

INSPECTION REPORT

FIRWOOD SCHOOL

Bolton

LEA area: Bolton

Unique reference number: 105278

Headteacher: Jonathan Steele

Lead inspector: Mike Kell

Dates of inspection: 8th – 11th December 2003

Inspection number: 258898

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

© Crown copyright 2004

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special (severe learning difficulties)
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 – 19 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	83
School address:	Crompton Way Bolton
Postcode:	BL2 3AF
Telephone number:	01204 333044
Fax number:	01204 333045
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mavis Abel
Date of previous inspection:	26 th – 29 th January 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Firwood is significantly bigger than average for a school of this type, catering for 85 pupils. There are currently 24 students in the post-16 provision and 59 pupils in the main part of the school. The vast majority of pupils have severe learning difficulties but the school has on its roll a significant proportion of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. In addition, a very small number (nine pupils) have autism and a significant number demonstrate challenging behaviour. Therefore, pupils' levels of attainment on entry to the school are significantly below national expectations. There are slightly more boys than girls on roll and all pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Needs or are undergoing statutory assessment. The school is part of an Education Action Zone (EAZ) and has a wide socio-economic mix in keeping with its intake from throughout the local education authority. The majority of pupils have a White British background, although approximately 25 per cent have an Asian background. Sixteen pupils are learning English as an additional language, although this is not their primary barrier to learning. The most common languages spoken by these pupils are Gujarati, Urdu, and Panjabi. A few pupils attend some classes at a local mainstream school and college in order to extend their learning and to encourage their personal development. The school does not provide a base for any regular outreach service to local mainstream schools to support teachers in their work with pupils who have significant special needs. This reflects the local education authority's policy of having centrally based support teams.

The school has achieved the Investors in People and the Sportsmark awards.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
13101	Mike Kell	Lead inspector	Religious education Personal, social and health education and citizenship Music
14066	Gill Hoggard	Lay inspector	
16198	Carol Etherington	Team inspector	English History Design and technology
10678	Margaret Paull	Team inspector	Science Art and design Geography Physical education Special educational needs
19386	Trevor Watts	Team inspector	Mathematics Information and communication technology French English as an additional language

The inspection contractor was:

Penta International
Upperton House
The Avenue
Eastbourne
BN21 3YB

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be made initially to the inspection contractor. The procedures are set out in the leaflet '*Complaining about Ofsted Inspections*', which is available from Ofsted Publications Centre (telephone 07002 637833) or Ofsted's website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	8
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	11
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	17
OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURE	19
The provision for and standards achieved by pupils with English as an additional language	
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS	20
SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 - 4 AND POST-16	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	33

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Firwood is a **good** school with some very good and excellent features. It is very well led and managed. High quality teaching promotes pupils' learning well and they achieve well. The very good school ethos is supported by excellent links with parents and so pupils make very good gains in all aspects of their personal development. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Good quality teaching ensures pupils achieve well overall, but the very few higher attaining pupils are not always challenged sufficiently well in all subjects.
- Very good personal development, behaviour and attitudes are promoted.
- Very good quality leadership and management are provided by the headteacher.
- The excellent partnership with parents makes a significant contribution to pupils' learning.
- Teachers use a whole school assessment system consistently, effectively and constructively.
- A good variety of approaches is used to promote pupils' communication skills but pupils do not have routine access to their augmentative communication aids throughout the day.
- Very good links with the community and good links with local schools and colleges enhance pupils' learning.
- Aspects of the accommodation remain unsatisfactory and restrict pupils' learning.

The school has made very good improvement since the previous inspection. This is due mainly to the significant improvements in the qualities of leadership and management. Pupils' achievements have improved and there is now better provision for promoting and monitoring all aspects of their personal development. All the key issues identified at that time have been addressed very effectively and fully except that relating to accommodation, in particular the lack of hydrotherapy facilities. The school has made every effort to address this issue but it cannot do so without significant support from the local education authority.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement at the end of:	In relation to individual targets in:	
	Subjects of the curriculum	Personal and social education
Year 9	Good	Very good
Year 11	Good	Very good
Year 13	Good	Very good

Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent, very good, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory, poor, very poor.

Overall, in relation to their prior levels of attainment and capability, **pupils achieve well** at all ages and make good progress. Boys and girls make similarly good progress and pupils with English as an additional language, and those with the most complex needs, achieve equally well.

Pupils' good or better progress is due to the overall good quality teaching and adult support that is available across the school. These standards represent significant improvements on the previous inspection when pupils' achievements were judged to be mainly satisfactory. They were unsatisfactory in information and communication technology (ICT), geography and history but were good or better in science, French and physical education. Skilled teachers ensure that pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are well promoted in all subjects. The regular, routine, and consistent use of varied communication systems are a significant factor in the standards that pupils achieve. The promotion of pupils' personal development is evident in the school's ethos and all the work that it does. Pupils' personal targets are recorded in clear and well written individual education plans (IEPs) and pupils make very good progress in achieving these.

Pupils' attitudes to school and behaviour are very good because of extremely positive relationships throughout the school. They make very good progress in their personal development because provision for their **spiritual, moral, social and cultural development** is **very good**. Attendance is good, although punctuality is sometimes affected by delays in transport arriving at school on time.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a good quality education for its pupils. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good with very good, and sometimes excellent, features. Lessons have many strengths. Teachers manage their pupils very well and this is based on the quality of relationships and encouragement that feature in all lessons. Very high expectations of behaviour and interesting activities that are appropriate to pupils' age ensure that the needs of different groups of pupils are generally met. The highest attaining pupils are not challenged consistently in all subjects but the school is aware of this and is beginning to address it through the school improvement plan. Adults support pupils' communication skills well through the use of augmentative communication systems such as signing, symbols, the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and ICT. However, pupils do not have access to these ICT aids throughout the day and this restricts their ability to express choice.

The school provides a good range of worthwhile curricular opportunities. Opportunities for enrichment of the curriculum through extra curricular provision are very good. A good match of teachers to the curriculum, the use of specialist teaching in some subjects, and the training provided for education and care officers combine to provide very effective support for pupils' learning and curriculum needs. The individual needs of some pupils are well met through inclusion links with a local mainstream secondary school. Resources are good and well used but unsatisfactory aspects of the accommodation limit what can be taught and how it is taught in some subjects.

The provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety is very good. Good support, advice and guidance are offered to pupils. The school involves pupils very well and takes very good account of their views.

Links with parents are excellent. They receive excellent information about their children's progress. There are very good links with the community and good links with other schools and colleges. The school does not provide any routine outreach support to teachers and pupils in mainstream schools but this reflects the local education authority's policy of having centrally based support teams.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is **very well led and managed** by the headteacher, with good support from senior staff. The headteacher's vision is very well focused on improving pupils' achievement and very good management systems provide the school with significant information about its own performance. Governance is good and the governing body ensures that all statutory requirements are met.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents hold the school in very high regard and are very positive about the education and care provided for their children. Pupils are very positive and feel fully involved.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that the highest attaining pupils are challenged at all times in all subjects. In particular, information about pupils' literacy skills should be communicated to all their teachers.
- Provide pupils with the most complex needs with augmentative communication aids throughout the day.

- Address deficiencies in the accommodation that reduce learning opportunities.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Overall, in relation to their prior levels of attainment and capability, pupils and students achieve well and make good progress. Boys and girls make similarly good progress and pupils with English as an additional language, and those with the most complex needs, achieve equally well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There have been good and, in the case of some subjects very good, improvements since the last inspection. As a result, pupils and students achieve well overall but occasionally the standards achieved by the very few higher attaining ones are limited by insufficient challenge.
- Recently introduced accredited courses motivate pupils in Years 10 and 11 and provide appropriate degrees of challenge but it is not yet possible to evaluate pupils' success.
- Pupils and students in all years achieve very well in their personal development.
- Pupils' and students' language development and communication skills are promoted well through adults' skilled use of a different range of approaches.
- Teachers are effective in promoting the skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT in all subjects.
- Pupils' and students' learning is extended well through the use of community facilities and mainstream schools and colleges.
- The communication skills of pupils with the most complex needs are enhanced through the use of new technology but there are limited opportunities for pupils to use this equipment regularly throughout the day.

