
- The development of the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is very well led and managed.
- The leadership and management of the Ambrose Barlow Centre are excellent.
- Finances are very well managed, and spending is tightly controlled.

But...

- Systems for analysing pupils' performance, and for checking on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning are not yet being used well enough.
- The management of exclusions requires sharpening.
- The management of the provision for pupils with SEN is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

45. The overall leadership and management of the school are good. The aims of the school have recently been reaffirmed, and the headteacher has set out a clear vision and sense of direction for the future to all pupils, their parents, the school governors and staff. The vision builds on the school's many strengths, together with a determination to improve standards. It pays close attention to the needs of pupils as individuals, and the need to secure optimum achievement for all of them, whatever their background and capabilities. High expectations of effort and behaviour are set within a framework of good relationships and care, with positive impact on pupils' attitudes and response to school.
46. The governing body does its work well. Governors are conscientious and committed to the school's well-being. Through their clear committee structure and regular programme of meetings, governors are well informed and provide strong support for the school. They understand the school's strengths and weaknesses, and have strong and productive links with the headteacher and senior staff. Governors check regularly on the educational standards achieved and the quality of education provided, including setting challenging targets for GCSE examination results. They play an active role in setting the school's development priorities. Governors fulfil their statutory duties well, and their action plan in response to the previous inspection has been successful. There are some minor omissions from the school's prospectus.

47. The leadership of the headteacher is good. He has high expectations of pupils and staff, and the governors have strongly endorsed his clear vision for the future development of the school. An agenda for improvement has been set in place in a thoughtful, humane manner, and staff are responding well to the open approach to management and increasing accountability. There has been positive impact in a number of important areas including revised management structures, clear roles and responsibilities, and the school's development planning procedures. A strong philosophical foundation is reflected in the very good curriculum improvements in Years 10 and 11 that embrace a wide range of opportunities for pupils to follow courses appropriately matched to their varying aptitudes and abilities. The headteacher and senior team work well together in providing consistent leadership, expectation and support for the school. The leadership team is committed and hardworking and their complementary skills and expertise are used effectively. All carry considerable teaching loads.
48. Management across the school is satisfactory. Priorities in the school development plan, though not always explicit in their success criteria, relate to raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning. These priorities are reflected in faculty plans, staff development plans and performance management targets. Consequently there is a common and well focused drive for improvement. Progress in putting the school development plan into action is checked on regularly by senior staff and this information is shared with governors. A notable success of the school's drive for improvement is the development of the curriculum on offer to pupils in Year 10 and 11 which has resulted in improved attendance and motivation.
49. The management by subject leaders is variable. It is good in English, science, art, citizenship, geography, history and physical education. Most subjects have well planned schemes of work from which teachers can plan worthwhile progressive lessons. Some subject leaders analyse pupils' performance and identify where pupils need support. However, the monitoring of teaching and learning is not yet well developed. As a result, in the majority of subjects there is insufficient debate about the effectiveness of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning. Strategies such as the regular review by subject leaders of pupils' books and teachers' marking are starting to be used, but their observation and review of lessons is less regular. The sharing of good practice is not consistently established. This aspect of subject responsibility requires greater emphasis.
50. Analysis of pupils' performance is carried out by the whole school and by faculties. The focus is on tracking the progress of individual pupils and this leads to identification of underachieving pupils and subsequent provision of support. For example, learning mentors or teachers give additional help to these pupils. However, assessment information is not analysed fully enough, either at whole school level or consistently across subjects, to identify where there may be areas of strength to share across the school or areas of weakness that need improving. Analysis is not contributing fully enough to the school's self evaluation.
51. A well managed system of pastoral care ensures a positive ethos in the school where pupils know they are well looked after and encouraged to do their best academically and in terms of their personal development. For example, the introduction of citizenship and arrangements for teaching personal, social and health education by form tutors have been well managed. Close monitoring of the new arrangements helps to ensure that pupils have consistently good learning experiences in these subjects. However, management of the exclusion of pupils is not rigorous enough. There is little analysis of the nature of the exclusions or their occurrence. Not enough has been done to seek alternatives to fixed period exclusions. Consequently, although falling, the number of fixed period exclusions is still much higher than is found in most schools of this size.
52. The management of the provision for special educational needs pupils is unsatisfactory. The progress of pupils is not being tracked as they move through the school and few records are kept of their achievements. The criteria for placing pupils on the special educational needs

register when they join the school is insecure, and not all pupils who should have an individual education plan have one. The administration and record keeping require improved organisation. Liaison with teaching assistants is unsatisfactory and their deployment does not always give good value for money. The leadership of special educational needs provision is satisfactory. There is a clear commitment to the care and support of individual pupils. The requirements of recent legislation are well understood and disseminated to all staff. The link governor is well informed and very supportive.

Example of outstanding practice

The Ambrose Barlow Centre (learning support unit) provides excellent support to a wide range of pupils whose behaviour and attendance is a cause for concern. Whilst at the Centre, they learn how to take personal responsibility for their actions, including ways of managing their own behaviour and getting on with others. Pupils' individual behaviour plans are of excellent quality, setting demanding but achievable targets that they themselves have had a hand in formulating. Relationships within the Centre are excellent and both teachers and other adult staff provide excellent role models for pupils, demanding high standards of behaviour and courtesy but tempered with a patient, caring concern for each individual child. Teachers and other staff know the pupils extremely well and give them every encouragement and support. Consequently when pupils leave the centre they are better able to cope in lessons, have much greater self-esteem and confidence and attend school more regularly. This is already leading to a reduction in school exclusions. The Centre arranges for approximately twenty Year 11 pupils to attend some form of work-based training. This is proving a valuable incentive for pupils to take personal responsibility for their future employment prospects. The leadership and management of the Centre are excellent and provide a clear direction and focus for the work of all staff in the Centre. A very strong team ethos provides pupils with the support they need to make full use of their learning opportunities and reach their full potential. There is an acknowledgement that the area for future development is to develop intervention strategies, particularly in Year 7, so that pupils, whose behaviour and attendance is beginning to cause concern, can be targeted and supported before poor attitudes and behaviour become irreversible.