Commentary

1. Pupils achieve very well in history and personal, social and health education (PSHE) and they make good progress in English, mathematics, science, art and design, geography, music, physical education and religious education. Achievements are satisfactory in ICT and design and technology. There was insufficient evidence to judge achievement in French. These standards represent significant improvements on the findings from the previous inspection when achievements were judged as no better than satisfactory, or worse, in all subjects except science, French and physical education. The improvements in history, geography and ICT have been particularly impressive. Consequently, pupils and students achieve well overall but occasionally the very few higher attaining ones, who are working at low levels of the National Curriculum, are not sufficiently challenged. Frequently, this is associated with teachers not having detailed information about pupils' literacy skills because, as yet, there is no routine mechanism for sharing this information on pupils' progress and achievements in English with all of their subject teachers. The school is aware of the need to maintain challenge at all times for its higher attaining pupils and is beginning to address this through the school improvement plan.

2. The school has only recently introduced accredited courses for pupils at the end of Year 11, although courses where they can gain awards for their work have been available for post-16 students for some time. The Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) is available at Transition Challenge level in Years 10 and 11 and at Towards Independence level for post-16 students. Pupils can also receive accreditation in the key skills of English, mathematics, ICT and work related education as well as the Accreditation for Life and Living (ALL) award. These courses motivate pupils and students and provide appropriate degrees of challenge. Post-16 students achieve well but it is not yet possible to evaluate the success of pupils in Years 10 and 11.

3. Pupils' achievements are further enhanced when they go out into the community. Local schools, resources and facilities are used effectively to extend and enrich learning and to meet the learning and social needs of individuals through the school's effective inclusion programme with a local mainstream secondary school.

4. The promotion of pupils' personal development is a key feature of the school's aims. This is evident in its ethos and all the work that it does. Pupils' personal targets are recorded in clear and well written individual education plans (IEPs) and pupils make very good progress in achieving these. Registration periods at the beginning of the day are effective sessions in helping to promote personal development. Circle time is used very well with younger pupils to encourage and develop their communication skills and confidence and teachers and education and care officers encourage pupils very well to participate. A number of older pupils have the maturity, self-esteem and confidence to engage in discussions at these times. For example, a class of post-16 students were able to participate in a discussion about their forthcoming visit to a local supermarket. The school's very good provision for PSHE provides more formal, planned opportunities to promote all aspects of personal development. The school uses these opportunities very well.

5. The regular, routine, and consistent use of varied communication systems are a significant factor in the standards that pupils achieve. Speech, signing, symbols and PECS provide a good range of ways of helping pupils with autism communicate effectively and help them to be involved better in what they are learning. The school's decision to teach pupils with autism in two separate classes has proved successful as specialist teachers meet the needs of these pupils well. Pupils and students with the most complex and profound learning difficulties are supported by a range of specialist access devices to new technology that supports their learning well. These include single switches and communication boards which provide pupils with the opportunity to participate in activities as they are enabled to express choices and demonstrate understanding. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to use this equipment through the whole day, and in all situations, to enable them to have more control over what happens to them and to support their learning.

6. Skilled teachers ensure that pupils' literacy skills are well promoted in all subjects. Key words are used regularly and pupils learn the vocabulary associated with the subject. Higher attaining pupils research information through books and the Internet in a range of subjects. The basic skills of numeracy are well taught in other subjects of the curriculum. Pupils create several different kinds of graphs on the computers; they measure and cut different shapes in art lessons when making Christmas decorations; they make dough in the shape of numbers in science; and count and sequence activities in physical education. Teachers plan opportunities for pupils to develop and rehearse ICT skills in different subjects of the curriculum, such as improving the presentation of their work, typing words and short sentences, and creating graphs about surveys they have conducted.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

7. Attendance is good, although punctuality is unsatisfactory as school transport frequently arrives late. Pupils' attitudes to school and their behaviour are very good because of extremely positive relationships throughout the school. They make very good progress in their personal development because provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils enjoy coming to school and have very good attitudes to their work and all activities.
- Pupils and students behave very well in lessons, around the school and when attending lunch time and after school clubs.
- Relationships are very strong throughout the whole school community.
- The very positive ethos supports pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well.

Commentary

8. Attendance is good for a school of this type. However, on frequent occasions a number of pupils arrive late in the morning because of difficulties with transport. This affects the beginning of the school day as pupils join their classes late, causing interruptions, when staff are trying to settle down everyone for the start of the day.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7%	School data	0%
National data	9.1%	National data	0.6%

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

9. Relationships are very good between pupils and with staff. Everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Even when pupils and students with particularly challenging behaviour become difficult to manage, adults' response is one of patience but firmness. As a result, pupils still feel valued when a situation such as this calms down. Consequently, pupils have very positive attitudes to school and to learning. The high quality interactions between pupils and staff mean that they are well motivated to learn and respond enthusiastically and with enjoyment. For example, a class of Year 8 pupils participated wholeheartedly in a drama lesson using *Little Red Riding Hood* as the basis but they considered an alternative ending. Everyone dressed up in a suitable costume and a range of excellent props helped them to visualise the story clearly. All pupils joined in willingly and derived great pleasure from this activity.

10. Behaviour in and around school is very good. Pupils understand the rules and abide by them so that only one pupil has been excluded in the past year. Playtimes are lively but happy occasions and pupils co-operate well, for example in moving around the building, having lunch or putting on coats. They are polite and respectful to visitors and behave well when in the community, such as during physical education lessons at the local leisure centre and in lessons with mainstream pupils at the local secondary school.

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	59	0	0
Mixed - White and Asian	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	10	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	8	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	1	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	1	0
Chinese	1	0	0

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

11. Personal development is very good and a strength of the school. It is very successful in promoting the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and students. Spiritual

development has improved greatly since the last inspection. A whole-school assembly was a joyous occasion characterised by enthusiastic and tuneful singing and pupils waving ribbons and banners in time to the music. Individual pupils read a prayer at lunchtimes and assemblies and there is extensive use of circle time at the beginning of the day. These sessions provide opportunities for all pupils, including those with autism and more profound difficulties, to think and reflect about their day. Subjects such as religious education makes significant contributions to developing moments of spirituality in discussions of religious beliefs, and music is used particularly well in many subjects to develop appropriate moods and emotions leading to opportunities for quiet reflection and thought. Moral values are developed very well and pupils understand the code of conduct and teachers' expectations. They learn to understand and accept that others have different needs to their own, to take control of their behaviour and understand that their actions might have an impact on how others feel.

12. Social development is especially strong. Teachers promote many opportunities for pupils to work in pairs and small groups and social awareness is supported very well through visits into the community and a range of outside visitors to the school. Their social development is promoted well through their experiences of mixing with their peers in mainstream schools and further education colleges. In addition, pupils develop good levels of independent responsibility, through activities such as independent research and walking to and from the transport on their own. Pupils gain a very good knowledge of their own and others' cultures through subjects such as English, art and music. The library contains a very good range of books representing many different faiths and cultures. Highly effective wall displays and occasional open evenings, when different food is prepared by parents and brought in to share, help to extend this learning. As a result, pupils and students grow up into confident, mature young adults with a good understanding of the world.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Teaching and learning

13. Teaching is good overall with a number of very good features. Therefore, pupils and students learn well and make good progress in developing new skills, knowledge and understanding. Lessons also make a very good contribution to pupils' personal development. Thorough and constructive assessment procedures are applied consistently throughout the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers manage pupils extremely well and involve all pupils and students in activities.
- Very high quality relationships and the appropriate use of praise and encouragement underpin teachers' very high expectations of pupils' attitudes and behaviour.
- Detailed lesson planning enables pupils to be provided with activities that match their needs although, on occasion, higher attaining pupils are not always sufficiently well challenged.
- Very strong teamwork means that education and care officers make a very significant contribution to pupils' learning.
- Teachers' skilled and creative use of resources and equipment engages and motivates pupils.
- Teachers use a whole school assessment system consistently, effectively and constructively.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 58 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (1.7%)	19 (32.8%)	32 (55.1%)	5 (8.7%)	1 (1.7%)	0 (0%)	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.

14. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and many lessons have very good features. Classrooms are well organised and pupils are very well managed. This is based on the quality of relationships, encouragement and trust that feature in all lessons.

15. Lessons are very well planned. Teachers are particularly skilled at using information about pupils' prior learning to plan activities that are appropriate to pupils' age, interests and abilities. These plans identify what pupils are expected to learn and show clearly activities that are carefully chosen to meet individual pupils' and students' needs. Consequently, all pupils are included and actively involved as lessons are worthwhile experiences for everyone. Therefore, pupils and students of all ages generally learn well. However, on occasion the highest attaining ones do not always receive sufficient challenge and this is generally associated with teachers' failure to build on pupils' prior achievement in literacy. Currently, not all subject teachers receive details about pupils' literacy skills because there is no routine mechanism for sharing this information. Therefore, at times pupils may be required to demonstrate their understanding in subjects by ticking or crossing boxes when, in fact, they are able to write paragraphs quite independently in English lessons.

16. Teachers have very high expectations of behaviour. They have good understanding of their pupils' and students' particular special needs and, therefore, manage their behaviour efficiently and with minimum fuss, using well written behaviour and positive handling plans. Consequently, pupils settle into lessons quickly, listen carefully to what they are asked to do and respond positively. As a result, they try very hard, approaching tasks with very good interest and concentration. They are further encouraged to do this because of the very good contribution of education and care officers and teachers' choice and use of resources. A feature of lessons is the very high quality teamwork between teachers and very effective education and care officers. These support staff contribute greatly in ensuring that all pupils participate fully in lessons and are included in all activities. Good quality resources, which at times are simple but highly effective, are used extremely well to stimulate learning. Specific multi-sensory resources are used very effectively to promote the learning of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and other resources are tailored to meet the needs of pupils with other educational needs, such as autism.

17. In addition to providing many opportunities for pupils and students to acquire subject-specific skills and understanding, skilled teachers are committed to developing their communication skills and personal qualities too. They are able to do this because they have a very good understanding of their pupils' needs and their personal targets as shown in IEPs.

18. Adults support pupils' communication skills well through the use of augmentative and additional communication systems such as signing, symbols and PECS as well as text. However, they do not do this to the detriment of promoting speaking and listening skills. Consequently, pupils show developing maturity in expressing their own views orally and listening to those of others. Teachers orchestrate discussions very well, using carefully worded questions to challenge individuals and others are given the opportunity to extend the detail of the answers provided. Many examples of confident pupils listening and expressing themselves clearly were observed during the inspection. These included members of the school council discussing agenda items, the cast of *The Tempest* performing the play, a class of fourteen year olds attending 'mock' job interviews, and individual pupils saying a prayer before lunch.

19. Staff work hard to provide opportunities for pupils and students to reinforce and extend their personal skills. Activities are provided that require pupils to work independently or collaboratively and staff are sensitive to situations, knowing when to intervene and when to provide verbal or physical prompts. However, just occasionally, the pressure of time or the complexity of the task means that adults provide excessive support.

20. Teachers' assessment of pupils' work is good. Procedures are well integrated into teaching and learning across the school. There is an established assessment system throughout the school and this is used consistently, constructively and effectively. Teachers make careful assessments during lessons and over time and as a result they have detailed information about pupils' achievements and progress. Therefore, teachers are able to teach accurately and confidently when

making any ongoing adjustments to ensure that their expectations for individuals match pupils' needs and learning styles. In addition, feedback to pupils and students is accurate and consistent. They find this motivating as they develop a good understanding of what they need to do in order to improve. This is further enhanced as teachers help pupils to develop knowledge and understanding of their own capabilities. There are many examples of good practice in encouraging pupils to adopt a critical and analytical approach to their own and others' work.

The curriculum

21. The school provides a good range of worthwhile curricular opportunities. Enrichment of the curriculum through extra curricular provision is very good. Resources are good and well used but the accommodation is unsatisfactory overall. Provision for pupils' and students' personal, social and health education is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There has been good improvement in provision for most subjects and the school continues to provide very good opportunities for learning outside the school day.
- A good match of teachers to the curriculum and the use of specialist teaching in some subjects are raising standards.
- Training provided for education and care officers has resulted in them providing very effective support for pupils' learning and in the meeting of pupils' and students' needs.
- Monitoring of the curriculum and the overview of its development are well led by the school's two deputy headteachers.
- Aspects of the accommodation remain unsatisfactory and limit what can be taught and how it is taught in some subjects.
- In personal, social and health education lessons, pupils and students study a very good range of relevant topics that are appropriate to their age and interests.

Commentary

22. Improvements in the quality of the curriculum provided in most subjects have been made since the previous inspection. This is particularly noticeable in ICT, geography and history, which were all noted as having weaknesses at that time. National strategies, such as those for literacy and numeracy, have been adopted appropriately across the school and are having a positive impact on pupils' achievement in English and mathematics. A very good range of extra-curricular activities, including sports and the arts, enriches the curriculum. There is a very well planned programme of lunchtime activities, including sports and study support groups, such as a twice weekly reading club, and these are well attended. In addition, a high number of pupils stay behind for an after-school club, even though this means they have to be collected by parents rather than travelling on school transport. This is a joyous and lively occasion that contributes to pupils' personal development as it is also open to pupils from a local school.

23. Although not all subjects are led by specialists, suitable training and professional development opportunities have been provided and overall leadership and management of subjects are good. The school has started to use subject co-ordinators to undertake specialist subject teaching rather than having all subjects taught by the class teacher. This approach has contributed significantly to improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Pupils benefit from this secondary school approach, and learn to work with a wider range of adults, which is good preparation for the next stage of education, for example college, and for later life.

24. There is a very good match of well qualified and experienced support staff to the needs of the curriculum. Recent training in, for example, the teaching of literacy has resulted in them providing very good support for pupils' learning in many subjects. Those working with specific groups of pupils with particular special educational needs develop great expertise in meeting these. For example, support staff working with younger pupils with autism have become extremely skilled in managing

their related challenging behaviours. Therefore, subject teachers coming in to teach perhaps only one or two lessons each week have little difficulty in managing the class and are able to teach high quality lessons with confidence that they are supported by a dedicated team.

25. The school's two deputy headteachers take joint responsibility for leading curriculum development and for monitoring the school's provision across subjects. This monitoring has effectively identified weaknesses in some subject areas, such as design technology, and an effective response has been made. The next curriculum priority is to ensure school wide consistency of approach to the development of pupils' literacy skills across all other subjects. Again, this is an example of successful monitoring, as teachers do place emphasis on developing pupils' communication skills in all subjects, but some miss opportunities to build on their prior learning in reading and writing.

26. Some areas of the accommodation have been improved significantly, such as the new library / computer suite. Other aspects remain unsatisfactory. There are no specialist teaching rooms and facilities for subjects such as science and design and technology and there is still no hydrotherapy pool on site for those pupils who require this. Some classrooms are too small for the class sizes they need to accommodate, and this restricts how lessons can be organised. For example, in literacy and numeracy lessons pupils often need to work in several smaller groups rather than as a full class. In some class bases there is not enough room to divide pupils up into groups and still leave sufficient room for staff to move from group to group to check on progress. This situation is well managed by the school but the current situation is not acceptable because accommodation limits what can be taught in some subjects, and how it can be taught, and restricts the school's ability to meet the needs of all its pupils.