53. Performance management arrangements are well focused on the school's priorities and have had a significant impact on improvements, for example, in the use of ICT across subjects and the introduction of learning materials to develop higher level thinking skills in science. Professional development activity, particularly the introduction of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy, has resulted in improvements across many subjects. For example, lessons are generally well structured and what is to be learnt in each lesson is made very clear to pupils. Training, funded through New Opportunities Funding, has given staff greater confidence in teaching and using ICT in their subjects. Staff new to the school and newly qualified are well supported and are developing good professional approaches.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,259,942
Total expenditure	3,320,724
Expenditure per pupil	3,480

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	45,382
Balance carried forward to the next	-15,400

54. Finances are very well controlled. The school administrative officer monitors spending closely. Governors and senior managers keep the budget under regular and close review. Financial management is well thought through to ensure that the school can succeed in its major improvements. For example, the successful approaches to the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 require high levels of staffing and the budget has been managed well to fund this improvement. The school looks for ways of reducing administrative tasks of teachers and freeing them to concentrate on their principle role of teaching pupils. To this end, the school has introduced external examination invigilation and increased support for teachers' administrative tasks. Principles of best value are adhered to well in that the school's performance compared to others is constantly reviewed, spending is checked for its relevance to the school's principle aims, parents and pupils are consulted on major issues and the most competitive pricing is sought for spending.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

The overall quality of provision in English is **good**.

Aspect	Years 7- 9	Years 10 - 11
Standards of work seen	Average	Average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Improvement since the last inspection	Good	

Strengths

- Pupils attain standards which are well above average in media studies.
- The opportunity to take three GCSE challenges the most able pupils.
- The excellent range of extra-curricular activities enhances the learning of all pupils.
- Pupils' have positive attitudes which contribute well to their good achievement.
- Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers do not make sufficient use of assessment information in Years 7-9.

Commentary

55. Standards in Year 9 national tests in 2002 were average overall, though boys' results were above the average for their gender. The results for all pupils in 2003 are similar, but indicate an improvement in the performance of girls. The GCSE English results in 2002 are average: those for literature are above average and those for media studies are well above, with boys' outperforming girls in the latter. There is a similar picture in 2003, except that girls and boys performed equally well in media studies.
56. Standards of work seen are average overall, although pupils' speaking and listening skills are above average in all years because of the frequent opportunities which they have to use talk in lessons to develop and refine their ideas. Reading is average. Pupils are encouraged to read for enjoyment but their deductive and inferential skills are weak in Years 7-9. However, they are much improved by the end of Year 11, particularly in the two higher attaining groups which follow the media course. In these classes, teachers provide frequent opportunities for pupils to practise and develop these skills. Writing standards are also average but there are frequent spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors, especially among the middle and lower attaining pupils in all years. Creative writing is often lively and entertaining and is stronger than critical writing which tends to be descriptive rather than analytical, with arguments undeveloped. The most able write cogently and accurately for a good range of audiences and purposes. The less able enjoy narrative writing but, because of their limited vocabulary and experience of a range of formal writing styles, have difficulty with writing to instruct and inform.

57. Many pupils enter the school with below average standards of literacy: however, because of their positive attitudes to the subject, good teaching and the considerable enrichment opportunities offered to them by an excellent extra curricular and support programme, such as booster classes, coursework surgeries, and links with the Arts, their achievement is good in both national tests and at GCSE. It is very good in the two groups which take the three GCSE subjects without the benefit of additional curriculum time. These pupils show high commitment and a strong desire to do well. All pupils use information and communication technology to improve their writing and research skills and those with special educational needs receive high quality individual support and guidance from their teachers and teaching assistants who work well together.
58. Teaching and learning are good overall. There is some very good teaching, especially in Years 10 and 11, which challenges all pupils and makes learning exciting. This was evident in a Year 10 media lesson in which the teacher made very good use of pupils' own knowledge and experience to help them identify the conventions of science fiction films and apply them to *Blade Runner*. Teachers have high expectations of all pupils and plan work which is rewarding, relevant and appropriate to their different needs. Assessment in Years 7-9 is positive and gives pupils confidence but, because teachers rarely refer to the National Curriculum level criteria in their comments, pupils are not being shown exactly what they need to do to improve. In Years 10 and 11, the quality of advice and use of examples are good.
59. Leadership and management are good with some very good features. There is a strong corporate dedication, excellent communication and a shared commitment to raising standards. Team responsibilities are well delegated, teaching and marking are carefully monitored, through team teaching and standardising exercises, and all teachers participate in lesson planning and make valuable contributions to the excellent range of extra curricular activities. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards attained by boys have improved, there is a very rich curriculum, teaching is now good overall, there are regularly planned ICT activities for all pupils and the department is promoting and supporting literacy development throughout the school.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

60. Overall, the standards of English language and literacy skills are average by the end of Year 11. Pupils' speaking and listening ability is above average because they are very willing to join in discussions and to use talk to make decisions, solve problems and share ideas. However, a significant number of pupils enter the school with below average reading and writing skills. All staff have had training in the planning of units of work to develop pupils' literacy, but there is inconsistency in the thoroughness of teaching and marking, both within and across departments. There is already very good practice, in science, history and geography, for example, but opportunities, such as for the drafting and planning of extended writing, or developing critical reading, are missed in other subjects. There is inspection evidence which indicates that inadequate literacy skills are adversely affecting standards in some GCSE subjects, for example, in music.
61. In order to raise standards further, it is necessary to ensure greater emphasis on whole school literacy development through the more rigorous monitoring by all heads of department. The English department works hard to advise and support colleagues but, at the moment, there is insufficient data on all pupils to determine their literacy needs and to track their progress. The contribution of the new library to pupils' literacy has yet to be fully considered. By tackling these areas, the school will raise the profile of literacy, provide regular opportunities for the sharing and promotion of best practice and provide measurable literacy targets.

Drama

62. GCSE results in drama over recent years have been well above the national average. Current standards of work in lessons are average overall. They are above average in Years 10 and 11. These pupils respond enthusiastically and creatively and can devise their own presentations with confidence using a range of basic drama techniques. Ensemble work is good. Most pupils can use their voices well but lack the experience and knowledge of stagecraft and theatre, and the understanding of the concepts of leading practitioners, which are necessary for the top grades. In Years 7-9, pupils are co-operative and responsive though many are unaware of the impact of facial expressions and body language on an audience. They enjoy devising and presenting, stimulated by an imaginative range of tasks: however they show insufficient self-discipline in their performances.
63. Achievement is satisfactory overall. It is helped by pupils' positive attitudes and enjoyment of the subject. Drama also makes a worthwhile contribution to all students' social, moral and ethical awareness, through the consideration of issues such as bullying and homelessness, and also to their experience of citizenship. They work collaboratively and readily share ideas.
64. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Classes are usually well managed but there is an insufficient focus on drama skills in some lessons, although in one Year 11 lesson, pupils were encouraged to experiment with choral effects, such as speaking antiphonally and in canon, with considerable success.
65. A new head of department has recently been appointed. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Improvement since the previous inspection is good, with high standards being maintained in GCSE drama examinations and the extension of the curriculum by the introduction of a performing arts course.