27. Overall, pupils make very good progress and achieve very well in PSHE lessons. Promoting pupils' personal development is a key feature of the school's aims and, therefore, it places great emphasis on developing these skills. This is evident in all the work that it does and lessons in PSHE build on this very well to further encourage pupils' personal development in formal and planned ways.

Care, guidance and support

28. The provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety is very good. Good support, advice and guidance are offered to pupils. The school takes very good account of pupils' views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' and students' care, welfare, health and safety are given very high priority.
- Pupils' and students' views are very highly valued and there are very good mechanisms for regularly gathering their views of the school.
- Very good relationships and high quality communication means that pupils are well supported.
- Good quality careers education and guidance prepare pupils and students for leaving school.
- There are good induction arrangements for pupils new to the school
- Good quality individual education plans enable pupils to make very good progress towards their personal targets.

Commentary

29. There is a very high level of care and support from all staff at the school. The very high level of teamwork means that all pupils are made welcome and comfortable and treated respectfully because their needs are so well known by all staff. This begins when school starts and support staff, teachers and escorts wish each student 'Good morning', and exchange jokes and banter. Daily care routines, such as toileting, and moving around the school, are managed sensitively and unobtrusively with staff working around the limitations imposed by some aspects of the accommodation. The correct child protection procedures are in place and well organised, with appropriate staff induction and training. Practical attention to health and safety is evident in a variety

of ways, from providing fruit to pupils at morning break to training for all staff in manual handling procedures.

30. There is a genuine feeling of a community within the school and therefore pupils are able to develop trusting relationships with all adults and learn to understand the expectations that they will behave well and respect one another. All staff follow the school's very good ethos of care and concern for the individual and, therefore, they try very hard to ensure that pupils are involved in activities and have some control over their lives. Staff do this by consulting with pupils and advising and supporting them effectively. This may be enabling pupils with the most complex needs to express choices and make decisions, such as which drink they would like in a café or which costume to wear in drama. In other cases, it involves supporting pupils with the most severe autism to develop social skills. This may be through managing, and gradually increasing, the time they spend in potentially difficult situations, such as assembly, or supporting individuals who integrate with the rest of the school at lunchtime.

31. There are good induction arrangements for pupils who are new to the school and this enables them to quickly get used to school routines and settle down to their learning. All pupils have clear, well written IEPs that identify targets for their learning and personal development. Staff use these well to provide activities that match individual needs and, as the plans are monitored effectively, pupils are helped to mature as they move through the school. Pupils and students are further supported and encouraged through the school's recognition of their achievements in the classroom and in celebration assemblies. The high level of support and guidance prepares pupils well for leaving school as those aged 14 to 19 years follow a well-planned programme for careers education and, where appropriate, work experience.

32. Staff listen carefully at every opportunity to what individual pupils and students have to say to them and take their views seriously. In addition, there is a formal forum, the school council, for pupils to discuss school life and how improvements can be made. This meets very regularly and involves about 12 pupils, some of whom have executive roles such as secretary and chairperson. Class representatives on the council have discussed and reported back to their classmates on various school matters and have managed to make changes, such as introducing a litter bin for the playground. Following discussion they selected a suitable model from a catalogue, requested money from the headteacher and ordered it.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

33. Links with parents are excellent. There are very good links with the community and good links with other schools and colleges. The school does not provide any formal, routine outreach support to teachers and pupils in mainstream schools.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Links with parents are excellent.
- The school uses its links with the community very effectively to extend pupils' learning.
- There are good links with other schools and colleges in the area.
- There are no regular support services provided by the school for assisting pupils with special needs in mainstream schools and their teachers.

Commentary

34. Links with parents have improved a great deal since the last inspection and are now excellent. They are provided with an excellent range of written documentation, such as a professionally-produced prospectus and regular lively newsletters. The school seeks parents' views about its performance regularly. Home visits are made before pupils join the school and while they are on the school roll if difficulties arise. Home-school diaries keep parents very well informed about day to day events involving their children. Very thorough Annual Reviews of pupils' Statements of Special Educational Needs are professionally conducted but not in ways that are intimidating for

parents. Their views, and those of their children, are valued. The reports that are produced prior to these meetings are well written and easy to understand. A teacher has specific responsibility for parent links and organises regular parents' meetings. Items discussed may be at parents' suggestion, such as dealing with puberty, or initiated by the school. For example, a recent session was run on the use of the assessment processes used by the school, which are analysed at a national level, to evaluate pupils' achievements. The graphs and other data produced were explained and discussed in detail with parents to demonstrate how they could track their child's progress. Pupils themselves produced presentations, using new technology, to show their parents how the newly installed interactive whiteboards work. Although the special group for Asian mothers has not met recently, it has done some very good work, including building bridges across cultures.

35. Links with the community are very good and they support the work teachers do in the classroom. Staff are keen to use these links to extend pupils' learning. Opportunities are taken whenever possible to utilise the area. Use of the local supermarket to buy cooking ingredients and to use the café, having previously rehearsed the skills they would need, develops independent skills and encourages decision making. Visits to different places of worship promote pupils' multi-cultural awareness and using computers at the Reebok Study Centre develops social skills as well as ICT knowledge. A few older students also have work experience placements in the community, for example in a supermarket. Pupils have also sung in the choir at the Record of Achievement ceremony held at the Victoria Hall. Visitors into school also help to promote pupils' personal development. The Bolton Music Group entertained pupils and the mayor attended to present attendance certificates. The school also helps the local and international communities through its support of charities such as the Bolton Hospice and the Christmas 'shoeboxes for Eastern European children' campaign.

36. The school is within an Education Action Zone (EAZ) and this has benefited it in many ways. In particular, the school has been able to improve its provision for ICT through the supply of equipment and technical support. The EAZ has also provided funding that has allowed other school initiatives and developments to take place, ranging from establishing the after school club to purchasing training as part of the staff development programme.

37. The school has good links with local schools and colleges, which reflect the school's comprehensive inclusion policy and commitment to promoting the development of individuals. Where possible, it extends pupils' experiences by seeking suitable integration links, such as pupils attending lessons at a nearby secondary school. A number of pupils in Years 7 and 8 currently attend drama and physical education lessons and others are due to go for design and technology and food technology lessons next term. This link is well planned and managed and carefully monitored to ensure that the experience is appropriate for the pupils and is making a positive difference to their learning and social skills. Pupils' achievements while off site are assessed effectively so that there is continuity in their learning and their successes are recorded and celebrated back at Firwood. Older pupils and students benefit from attending the local college, following courses in ceramics and catering.

38. Staff maintain good contact with other schools too and these have advantages for pupils. Teachers attend pupils' final Annual Review of their Statement of Special Educational Needs in their primary schools if Firwood is the likely secondary placement and this eases the transition of transferring there. Teachers' links with staff in other schools is also an initiative that has advantages for pupils and students. For example, the history co-ordinator has initiated links with colleagues in other special schools and this network encourages the sharing of ideas and resources for teaching the subject.

39. There has been little impetus from the local education authority for the school to develop an outreach support service to local schools, even though it has the staff expertise to deliver such a service. Therefore, there is no regular, formal extended service currently provided although school staff do work in schools in other ways. The co-ordinator for physical education offers specialist support to local primary schools and some special schools and staff have taught some demonstration humanities lessons to pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

40. The school is very well led and managed by the headteacher, with good support from the governing body and senior staff. Governors ensure that all statutory requirements are met.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher's vision is very well focused on improving pupils' and students' achievement and the quality of education provided.
- Very good management systems provide the school with significant information about its own performance.
- The governing body is effective in its role as a supportive, but critical, friend of the school.
- Financial management is very well linked to enabling the school to achieve its educational priorities.
- Senior staff are good at carrying out their specific responsibilities within the school.