English as an additional language

66. The school has identified five pupils for whom English is an additional language. Four are in Years 7-9: two come from Indonesia and two from Italy; none are now at an early stage of language acquisition. There is one Japanese pupil in Year 10. The local education authority does not measure the language proficiency of EAL pupils at the school or provide support.
67. Although these pupils receive considerable support from pastoral staff, the languages department and fellow pupils, the school has no EAL policy and does not provide them with specific help in lessons, or action plans and targets for them. Because of their very low number of EAL pupils, the school does not have any ethnically analysed attainment data. Teachers say that EAL pupils achieve as well as other pupils, using the fact that two of them are on the gifted and talented register as their evidence, but not all regularly take their needs into consideration in the classroom. To strengthen the situation, the school should incorporate systems for the assessment and monitoring of pupils' EAL needs and, within the school's overall arrangements for assessment, formalise these in a policy statement.

Modern foreign languages

The overall quality of provision in modern foreign languages (French, Spanish, German) is **satisfactory**.

Aspect	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards of work seen	Average	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Leadership	Satisfactory	
Management	Satisfactory	
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory	

Strengths

- In German, pupils achieve well because they have very good attitudes and teaching is consistently good.
- Pupils use ICT well to enhance their learning in modern foreign languages.

Areas for improvement

- Rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning to raise standards is not in place.
- Data is not analysed or used to its full potential in order to raise standards.
- Procedures need strengthening to ensure levels assigned in Year 9 teacher assessments are secure.
- Speaking skills are weak in French and in Spanish because not enough use is made by teachers of the language pupils are learning.

French and Spanish are taught as equal first languages in alternate years, with French currently in Years 7, 9 and 11 and Spanish in Years 8 and 10. German is taught as a second language for higher attaining pupils, starting in Year 8.

French

68. GCSE results in 2002 were well above average. Boys achieved as highly as girls. Results fell sharply to below average in 2003, due in part to discontinuity in teaching because of frequent staffing changes.
69. Standards of pupils' work in Year 9 are below average. Pupils make best progress in developing comprehension skills. Speaking is weak and pupils lack confidence mainly because opportunities to practise are too infrequent. Higher attaining pupils can write an account in the past tense but overall, pupils have little knowledge of using tenses.
70. Standards of pupils' work in Year 11 are below average. Listening and reading skills develop further but speaking remains weak. Pupils respond briefly to questions but do not extend their responses routinely. Coursework produced by higher attaining pupils shows good progress in expressing opinions and using different tenses. Average and lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, write simple facts in the present tense.
71. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Resources are generally well chosen to catch pupils' interest although activities are not always sufficiently demanding and do not move pupils on fast enough. Classes are well managed and behaviour is good. Pupils have good attitudes and take pride in the presentation of written work. Marking is good. Sometimes activities drag on too long, taking time away most notably from developing speaking skills. This is compounded by the inconsistent application of departmental policy regarding the use

of French as the language of the classroom and there is overuse of English. Nevertheless, pupils' achievement, including those with special educational needs, is satisfactory overall.

Spanish

72. Standards of work in year 8 are broadly as expected after one year of study. Pupils are beginning to say and write simple sentences although pupils with weaker literacy skills make spelling and copying errors.
73. Standards of work in Year 10 are close to average. This is at variance with the teacher assessments for this cohort at the end of Year 9, which were well below average. The school agrees the levels assigned were too severe, resulting mainly from insufficient moderation and monitoring. Higher attaining pupils are beginning to speak and write with a degree of fluency on familiar topics, although they do not yet have a secure grasp of the past tense. Average attaining pupils can write a short description in the present tense but work contains basic errors.
74. Standards of work in Year 11 in the small class taking Spanish as second language are below average. Comprehension skills are adequate but speaking is weak.
75. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and all pupils, including those with special educational needs, are achieving broadly as expected given their capabilities. However, pupils need to learn the past tense earlier to ensure as many as possible reach the required standard by the end of Year 9. Pupils in Year 10 do not consolidate and build on their prior knowledge of tenses quickly enough. Classes are well managed and pupils behave well. They have good attitudes and written work is neatly presented. There is overuse of English as the language of the classroom but to a lesser extent than in French. Marking is good, occasionally with targets set for improvement although this good practice is not widespread across the team.

German

76. Higher attaining pupils begin German as their second language in Year 8. Standards of work in Year 9 are above average and pupils achieve well because they have very good attitudes and teaching is consistently good. Pupils make good progress in each skill.
77. In 2002, GCSE results were below average. Pupils did less well than in their other subjects though girls did better than boys. In 2003 results rose to average. Standards of work in Year 11 are well above average and higher than recent results, though numbers taking German are much lower than previously. Pupils speak and write fluently and accurately, using a range of tenses and language structures with confidence.
78. Teaching is good. The consistent use of German in the classroom has a clear impact on the good progress pupils make in developing speaking and listening skills. Resources are well matched to pupils' capabilities and activities are carefully planned to push them on quickly. Marking is good. Pupils develop good independent working skills and they work hard. They have opportunities to use ICT to enhance their learning, for example use of the Internet to research German web-sites. Achievement over time is good.

Modern languages

79. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Standards seen are similar to those reported at the previous inspection. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning need to be established in order to drive up standards. Closer monitoring of practice is needed to ensure a consistent approach across the department as a whole. More detailed analysis and increased use of data are needed in order to raise standards of achievement. The use of National Curriculum

levels needs to be standardised and procedures tightened to ensure levels assigned in Year 9 teacher assessments are secure.

MATHEMATICS

The overall quality of provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Aspect	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards of work seen	Average	Average
Achievement	Good	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Good	Satisfactory
Leadership	Satisfactory	
Management	Satisfactory	
Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory	

Strengths

- In Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning are good, and pupils achieve well.
- Presentation of work is good.
- Pupil-teacher relationships are good and pupils behave well.
- The department provides well for higher attaining pupils through a range of worthwhile enrichment activities.