Commentary

41. The headteacher has a very clear idea of how he wishes the school to develop, based clearly on raising pupils' achievements. This vision is pursued with levels of enthusiasm and dynamism that buoy up the rest of the school. Senior staff act as motivational and inspirational leaders and their high aspirations and clear commitment offer a very good example to other staff and pupils. An especially valuable consequence of this leadership is the strength and effectiveness of the very good teamwork throughout the school. This is evident in individual classes where all staff work very well together, within age groups when staff from a number of classes come together, and in the senior management team.

42. The governors fulfil their statutory duties well, and are good at promoting the inclusion of pupils in as wide a range of activities as possible. Governors find out information for themselves through regular visits and, therefore, have a good understanding of the strong points of the school as well as those areas that require further development. They discuss knowledgeably many matters with the headteacher and senior staff over the direction and purpose of the school. They are especially effective in challenging, questioning and giving positive support to the headteacher and senior management team.

43. Senior staff members have responsibilities for particular elements of the school and they carry out these duties well. As a result, staff training needs are very well organised; good induction procedures introduce new staff to the school, especially newly qualified teachers; long term planning of what should be taught is overseen well; and there is effective tracking of pupils' progress to ensure they are achieving appropriately. The quality of teaching is very well monitored by subject co-ordinators and senior staff observing lessons regularly throughout the school. They give clear feedback to staff about what they have seen. Positive and focused feedback helps to celebrate good quality teaching and spreads good practice as well as identifying areas that might be improved upon.

44. The school is managed very well, with proposed developments securely rooted in particularly good monitoring and analysis of all aspects of its own performance. Long-term planning is very well targeted at the specific areas that have been identified as priorities. All staff, not just members of the senior management team, are well involved in determining these priorities. These are collated into a well organised school development plan and progress towards each target is very well monitored and evaluated. The headteacher is very good at comparing the school with similar schools across a range of criteria. These include, for instance, the progress that pupils make, relative costs, and staffing levels. In addition, pupils' achievements within the school are analysed and compared to ensure that pupils from different groups, based on features such as gender, nature of the special need and ethnic background, achieve in accordance with their capability. Pupils' performances in different subjects of the curriculum are also compared. All of this information is used extremely well to focus the school's development. This may include improving the resources for a particular subject, or targeting the teaching of a particular group, such as pupils with autism. The school is

able to succeed in achieving its objectives because its spending is linked to these priorities and day to day finances are managed very well. A very recent audit was very positive and found no significant causes for concern.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	991125
Total expenditure	981375
Expenditure per pupil	13433

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	43312
Balance carried forward to the next year	9749

45. The school is run very efficiently in many ways, although there are a few examples where elements of inefficiency are evident. For example, it spends its money wisely as the principles of best value are embedded in its purchase decisions, but governors are not yet routinely evaluating the effectiveness of its spending by monitoring its impact on raising standards. Similarly, staff are generally deployed very well but there is some inefficient use of time associated with carrying out routine administrative tasks, such as the senior member of staff who telephones round to find replacement staff in the case of absence. With such a large staff this can be virtually a daily occurrence and extremely time consuming when such a task could be carried out by very able administration staff.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

English as an additional language

46. The provision for pupils whose home language is not English is good. They make progress at the same rate as their classmates. The school manages the educational provision for these pupils well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff know the pupils and their learning needs very well and provide appropriate activities for them.
- Good support is provided by a specialist education and care officer and a visiting specialist teacher from the local education authority's support service.

Commentary

47. These pupils' learning is restricted more by their severe and complex learning difficulties than by their lack of English understanding and speaking. Therefore, they are provided with the same high levels of appropriate work and resources as their classmates. Classroom support is effective, particularly from the specialist education and care officer. Classroom support staff and teachers are good at helping pupils with their learning on an individual basis: they use clear speech, regular use of key words, signing, pictures, symbols and objects to get their meaning across to the pupils.

48. The school is particularly good at analysing and comparing the relative performance of different groups of pupils, and this includes pupils whose home language is not English. Early results indicate that this group as a whole does not make the same progress as other groups of pupils do. This occurs because this cohort of pupils is weighted heavily towards the most complex and profound needs. However, individual pupils whose home language is not English make equal progress as native English speaking pupils with similar degrees of learning difficulty.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 – 4 AND POST-16

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Subject co-ordinators provide very good leadership and strong subject management.
- The recent introduction of specialist teaching has resulted in improved quality of teaching and learning and pupils and students of all capabilities now have good achievement.
- Resources and the recently extended combined library and computer suite have had a positive impact on the teaching of reading.
- Education and care officers generally make a good contribution to the teaching of basic literacy skills but the quality of support varies from class to class.
- Assessment arrangements are good, but information on pupils' literacy skills is not always shared with other subject teachers to allow them to build on pupils' current levels of attainment.

Commentary

49. There has been good improvement in provision since the last inspection. This is due mainly to the strong joint leadership of the previous subject co-ordinator and the recently appointed deputy headteacher. They are working well together and have a very good understanding of where the development of the subject has reached, and what needs to be done next to improve it further. Elements of the National Literacy Strategy for pupils aged 11 to 14 years have been incorporated in lessons and this has made them more stimulating for pupils. Their attitudes and behaviour are now very good. This supports their learning well. In particular, they enjoy the good range of literature texts available for study across the school and these make a strong contribution to their cultural and multi-cultural development. Training provided for education and care officers has ensured that they now make a significant contribution to the teaching of basic literacy skills, especially reading and writing. The curriculum for students at post-16 is relevant to their needs and interests. As a result of all these developments pupils and students of all ages and capabilities, including those with additional special educational needs and pupils at the early stages of learning English as an additional language, achieve well.

50. The school's assessment procedures, including IEP literacy targets, are good and pupils make good progress towards achieving their individual literacy targets. In English, they build well on prior learning in communication skills, and in reading and writing. A good range of interactive books and programs to develop pupils' spelling and phonics skills is available, and many higher attaining pupils use these independently. This gives them a more active role in their own learning and often results in them helping each other or working together collaboratively. Teachers are skilled at using a variety of communication systems and their regular and consistent use is an important factor in pupils' good achievements. For example, Makaton signs were well used in a class of Year 9 pupils to support their understanding of the reading of *The Hungry Giant's Soup*. These approaches are supported well by other strategies that meet the needs of different groups of pupils. The school's decision to teach pupils with autism in two separate classes has proved successful as specialist teachers meet the needs of these pupils well. Symbols, PECS and elements of the Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) approach provide a good range of ways of helping pupils with autism communicate effectively and help them to be involved better in what they are learning.

51. The learning of pupils with the most complex and profound learning difficulties is supported by an effective multi-sensory approach. A group of Year 10 pupils with profound learning difficulties was able to enjoy and participate in the reading of the poem *All Join In* because objects of reference

and other props were well used to capture and hold their attention. A more tactile approach with a class of Year 11 pupils with multiple learning difficulties was equally effective. The story *Its Party Time* was used as the stimulus for learning about the Muslim festival *Eid* but pupils' enjoyment and participation were enhanced by the playing of Indian music and the making of chapatti dough. A range of specialist access devices to new technology is also well used to support pupils' learning well. These include single switches and communication boards which provide pupils with the opportunity to participate in activities as they are enabled to express choices and demonstrate understanding. However, pupils and students are not able to use this equipment through the whole day, and in all situations. This restricts their ability to have some control over what happens to them and to support their learning.

52. Teaching and learning are good overall across the school but there are differences between classes. Examples of good or very good teaching were observed in all year groups but there were instances when teaching was only just satisfactory. In one lesson, the teaching was unsatisfactory. In the most effective lessons, teachers have high expectations for what pupils will learn and education and care officers make a significant contribution to pupils' learning. At these times education and care officers support individual pupils well, using a good combination of questions and verbal and physical prompts to engage their attention. On other occasions they are less decisive as they miss opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of language and do not manage pupils' challenging behaviour effectively. Resources are used innovatively and ICT is integral in the planning and implementation of lessons. Where teaching is less effective, teachers are not clear about how to help pupils to achieve the learning objectives, activities go on too long or are not sufficiently focused, and closing sessions are not used to review what pupils have learned and to celebrate their success.

53. The deputy headteacher is a specialist English teacher and her subject expertise has been used effectively to improve the quality of teaching overall. The impact of this specialist subject knowledge was seen during the inspection week in a very good lesson with younger pupils with autism. A specially adapted fairy tale was made accessible by a very good selection of props, consistent use of signing and the inclusion of plenty of repetition to help pupils to understand the key events of the story and to recognise the main characters. Although such pupils often have great difficulty in identifying with other people and in understanding their actions, by the end of the session all of the pupils could undertake role play based on the story. They joined in parts of the dialogue with their allocated characters, and enthusiastically acted out key events from the story.

54. Since the last inspection, resources and accommodation have been improved. A range of 'big' books for pupils to share in lessons has been purchased and a variety of stories adapted for a multi-sensory approach is being developed. These have enabled pupils with profound and complex learning difficulties to have access to a wider variety of literature. The recently completed combined library/computer suite has been effective in improving the quality of the teaching of reading through its use during English lessons and for extra-curricular reading and study support clubs at lunchtimes.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

55. Generally, teachers place great emphasis on developing pupils' communication skills in lessons other than English, such as in art and ICT. In history, for example, higher attaining pupils read a variety of source materials in their research and write contributions to class books about aspects of the subject. Form tutor periods at the start of each day provide many opportunities for pupils to undertake good quality language activities that give them extra opportunities to use communication skills in less formal social settings. However, on occasion teachers miss opportunities to build on pupils' prior achievement, such as in design and technology and PSHE. For example, there are instances where pupils who are able to write paragraphs independently in English lessons regularly only record their work by ticking or crossing boxes in other subjects. As yet, there is no routine mechanism for sharing information on pupils' progress and achievements with all of their subject teachers.

French

56. At the time of the previous inspection, French was taught by a visiting peripatetic teacher and pupils' achievements were judged as very good. Since then, arrangements have had to be changed and the overall quality of provision has suffered. The subject is now taught by class teachers although staff are supported by a link with a specialist teacher based at a Beacon school. However, it is not possible to make a judgement about teaching and learning because no lessons were taught during the inspection. In addition, because of the interruptions to learning that occurred as a result of the temporary interim arrangements that had to be put into place following the removal of peripatetic teaching, there was too little evidence to make reliable judgements about pupils' standards of achievement. The situation is now improving. An effective and organised subject co-ordinator has a good understanding of what is required. She has begun to carry out observations of teaching and learning and has produced an effective plan of what is to be taught in the long term, based on practical everyday aspects of French language and way of life.

57. Currently, all pupils are provided with opportunities to gain valuable experiences of another culture and language. The higher attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9 are taught French formally through a topic-based approach with an emphasis on oral work. Less able pupils do not have such formal lessons but they have several French "experience days" or half days each year. These are joyous occasions and allow pupils to acquire some understanding and knowledge of France and the French language.

MATHEMATICS

58. Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils learn well and make good progress as a result of high quality teaching. They achieve well.
- Education and care officers support pupils' learning extremely well.
- The subject is well led and managed.
- Teachers assess and track pupils' progress very well.
- Mathematical skills are developed well by other subjects of the curriculum.

Commentary

59. Pupils and students make good progress and achieve well. This good progress occurs in all areas of mathematics but it is particularly evident in practical number work. For lower attaining pupils this means improving their recognition of numerals and counting. Pupils with more developed mathematical skills make similarly good progress as they add and subtract small numbers and handle money in "shopping" activities. These activities are appropriate to the ages and interests of pupils and promote the use of mathematical knowledge in everyday situations.

60. Pupils' and students' learning is good because teachers are good at planning their lessons to take account of individual needs. Lesson plans have clear aims that are based on pupils' termly targets and therefore activities are provided that build on prior learning and extend pupils' understanding. Lessons are generally well structured in three parts, an introduction followed by the main teaching activity and a final plenary session, in line with the guidance of the National Numeracy Strategy. Sometimes, however, teachers spend too long on the introduction to the lesson, and pupils begin to get inattentive and restless. At the end of a lesson, most teachers conduct a good review of what pupils have learned, and they praise them for their efforts and successes. However, on occasions some teachers simply do a different activity for a few minutes, rather than taking this opportunity to reinforce ideas and assess pupils' and students' learning.

61. Lessons are busy sessions. They run at a good pace and teachers' high expectations mean that pupils pay attention, try hard, behave well, and join in the activities. Pupils and students are keen

and interested in their learning. The education and care officers in each class support pupils' learning very well. They are capable, know the pupils very well, and work closely with teachers in very good class teams. All staff use a good range of equipment and learning aids effectively in lessons, finding different ways to present the work to pupils to make their learning more effective and interesting. Information technology is also used well to extend learning. Teachers frequently use interactive whiteboards, which are large wall-mounted computer touch screens, to demonstrate topics and to question pupils. The most competent pupils respond using these same screens as well as desktop computers and switches that respond to a single touch. Teachers use this new technology well to assist lower attaining pupils' personal development, such as making choices and building up concentration, as well as basic mathematical skills like understanding that something will happen when they make a deliberate movement. Teachers assess pupils' learning and track their progress very well in terms of their success in achieving their individual targets.

62. Mathematics is effectively organised by an enthusiastic and capable co-ordinator. He has been particularly effective in encouraging the use of ICT, building up resources, and introducing a consistent format for planning that is in line with recommended best practice. This represents good improvement since the previous inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

63. Teachers are effective in supporting pupils' learning of mathematical skills through other subjects of the curriculum. Many examples were observed of teachers seizing opportunities to allow pupils to rehearse their mathematical understanding and knowledge. For example, pupils create several different kinds of graphs on the computers; they measure and cut different shapes in art lessons when making Christmas decorations; they make dough in the shape of numbers in science; and count and sequence activities in physical education.

SCIENCE

64. Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well as a result of the good teaching across all groups in the school.
- Scientific language and techniques are emphasised and used appropriately.
- Science lessons make a good contribution to developing basic skills
- The highest attaining pupils are not always sufficiently well challenged.
- The accommodation for teaching science is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

65. Pupils' good progress in science has been maintained well since the last inspection. Pupils' work books and teachers' records show good achievement across all the different groups of pupils within the school. Those with the most complex difficulties are given as many scientific experiences and opportunities as other pupils, reflecting the policy of including pupils with all special needs in their lessons. This results from good overall planning and recording of pupils' achievements. Records reveal careful assessment of individual pupils' skills and what they know and understand. Planning also takes account of individual learning needs in pupils' IEPs. However, on occasion lesson planning does not always identify more challenge for higher attaining pupils. When all pupils are doing the same set of tasks within a lesson this restricts opportunities for some pupils to achieve even better, especially with regard to opportunities to record their work as individuals, either in writing or on the computer.

66. Different teachers are confident in their approach to teaching science. Subject knowledge is secure and a particular feature of lessons is staff's use of specific scientific language to help pupils to develop their understanding in a progressive way. Lesson plans have a clear focus on what

pupils are expected to learn and there is an appropriate emphasis on providing opportunities for pupils to carry out their own experiments, helping them to learn from experience. Pupils are well motivated in their science lessons and are keen to learn. Teachers and education and care officers are skilled at providing appropriate prompts for pupils to choose and decide between different options in a scientific experiment, and to learn from the consequences of what they do. For example, a class of Year 9 pupils investigated different states, such as solids and liquids, and how one can be converted to another through a variety of interesting practical tasks. Pupils were encouraged to explore the materials while the teacher used every opportunity to question their decisions, thus extending their understanding of science. Pupils responded very well to these demands, working with enthusiasm, interest and enjoyment. This produced a very good working atmosphere as pupils puzzled over the implications of some of their results, and showed pride in their accomplishments.