Areas for improvement

- Monitoring of teaching and learning is insufficiently developed.
- In some lessons pupils do not achieve as well as they could because they are not challenged sufficiently, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- The range of teaching strategies is limited and there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to discuss and explain their reasoning in Years 10 and 11.
- There is insufficient use of ICT.

Commentary

80. In 2002, results in the national tests in mathematics at the end of Year 9 were average with boys performing significantly better than girls. This was reversed in 2003, when higher attaining girls outperformed boys. Results over the past four years have improved in line with the national trend. Standards seen in Years 7 to 9 are also average, with both girls and boys achieving well, including those with special educational needs. GCSE results in 2002 were broadly average. However, in 2003 significantly fewer pupils achieved a higher grade (A*-C) at GCSE and a significant minority did not receive a graded result. There has been a change of syllabus in response to this, but standards seen, whilst broadly average overall, are not high enough in some groups of higher attaining pupils. The standard of presentation of pupils' work is good in all years, with clear, logical setting out, neat tables of results, and well-labelled, accurate constructions and diagrams.
81. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, and good in Years 7, 8 and 9. Lessons are well planned, building on prior learning and maintain a brisk pace. Teachers ensure good use of time by their effective classroom management. They set and maintain high standards of behaviour and relationships are invariably good. As a result, pupils have positive attitudes to their work and are well motivated. The department has started to implement the national numeracy strategy and most lessons start with a short oral activity; however, these sometimes lack challenge and opportunities for pupils to explain their reasoning are not always taken. Teachers share the objectives of the lessons with their pupils and most lessons conclude with a short plenary session. Both of these strategies are successful in reinforcing pupils' learning. Teachers' expectations of pupil achievement in Years 7 to 9 are

usually high and pupils make good progress. However, in Years 10 and 11 some groups of pupils are underachieving because the work is not challenging or varied enough. The range of teaching strategies employed is too limited with an over-reliance on the textbook scheme. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to discuss and explain their ideas; consequently pupils are often too passive. Over time there is a good balance of number, algebra, geometry and statistics, but there is insufficient use of ICT to enhance pupils' learning. Relevant, worthwhile homeworks are set and marked regularly. The emphasis on presentation skills contributes to pupils' progress.

82. The leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory. Good development planning accurately reflects the department's priorities. Schemes of work are matched well to meet the needs of different groups. Coverage of the syllabus and the use of homework are monitored regularly, but lesson observations do not yet take place. As a result, there is insufficient focus on the consistency of teaching in the department and its impact on pupils' learning. The department uses prior attainment data to set individual pupil targets; pupils understand their targets and are aware of how to improve their national curriculum level or GCSE grade. The department provides well for higher attaining pupils with extension homeworks and participation in the Maths Challenge in Years 7 to 9, and extra classes in Years 10 and 11. However, data is not yet used systematically to inform teaching. The department does not use the analysis of examination and test results to rigorously monitor its own performance and to effect improvement. The use of ICT is currently being written into the schemes of work but has not yet been implemented. There is a shortage of graphic calculators but access to computers is now satisfactory. Since the last inspection, standards overall have improved in line with the national trend. The implementation of the Key Stage 3 strategy is resulting in good achievement in Years 7 to 9. Overall, improvement is satisfactory.

Mathematics across the curriculum

83. Standards of numeracy both in mathematics and throughout the curriculum are average. The school has started to implement a consistent approach to mathematics across the curriculum, but this is still in the early stages. All subjects make a contribution to pupils' mathematics skills, but this is not planned systematically. Good practice occurs in GCSE physical education and art and design; there is insufficient use of mathematics in ICT in Years 7 to 9.

SCIENCE

The overall quality of provision in science is **good**

Aspect	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards of work seen	Average	Average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Improvement since the last inspection	Good	

Strengths

- Results at the end of Years 9 and 11 are improving.
- Teaching and learning are good, leading to good achievement.
- There are good external links, which motivates the pupils.

Areas for improvement

- The number of pupils achieving level 6+ at the end of Year 9 and those achieving A*-C grades at GCSE level could be improved.
- Resources are becoming depleted, which sometimes limits practical work.
- The monitoring of teaching needs to be formalised so that good practice can be shared.

Commentary

84. The national test results at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were average, although the number of pupils achieving the higher levels was below average. The results for boys were better than for girls. These results improved in 2003 and the achievement of girls also improved. The dual award results at GCSE in 2002 were average and improved in 2003. There has been an overall improvement in examination results since the last inspection.
85. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average in all years and the achievement of pupils is good, including those with special educational needs. Pupils in Year 9 are able to describe the reactions of metals with acids, whilst Year 11 pupils are able to discuss the effects of temperature on the rate of chemical reactions. The written work of all pupils is of a good standard, with few exceptions. Pupils are well behaved during lessons. They handle apparatus with care and share ideas and co-operate with each other in a mature and sensible manner. They listen attentively, are keen to answer questions, and remain on task during written and practical work.
86. Teaching is good overall across the school, and pupils learn well because of this. Lessons are well prepared and contain a variety of activities, which maintains the interest of pupils. Number skills are successfully practised in the use of scientific formulae and the drawing of graphs appropriate to the science curriculum. Teachers pay good attention to literacy, and emphasise new terminology. The use of ICT is well covered in the schemes of work but access to computers sometimes limits this. Lessons are well prepared and teachers have sound subject knowledge, enabling them to give clear explanations to pupils to enhance their learning. Well-matched work is always provided for gifted and talented pupils and for those with special educational needs. Homework is set on a regular basis and is used to reinforce work covered in lessons. Pupils' work is carefully marked and annotated with clear guidance on areas for improvement. Assessment and target setting are good and regular testing takes place.
87. The leadership and management of the department are good and staff work well together to improve examination results. The introduction of several recent initiatives, such as GCSE Applied Science and CASE thinking skills in Years 7-9, are intended new strategies to help in this. Accommodation is satisfactory, but there are insufficient laboratories so that some lessons are taught in classrooms. Large group sizes, particularly in Years 10 and 11, mean that laboratory space is cramped which can restrict practical work for pupils. Resources are becoming depleted as money has been spent on setting up the new Applied Science course and there are insufficient textbooks for Years 10 and 11. Monitoring of teaching is currently informal and needs to be formalised to ensure that good practice is identified and shared widely. Very good use is made of external links such as local museums and the University. The excellent displays around the department are informative and enhance learning. The department receives good technical support, although it is insufficient in time allocation.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The overall quality of provision in information and communication technology is **satisfactory**.