67. There are very good links with other subjects across the school. For example, numeracy is supported through activities in science lessons such as work on capacity and cause and effect, or younger pupils making numerals out of dough they had made. Scientific understanding is also developed by other subjects of the curriculum. In geography, work on rainforests, with eye-catching displays of insects and other animals, and volcanoes reinforce pupils' learning.

68. Although only appointed this term, the science co-ordinator manages the subject well and has already begun to make an impact. Policy documents have been redesigned and the timing of some of the modules in the science curriculum is being examined. In addition, the co-ordinator has the opportunity to monitor science teaching across the school and this has helped to maintain the good quality teaching and learning. Although more money has been spent on science resources, so that there are adequate resources generally, science is limited by accommodation. There is no separate science area or room and this restricts opportunities for investigative work, particularly for older pupils. This situation is unsatisfactory.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

69. Provision in information and communication technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils and students learn well because of effective teaching.
- Very good leadership and management and improved accommodation and resources have resulted in a much improved subject since the previous inspection.
- Pupils' and students' computer skills are consolidated well in other subjects of the curriculum.
- There are limited opportunities for pupils and student to use single-touch switches throughout the day to respond to questions and express choices.
- On occasions some pupils and student are not sufficiently challenged by their work.

Commentary

70. Pupils learn well throughout the school, including students in the post-16 unit. However, although pupils learn well in lessons their progress over time is satisfactory. This is because their acquisition of new skills, understanding and knowledge has not been across a broad subject curriculum until recently. Although pupils' achievements are satisfactory at the present time, there are many indications to suggest that they will develop well if the recent pace of improvement is maintained.

71. Teachers and education and care officers know their pupils well, and work very well in class teams. In a warm and positive learning atmosphere, they encourage, praise and prompt pupils to concentrate on their work. Staff use signing well when needed and manage the behaviour of pupils very well. Consequently, pupils learn well because teaching is well planned to include suitable activities for each individual pupil, very well based on accurate assessments of their progress. As a result, the highest attaining pupils use a good range of equipment in positive ways to improve

learning. They know how to use a computer mouse and some parts of the keyboard. The most competent pupils use interactive whiteboards and a good variety of electronic tabletop equipment that is operated by switches. However, on occasion the activities provided lag behind pupils' and students' developing skills and they continue to use the same equipment for some time after they have mastered it, repeating tasks instead of progressing to something a little harder.

72. Pupils and students with more profound and multiple learning difficulties are provided with a range of activities that enable them to develop understanding of cause and effect. As a result, they demonstrate their understanding of knowing that they can make things happen by pressing a switch. They press switches to play music, to make coloured lights come on, to move a toy, and to start a display on a computer screen. Many of these pupils use a single-touch switch at some time of the day, usually in the early morning, when their switch speaks a "good morning" message. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to use this equipment through the rest of the day to enable them to express choice and therefore to have more control over what happens to them. For example, the equipment is not used to allow pupils to choose which flavoured drink they want, which activity they would like to do next, or which photograph shows their mum. In addition, the school does not exploit the potential of using these 'speaking switches' as effective electronic message carriers between home and school.

73. The subject co-ordinator has worked hard and successfully in improving provision since the previous inspection. Resources and accommodation have been improved very well, many staff have gained confidence in using new technology through well-targeted training, and teachers work to a clear plan of what should be taught in the long term. The new library / computer suite for the more able pupils is a great boost to developing their skills, such as accessing the Internet, reading interactive programs, and writing about what they have been doing over the weekend. In addition, pupils can now gain awards for their work through nationally recognised certification.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

74. Pupils have good opportunities to use, reinforce and extend basic ICT skills in other subjects. For instance, pupils control the music about witches that accompanies a drama production they are doing as part of an English project; they have made a slideshow display about a historical local inventor; and they match coins using a mathematics CD ROM. They also use new technology to improve the presentation of their work, typing words and short sentences, and creating graphs about surveys they have conducted.

HUMANITIES

History

75. Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Specialist teaching results in pupils of all capabilities having very good achievement.
- The new subject co-ordinator has improved the provision in many ways and she provides very good leadership and management.
- Joint projects with a local museum, and a very good range of visits to places of historical interest, enrich and enhance the good subject curriculum.
- The history curriculum for pupils with more profound learning difficulties is well planned and taught through a relevant multi-sensory approach.

Commentary

76. Very good specialist teaching results in a very good quality of learning and very good achievement by all pupils. The teacher's enthusiasm for the subject and high expectations is

communicated to the pupils. This leads to real enjoyment of lessons with all working hard and gaining a very good level of historical knowledge, skills and understanding. All pupils follow the same programme but the teacher plans very different approaches to make activities suitable for pupils of different abilities and for groups with specific special educational needs. For example, younger pupils with autism are helped to understand the difficult idea of the difference between what happens now and how things were in the past. The teacher's astute choice of resources and focussed questioning leads them to be able to identify, for example, the difference between Victorian toys and those that children might receive now.

77. Since the last inspection, the provision for history has been improved significantly by the very good new subject leader. The curriculum has been revised and now has a good balance, giving pupils in Years 7 to 9 opportunities to study their personal and family history, local history and important people, events and times in national and world history. The use of ICT is an integral part of curriculum planning and it is used effectively to support pupils' learning. For example, one class is developing and using an interactive quiz to record their findings about Samuel Crompton in a local history study, and can also use the quiz to test their recall of the project. Digital photography is used to record evidence from visits to historical sites as well as to record pupils' progress. Other resources and artefacts have been extended, and these are used imaginatively to support pupils' learning, especially where pupils benefit from a multi-sensory approach to help them develop new knowledge and understanding.

78. Projects jointly organised by the co-ordinator and education officers from a local museum are making history really come to life for pupils with severe learning difficulties. A younger class is exploring their personal history through photographs of themselves at different ages. They enjoy working with the visitor to learn about chronology by sequencing pictures for the class book they are making. Older pupils have undertaken visits to the museum and Crompton's house and are proud that their work will be on view to the public as part of the museum's Centenary Celebrations. These are special projects for this year, but all the study units are planned to include at least one relevant visit to a site of historical interest. The subject leader has also developed successful partnerships with teachers at other local special and mainstream schools, setting up a group to share good practice and organising exchanges between schools. These initiatives serve to further enrich the school's history provision.

Geography

79. It is not possible to make an overall judgement on the quality of teaching and learning as only one lesson was observed during the inspection. However, pupils' work and detailed assessment records show that pupils achieve well. Wall displays show progression and continuity in pupils' learning, with good evidence of pupils' written work as well as carefully constructed models to extend and reinforce knowledge and understanding. This is a considerable improvement on the last inspection when progress was judged to be unsatisfactory.

80. In the lesson observed it was clear that pupils thoroughly enjoy the subject and the teacher and education and care officers worked hard to make the work interesting and relevant to their understanding. Simple, but effective, resources were used very imaginatively to grab pupils' attention. A combination of fizzy drinks and bicarbonate of soda enabled pupils to simulate the effects of lava running down a mountain from an active volcano. Similarly, the skilful and imaginative use of boxes and bricks were used to make a 'building' so that pupils could realistically simulate an earthquake by shifting their worktables violently to bring down their constructions.

Religious education

81. Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are well taught and make good progress in acquiring new knowledge and understanding.
- A broad curriculum ensures that pupils learn about other major world religions as well as Christianity.
- The subject makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development.
- Well established assessment procedures identify clearly the small steps in progress pupils are making.