Aspect	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards of work seen	Average	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Leadership	Satisfactory	
Management	Satisfactory	
Improvement since the last inspection	Good	

Strengths

- Commitment of staff and extra school support.
- Range of options available to pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Relationships between staff and pupils.

Areas for improvement

- Some pupils in Year 11 are not up to date with their examination coursework.
- Teachers' planning is not always well matched to the time available for teaching.

Commentary

88. Pupils enter the school with different experiences in their use of ICT but their overall standards are below average. The results of Year 9 teacher assessments in 2003 are below average, but are higher than those of the previous year. Current standards observed in the inspection are below average but indicate further improvement as a result of the increased time allocation now given to ICT, and recently strengthened teaching. Overall although pupils in Years 8 and 9 made limited progress prior to 2003 the progress they are now making is satisfactory as is the progress of Year 7 pupils. Achievement in Years 7 to 9, including those with special educational needs, is satisfactory.
89. Results at GCSE in 2002 were well below average. The most recent results in 2003 show a considerable improvement. Standards are improving and in classes seen are average. Achievement overall in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory, but some pupils in Year 11 are not up to date with their assignments in GNVQ and GCSE courses.
90. Teaching and learning are satisfactory across the school. Teachers have good subject knowledge and enjoy good relationships with pupils. They maintain good order and the interest of pupils. Planning is thorough and well sequenced, but does not always take into account the time constraints imposed by the timetable. This limits the effectiveness of the teaching. Lessons also could be more productive if learning outcomes focussed more upon the acquisition of specific skills within applications, for example – copying, sizing, rotating and colouring shapes within 'Paint'. Pupils' previous learning experiences have been restricted to word processing, desktop publishing and power point presentations. There is now evidence of more systematic use of spreadsheets and databases in Years 7 to 9 but use of control technology and multimedia remains limited. In Years 10 and 11 pupils can choose from a number of courses – GCSE, GNVQ, CLAIT, ASDAN – and this growing choice suited to differing abilities is increasing the take-up of ICT.
91. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new management structure is indicative of the school's commitment to improving the provision of ICT. The recently appointed head of faculty has a clear vision for improvement, incorporating more effective planning and

assessment, and including the evaluation and monitoring of pupil work and staff performance. The department is well served by technical support staff.

92. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. More time has been allocated to ICT in Years 7 to 9; more options have been introduced in Years 10 and 11; there have been improvements in managerial structure and staffing, and resources have improved. These changes are having a positive impact on pupils' standards and achievement.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

93. There has been satisfactory progress in the use of ICT across subjects since the last inspection. Teachers have successfully completed their New Opportunities Fund training and this, together with improving resources, is beginning to have an impact on teaching and learning using ICT. Good work using ICT is evident in composition in music and in desktop publishing projects in religious education and English. The use of ICT is less developed in mathematics, geography and art. In design and technology progress is limited by the lack of any CAD/CAM and control technology in general. Use of multi-media across subjects is limited to the use of digital cameras. The monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress in Years 10 and 11 has not been recorded well in previous years. Following recent staffing improvements in ICT, this is now being tackled as a management priority.

HUMANITIES

Geography

The overall quality of provision in geography is **good**.

Aspect	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards of work seen	Average	Average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Improvement since the last inspection	Good	

Strengths

- Lessons are planned well to promote pupils' learning.
- Learning resources and teaching methods are carefully matched to pupils' needs.
- The guidance and support for non-specialist teachers is very good.

Areas for improvement

- There are not enough opportunities for fieldwork in Years 7-9.
- Increasing the depth of study and linking some of the topics in Years 7-9.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils in Years 7-9 to use ICT.

Commentary

94. In 2002 the GCSE results were above average. The proportion of candidates gaining the highest A* and A grades was almost double the national figure. The most recent results are similar to those of the previous year, though fewer obtained the highest grades, and there was no significant difference between the performance of girls and boys.

95. At present, standards in Years 10 and 11 are not as high as previous examination results would suggest, and are average overall. This is because the head of department is absent and a teacher who has no previous experience of GCSE work, has been taking four examination classes.
96. Over time, good teaching throughout the school promotes good learning and pupils achieve well. Specialist teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject which includes an understanding of what pupils' need to do to achieve well in examinations. Lessons are very well planned to sequence learning. These qualities enabled pupils to make rapid progress in a Year 11 lesson on learning how to present and interpret data on residential environments. Learning resources and teaching methods are carefully matched to pupils needs and ensure the good progress of all groups of pupils. In Year 10, for example, higher attainers, including gifted and talented pupils, reach well above average standards in challenging work relating flood hydrographs to different drainage basins. In Year 11 lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs use more simple work sheets, diagrams and short structured writing tasks to help their descriptions of coastal features. However, they do not explain the formation of these features and the standard of their work is below average. Nevertheless, these standards represent good achievement in relation to their attainment at the start of the course.
97. In Year 9, higher and middle attaining pupils reach average standards in work comparing north and south Italy. However, they do not increase their understanding in real depth by linking population growth, structure and movement to stages of economic development. In effective group work, lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs made good progress understanding about industrial location in a well paced lesson using a structured worksheet and homework to reinforce their learning. A very imaginatively created model of a river basin and good use of literacy enabled Year 8 pupils to learn and identify the major features of a river valley effectively.
98. From Year 7 computers are now used well for research and presentation. Their use to handle and present data is less developed. There are too few opportunities for pupils to collect, present and analyse data in Years 7-9 and these skills are not well developed.
99. Leadership and management ensure good teaching and learning, especially in Years 7 and 8 where three non-specialists teach almost half of the classes. Since the previous inspection the quality of teaching and learning has improved and, as a result, all groups of pupils achieve well. There is, however, scope to further improve teaching through classroom observation focused particularly on how pupils learn most effectively.

History

The overall quality of provision in history is **good**.

Aspect	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards of work seen	Average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Improvement since the last inspection	Good	

Strengths

- GCSE results are above average.
- Pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11 because of very good teaching.

- Teachers plan lessons very well, and include a wide range of strategies to promote good learning.
- Pupils' behaviour is managed very effectively.

Areas for improvement

- Lower attaining pupils find some of the work too challenging.
- Systems for analysing pupils' performance, and for checking on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning are not being used well enough.

Commentary

100. Results in the GCSE examinations are above average and have been so for the last 3 years. Boys performed better than girls, and their results are well above the national average.
101. Pupils join the school with below average standards in Year 7. By the end of Year 9 they have caught up with national average standards. They show knowledge and understanding of major historical events and personalities and many are enthusiastic about their work. Pupils appreciate that history is based on evidence and all, including those with special educational needs, can extract information from a variety of written and pictorial sources and evaluate them. By the end of Year 11 they have a good understanding of modern history, and have further developed skills in analysis. They can discuss their work confidently and undertake focused, independent research.
102. Lessons are taught by subject experts with great enthusiasm so that the pupils are interested and involved. Lessons are very well-planned and use many different strategies to provide pace, variety and a wide range of activities. Pupils work independently, in pairs or larger groups and use many different sources to develop their research skills. A good range of textbooks is available for them, though more could be done in using the internet for research. Teachers place great emphasis on the development of literacy by encouraging pupils to read, write and speak well. Good provision is made for gifted and talented pupils by ensuring well matched work that fully challenges their capabilities. The teachers manage their classes effectively and the pupils respond well to their humour, firm but fair discipline, and support. Homework is set regularly and marked positively and quickly. Learning extends beyond the classroom in a series of visits to historical sites such as Roman Chester and Quarry Bank Mill at Styal.
103. The department is well managed. The teachers are hard-working and committed and they work well together as a team. Schemes of work have recently been re-written and are appropriate. Their plans for development are ambitious. Monitoring of teaching, however, is under-developed and they need to use the data they have on pupils' progress more effectively to raise standards further. There has been good progress since the time of the last inspection.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

The overall quality of provision in design and technology is **satisfactory**.

Aspect	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards of work seen	Average	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Leadership	Satisfactory	
Management	Satisfactory	

Improvement since the last inspection	Satisfactory
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Strengths

- Revised schemes of work in Years 7 to 9.
- Good procedures for assessment and its use in Years 7 to 9.
- High standards of display promotes good learning and expectations.

Areas for improvement.

- Monitor teaching and learning for consistency of practice.
- There is insufficient use of ICT, including CAD/CAM, in pupils' experience.
- Use examination board criteria in assessing work in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

104. The 2002 GCSE results were close to but below average overall. Boys' results were at the national average with girls' results below average. Results in all courses showed improvement in 2003: GCSE examinations results were above average in graphics and food technology; they were average in resistant materials and electronics.
105. Current standards in Year 9 are average overall and broadly in-line with recent teacher assessments. From mainly lower than average attainment on entry all pupils, including those with special educational needs, make at least satisfactory progress from Year 7 to 9. Achievement overall is satisfactory, with strengths in practical work. Girls usually produce better work than boys particularly in their design folders. In Year 7 very neat work is seen in the images project as a result of pupils' good research into different styles of lettering; in Year 8 pupils made good use of the internet in developing a colourful pinball game based on the Simpsons; in Year 9 pupils use a good range of materials in their clock project. Good evaluations are also seen in the best work. Where the work is not as good, there is poor use of colour, untidy use of felt tip pens, poor handwriting in biro, and drawings are incomplete.
106. Current standards of work in Year 11 are average overall. There is good work in all areas. Pupils researched well different shapes for a table top based on a surf board design and produced good freehand and perspective drawing; their investigations and modelling of ideas were good in a pop-up card project in graphics; their analysis of products was good in an electronics project looking at car barrier security systems. Where the work is weaker it is due to lack of research and development of ideas, an over use of commercial material and, for some pupils, incomplete and poorly presented work. However, a good feature of the work in Year 10 resistant materials is the link with a local primary school for a project pupils are undertaking on children's educational toys.
107. Literacy skills are well supported in lessons with good use of technical vocabulary and key words for the subject displayed in all rooms and in pupils' workbooks. Numeracy skills are satisfactory but ICT is underused in pupils' work. Control technology is not developed sufficiently and CAD/CAM resources need improvement.
108. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall with some good teaching seen. In the better lessons learning is increased and good progress made because teachers plan well, use good subject knowledge to develop or expand ideas, use a range of activities to keep pupils motivated, and have good pupil management skills. Pupils' attitudes are generally good, and they respond well when suitably challenged, as in a successful lesson where pupils designed and made a child's educational toy. This work showed creative and imaginative ideas. Satisfactory lessons have many positive features but can lack pace, have lengthy introductions or lack sufficient challenge to extend all pupils.
109. The recently appointed acting head of faculty has begun to provide a positive and effective direction for the subject and is managing the current situation well, although temporary staffing issues have yet to be resolved. Schemes of work have been revised with good

assessment and recording procedures in Years 7 to 9. Most issues from the last inspection have been tackled. Procedures for monitoring teaching and learning require a sharper focus for consistency of practice, and assessment in Years 10 and 11 needs to be linked more closely to examination board criteria. The department development plan has appropriate priorities for short and long term issues. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory, but ICT is still underused as at the last inspection. Although accommodation is good overall, the food technology room requires urgent refurbishment.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

The overall quality of provision in art and design is **good**.

Aspect	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards of work seen	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Improvement since the last inspection	Good	

Strengths

- Innovative leadership promotes high profile community projects that are helping to raise standards.
- A wide variety of teaching strategies ensures all pupils make good progress.
- Well-structured teaching and thoughtful use of resources enable all pupils to make good progress.

Areas for improvement

- Monitoring of teaching and learning lacks sufficient formality to help raise standards further.

Commentary

110. GCSE results in 2002 were very high. Those for 2003 dipped slightly but were still higher than average.
111. Standards in the current Year 9 are above average. This represents good achievement for the pupils in relation to when they started at the school in Year 7. Pupils in Year 9 use observation drawing effectively. This was seen in a project based on insects, where they constructed the drawing of the insect using a line of symmetry before adding layers of colour with coloured pencil. Pupils regularly visit art galleries and work with practising artists. Pupils from both Years 9 and 10 visited The Gallery of Costume in Platt Fields. They made analytical notes and drawings of a variety of historical costumes and textiles from the Indian sub-continent. At school pupils were stimulated by a visiting artist to experiment with metalwork on the same theme. The gallery research inspired all pupils to make armour and corset-like structures using materials including cane, wire, rubber and textiles. The outcomes were of such high standard that they won the age-group category for Working with Galleries in the national ARTWORKS competition.
112. Standards in the current Year 11 are above average. This represents good achievement compared with their prior attainment. Pupils on the College Link course show the ability to develop individual ideas on a set theme. They have wide experience of techniques of printmaking at the local college. They support this printmaking at school with drawings.

Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in all aspects of the subject throughout the whole school.

113. The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the school. All pupils make good progress because a variety of teaching strategies are used that capture their interest well. Introductions that include demonstrations and that use thoughtful resources lead pupils to know exactly what is required in the lesson and how they can get started promptly. Teachers intervene in lessons to direct the pupils' learning and to move them adroitly to the next step. Attitudes of pupils are positive when trusting and caring relationships are built by the teacher. When insufficient direction is given some pupils can drift off task and their progress is too slow as a result.
114. The leadership of art is good. Innovative projects give the department a high positive profile. This was evident when pupils with special educational needs, gifted and talented pupils and some disaffected pupils worked together on an extra-curricular project. They were led to make a large scale piece of work based on the Towers building in Didsbury. The project made such a big impression on the independent assessor that it was taken to London and displayed at the national headquarters of the DfES. Management of the department is good. The collegiate approach to decision-making and the value placed upon each individual's contribution generates good team spirit. However, the monitoring of teaching and learning has insufficient formality to help in raising standards further, by consistently sharing the very effective and successful practice in the department.

Music

The overall quality of provision in music is **good**.

Aspect	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards of work seen	Average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Improvement since the last inspection	Good	

Strengths

- Good teaching, leadership and management.
- The use of computers, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- Extra-curricular provision is good, and is helping to raise standards.

Areas for improvement

- Listening skills and pupils' literacy development.
- The analysis of GCSE results and use of assessment particularly in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

115. In general GCSE music results have been well above average in recent years. In 2002 there was an uncharacteristic dip caused by the absence of two candidates. Other candidates performed as well as usual and results in 2003 continued the previous trend. The number of pupils taking the music option in Years 10 and 11 is fairly small in relation to the size of the school. There are no significant differences in attainment between boys and girls.
116. Standards at the end of Year 9 are average, and pupils' achievement is good in relation to their below average attainment on entry. At the end of Year 9 all pupils are able to use

computers for music. Keyboards are used with competence for performance and for composition. Listening and appraising skills are below average and variable; pupils develop some suitable musical vocabulary with which to describe and appraise the music they hear but this area of musical literacy requires continued focus.

117. By the end of Year 11 pupils are fluent in the use of music technology and often reach above average standards in composition and performance. Compositions display strong use of timbre and basic use of developmental techniques. Pupils' literacy is less good and this tends to have a negative effect on attainment in those areas requiring written rather than practical skills. Whilst pupils did well overall, GCSE results in 2003 clearly demonstrate lower attainment in listening skills than in other components.
118. Teaching is good. In Years 7 to 9 pupils, including those with special educational needs, benefit from knowledgeable and committed teachers. Care is taken to relate tasks to previous learning; lessons often have a range of tasks and energetic pace. This helps to consolidate pupils' learning and maintain interest. Teaching embodies strong preparation, a range of teaching styles, interesting work, and very good organisation. Teaching in Years 10 to 11 is good. Teachers successfully build on pupils' previous attainment. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on composition, pupils' performance was closely linked to the development of their computer skills. Good teaching and good planning ensure that pupils make good progress across Years 10 to 11. Teachers ensure that at all stages pupils have opportunities to develop most necessary musical skills. Computer work is a strength.
119. There is a satisfactory provision of instrumental teaching. The number of pupils taking lessons in school is a little below average in relation to the size of the school. About 70 pupils have instrumental lessons each week. The visiting instrumental teachers make a strong contribution to the curriculum and their work is managed and generally integrated into the work of the department. Pupils have some opportunities to take instrumental grade examinations and this has a good effect on pupils' progress.
120. Leadership and management in the music department are good. Administration within music has a developing organisation with many processes firmly in place. Some aspects, for example, the detailed analysis of GCSE results, require further development. The department has made a good start in its promotion of literacy and in providing work for pupils of different abilities, but as yet these have been insufficient to produce a significant impact on pupils' attainment. The long-term monitoring, assessing and recording of pupils' work are good although the department does not as yet record their successes in grade examinations. Teachers analyse attainment across the range of skills taught in music lessons and have begun to consider this information to extend the work offered to pupils. Teachers are committed to high standards. Improvement since the last inspection has been good with all the main issues tackled effectively. The introduction of the intermediate GNVQ performing arts course is a very positive initiative.
121. There is a variety of extra-curricular activity in music. Committed pupils are involved across a range of music making. The performing and composing work of pupils is appropriately celebrated in musical events. The arts faculty is also embarking on a large-scale musical production. Such opportunities have a strong impact on the cultural and social development of pupils; they also contribute to the prevailing ethos of the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

The overall quality of provision in physical education is **good**.

Aspect	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards of work seen	Average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Improvement since the last inspection	Good	

Strengths

- Results at GCSE are consistently high.
- Pupils achieve well and have very positive attitudes as a result of good teaching.
- A very good programme of extra-curricular activities supports good achievement.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' personal development.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment is not being used fully enough to support teaching and learning.
- The quality of teaching is not checked upon regularly nor are there systematic opportunities to share the best practice across the department.
- Of those pupils opting to take physical education in Years 10 and 11, not enough are entered for a full course GCSE.

Commentary

122. Pupils enter the school with below average standards. By Year 9 pupils have secure skills in netball, soccer and badminton and apply them well in games. Pupils evaluate work well and this helps them to improve. Pupils understand how to prepare for exercise and they use technical terms well.
123. By Year 11 pupils are confident officials and coaches, and they reach average standards in games and above average standards in trampolining. Pupils demonstrate good leadership skills in the Junior Sports Leader Award course. They reach well above average standards in the short and full GCSE courses and the Welsh Certificate course. Despite the wide choice of accreditation, not enough pupils are entered for the full GCSE course. A very good programme of extra-curricular activities provides well over half of pupils with opportunities to develop their interest in sport. This leads to a good level of success in local competitions for football, rounders, cricket and netball teams.
124. There is no significant difference between the achievement of girls and boys. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because teachers adapt equipment and tasks, modify language and give additional support appropriately. Gifted and talented pupils make good progress because teachers give additional challenge in lessons and through extra-curricular activities.
125. Across the school, lessons are well structured, purposeful and have clear aims that pupils understand. Good emphasis on teaching technical language through good questioning develops pupils' confidence in their ability to evaluate. Clear demonstrations, plenty of opportunity to practice, useful feedback from the teacher and sometimes a chance to review their performance through the use of video all help pupils to improve. Teachers' high

expectations of pupils' behaviour and very good relationships result in well behaved pupils who enjoy lessons and want to do well. Good pace and variety of activities maintains pupils' interest and good opportunities to take responsibility for learning raises self esteem and confidence. For example, in a lesson on sports leadership, Year 10 pupils confidently led parts of the lesson and were responsive to suggestions for improvement from the teacher and their peers. Regular homework and very good support for coursework are important factors in pupils' good achievements in examination work. Occasionally, opportunities are missed to pose problems and encourage pupils to talk to each other about their work. Some evaluation is not structured well enough so pupils struggle to give clear feedback to each other. Where teaching was less effective there was a lack of pace and variety and so pupils became distracted and lost concentration.

126. Good leadership provides clear direction with a strong focus on raising standards. There is an effective team of staff with a good balance of experience. Links with primary schools are very good and helping to raise standards. Checks on the quality of teaching and learning are not yet systematic enough. Assessment is not yet tracking pupils' progress in all strands of the National Curriculum and it is not yet an integral part of teaching and learning. However, progress since the previous inspection is good, with all issues tackled successfully.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Vocational education

The overall quality of provision in vocational education is **good**.

Strengths

- The variety of this provision is very good and carefully matched to pupils' needs.
- The quality of care and guidance for pupils is very good.
- Pupils' response to the courses provided is good.
- Leadership and management are good.

Areas for improvement

- Ensure that the provision of college courses creates opportunities for basic qualifications that lead to progression when the pupils leave school.
- Ensure that arrangements for evaluating the results of the new courses, and the effectiveness of the provision, are in place.

Commentary

127. These subjects considerably enhance the breadth and range of the curricular provision. There are six types of provision. The guidance for pupils and their parents regarding these options is very good.
128. Successful candidates taking a GNVQ full intermediate course in ICT will gain the equivalent of 4 GCSE grades. Pupils will be entered for the first time in 2004. In the lessons seen, pupils were achieving satisfactorily in response to competent teaching, and standards are average.
129. A GNVQ full intermediate course in performing arts was introduced into Year 10 recently. Successful candidates will gain the equivalent of 4 GCSE grades in 2005. Pupils are able to complete the course through music and drama options and there has been an encouraging take-up. In the lessons seen pupils worked with enthusiasm at acquiring basic skills and standards are average at this stage of the course. Teaching, learning and achievement are satisfactory.

130. Pupils will be entered for the new applied GCSE in leisure and tourism next year. This course allows pupils to gain the equivalent of two GCSEs. It is taught by two of the humanities staff who have no experience of teaching the business elements of the course. Nevertheless, in the lesson observed good teaching enabled the pupils to make good progress using ICT to learn about the differences between products and services with reference to Alton Towers. Although standards are below average they represent good achievement in relation to pupils' attainment at the start of the course.
131. On the 'link' course pupils spend a full day each week at a number of local colleges. They follow a number of useful occupational taster courses in catering, joinery, fitness and car maintenance that do not lead to qualifications. Despite the best planning of the school staff these courses tend to change at short notice because of staffing problems in the colleges. However, pupils spoke highly of their college experience in terms of their personal development. Other courses in printmaking, ceramics and textiles link very well with their school based GCSE art course. Two of these lessons were seen. Both were good and pupils achieved well, with standards that were above average.
132. The land-based course, newly introduced in Year 10 this year, involves a college link for a morning each week. In school this group of lower attainers, including pupils with special educational needs, have a number of lessons together where they take, woodwork, ICT and a Youth Awards course. This is a valuable course enhancing pupils' basic skills and providing them with opportunities to experience success and gain recognition for their work. In the lesson seen pupils were using local newspapers to identify the good and weaker features of local communities. Pupils' attitudes to learning were good and they were achieving satisfactorily in response to satisfactory teaching.
133. The provision of extended work-related learning for pupils who are disaffected with conventional educational programmes and at risk in the community is very good. These pupils receive exceptional care and guidance and learning mentors regularly check their attendance and progress. The success of this provision, arranged with other agencies coordinated through the Ambrose Barlow Centre, is a strength of the school.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

The overall quality of provision in citizenship is **good**.

Aspect	Years 7-9	Years 10-11
Standards of work seen	Average	Average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Improvement since the last inspection	N/A	

Strengths

- The quality of leadership is good and provides clear vision.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Very good relationships between teachers and pupils encourage a positive attitude.
- The caring ethos of the school is conducive to the teaching of citizenship.

Areas for improvement

- More written work needs to be set and assessed.

Commentary

134. The standard of work seen in citizenship is average overall. By the end of Year 9 pupils have discussed the importance of relationships in building society and looked at a series of rights and responsibilities. During the inspection there were some pointed, lively debates on crime and punishment. By the end of Year 11 pupils have looked at, and understood, ways of resolving conflict and the rules required in order to maintain an ordered society.
135. The quality of teaching is good, both in special citizenship and personal and social education lessons, and also where citizenship is taught in other areas of the curriculum. Pupils' understanding of political issues, the environment, scientific matters and moral issues is developed well through the work they do in many subjects, including history, geography, science and religious education. Different teaching strategies such as role-play and group discussions are effectively managed by experienced teachers. Moral and political issues are sensitively taught, and enable a variety of opinions to be aired and analysed. Outside speakers enrich the curriculum with talks and visits. A variety of well-chosen textbooks is used to promote discussion and capture the interest of pupils, but more opportunity is needed for them to develop written work in each of the topics covered across the school. Many opportunities exist for all pupils, including those with special educational needs, to experience citizenship in action by fundraising and participating in a wealth of local activities within the local community and the city of Manchester. For example, pupils represent the school on the Manchester City Council Youth Group.
136. A very good start has been made on this new course by the citizenship co-ordinator. The course has been well-prepared and resourced and there are exciting plans for future development. There has been good co-operation and liaison from other subject areas and all staff are involved in the delivery of the curriculum. The subject is fully supported by senior staff who monitor all aspects of citizenship, including teaching and learning, well. The work done on citizenship is reported to parents but, as yet, there are few opportunities for more formal assessment.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3
Value for money provided by the school	4
Overall standards achieved	4
Pupils' achievement	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	3
Attendance	4
Attitudes	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	4
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	3
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	3
The quality of the school's links with the community	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2
The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	3
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	4

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).