Commentary

82. Pupils achieve well and make good progress. Religious education makes a significant contribution to developing pupils' understanding of living in multi-cultural Britain, through their exposure to features of religions such as Islam, Sikhism and Judaism, as well as Christianity. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

83. Lessons provide pupils with many opportunities for them to familiarise themselves with the vocabulary associated with different religions. Teachers do this through careful planning and the skilled use of resources. For instance, a Year 9 group of autistic pupils were extremely motivated to learn about *Shabbat* because the teacher provided them with bread, butter and 'wine' on a carefully laid out table complete with candlesticks. Skilfully balanced questions and explanations encouraged pupils to develop understanding about this ritual of Judaism. In addition, pupils' personal development was encouraged equally well as they were expected to butter their bread independently and to show table manners. A class of post-16 students were able to show their knowledge of the language of Christianity and other religions when they considered the Christmas Story. Once again, skilful planning provided the opportunity to extend the ideas of festivals and celebrations associated with Christmas to those enjoyed by other faiths. Therefore, there was discussion about Ramadan and Divali and Muslim and Hindu pupils were able to provide details about these festivals. Learning is reinforced and supported well by visits into the culturally-rich local community.

84. The subject is planned so as to provide activities that are appropriate to pupils' ages and which build on their prior learning. As a consequence, as pupils get older they are given opportunities to begin to apply their developing knowledge of the common features of different religions to everyday activities and situations. For example, when Year 9 pupils studied Sikhism they considered the qualities needed by a leader. A higher attaining pupil was able to transfer his understanding of these qualities by using them to write independently about how they might relate to the captain of a football team.

85. The co-ordinator leads and manages the subject effectively. She has produced a well considered subject curriculum that forms the basis of teachers' planning with specific activities identified that enable those pupils with the most profound and multiple difficulties to participate fully. Her role in monitoring the subject is carried out systematically and therefore there is consistent practice in assessment and recording procedures across the school.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

86. Provision in design and technology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The new subject co-ordinator has made changes in the curriculum that are already starting to have a positive impact on the subject.
- Staff work well together to ensure all pupils have opportunities to experience units of study covering a good range of materials.
- Some units of study do not give pupils sufficient practical activities to ensure that their skills are developed appropriately.
- A room has been successfully converted for the teaching of food studies, but there is no specialist accommodation for working with resistant materials such as wood, metal and plastics. This situation is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

87. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection, when subject leadership and pupils' achievements when working with resistant materials were judged as unsatisfactory. Currently, their achievements are satisfactory but improvement in the subject is being made since the appointment of a new subject co-ordinator at the start of this academic year. Leadership and management of the subject are now satisfactory. The co-ordinator is working well with different teachers of the subject to ensure that planning focuses on different teaching approaches and resources that are appropriate for pupils with different kinds of special educational needs. The development plan identifies the need to implement a subject-specific skills checklist and there is a focus on monitoring the subject to improve the quality of teaching and learning. An audit of all resources has been undertaken and there are plans to extend the use of new technology throughout the subject.

88. Pupils now have opportunities to work with a good range of materials, including food, textiles, card and wood. Teachers and education and care officers work hard together to ensure that all pupils have a wide variety of experiences in working with these materials and in using a variety of tools and equipment. For example, in a unit on taste and texture pupils with more profound and complex needs were helped to have multi-sensory experiences such as feeling the texture of flour and smelling and tasting different ingredients. As pupils move up through the school they become more independent, doing more of the designing, making and evaluating for themselves. Students at post-16 concentrate on cookery as a skill for independent living.

89. The extent to which pupils have hands-on practical experiences varies. In the most effective lessons staff are on hand to advise where necessary, but this support is given unobtrusively. For example, a class of older pupils with autism worked with minimal support to make jewellery from their own designs, using a variety of materials. They had researched different types of commercial jewellery before designing their own piece. The final specification was based on whether it would be a gift for a family member or friend, or something they were making for themselves. Much of their work was carried out independently, and as a result pupils were justifiably proud of the finished products that they had made themselves. In contrast, during the inspection week many classes were undertaking a unit on making and decorating a Christmas cake. Although staff tried to ensure that all pupils took an active part in lessons, pressures of time and over ambitious expectations on the part of teachers meant that at times pupils with less mobility or dexterity, and those with more profound learning difficulties, spent time waiting for a turn to do something practical. In the meantime, staff rushed to complete the most intricate parts of the project.

90. The kitchen converted for use by pupils doing food technology is suitable for many pupils, with adjustable height worktables and a small range of cupboards, cookers, sinks and worktops. The lack of availability of a specialist room for working with resistant materials, that is equipped with appropriate equipment, means that the curriculum is limited to projects that can be easily undertaken in classrooms. This situation is unsatisfactory as it restricts the progress that pupils make in gaining subject knowledge, skills and understanding.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

91. Provision in art and design is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Work in art shows a good range of different applications and techniques.
- New technology and community facilities are both used well to enrich pupils' learning.
- Planning and co-ordination of the subject are good.
- Art is taught well overall, although some teachers are more confident in their skills than others.

Commentary

92. Teachers' planning and pupils' work around the school show that the curriculum in art is varied and interesting. The displays and models around the school are lively, well presented, and represent the pupils' own work in a variety of art forms including sculpture, collage and mixed media. There has been good improvement in provision since the previous inspection.

93. Teaching is well planned and focussed with activities based on detailed information about pupils' achievements because of detailed assessment records. These activities allow pupils to interpret ideas imaginatively for themselves but also develop the specific fine movement and manipulative skills necessary for more detailed work, such as cutting, twisting and tying when making a sculpture. Consequently, pupils achieve well and make good progress in developing a range of skills and understanding of different techniques and applications like the use of paints, brushwork, and the use of wash in landscape art.

94. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils, and the pupils respond well. They show real pride in their work. These high expectations are also evident in the level of independent work achieved. This is a strong feature of learning and pupils often produce varied and individual results even when working on the same project with similar materials. New technology and community facilities are both used well to enrich pupils' learning. For example, pupils used the Internet to research information about Lowry and they then followed this with a visit to a local gallery before producing their own work in a similar style.

95. Art is well led and managed. A particular feature of the co-ordinator's current role is to promote greater confidence among teachers who teach art themselves or who incorporate art activities when teaching other subjects. The art room is well resourced but it is too small for whole classes so it can only be used by individuals or smaller groups.

Music

96. Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are taught well and enjoy music, being keen to join in. They achieve well.
- Planning identifies activities that promote pupils' personal development.
- Lessons provide many opportunities for pupils to gain valuable listening experiences and moments of reflection.
- Music is used well across the curriculum to motivate pupils and reinforce learning

Commentary

97. Teachers provide pupils with many opportunities to listen to music, sing and play instruments. These opportunities match pupils' capabilities well and therefore all pupils are able to achieve well and make good progress in acquiring new skills and understanding. The subject curriculum is well structured and organised by an effective subject co-ordinator. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

98. Teachers' very good management of pupils and their classroom organisation result in well planned and structured activities that pupils thoroughly enjoy. Therefore, with the significant input of education and care officers, who work very well with teachers, pupils are enabled to participate in all activities. For instance, a class of Year 9 pupils with severe learning difficulties were able to respond to symbol / text cards that showed instructions such as 'stop', 'go', 'quickly' and 'quietly' because of their focused attention and the prompts of all staff. These communication skills were further enhanced as the group sang *Children of the World* and they had to listen to the words which required them to hold up particular props.

99. Lessons promote many aspects of pupils' personal development. Music is used extremely well with pupils with autism to develop an appropriate mood of spirituality and opportunities for quiet reflection. A lighted candle and dimmed lights, while the *Oratorio de Noel* was being played, developed a sense of calmness and tranquillity to which pupils responded by sitting quietly and listening carefully. The mood that was created was then used productively to develop aspects of pupils' personal development; they received and passed on instruments, communicated choices, and collaborated with teachers and education and care officers.

100. Music features in many lessons. Jewish background music accompanied pupils experiencing a *Shabbat* meal and appropriate mood music was played as one class of pupils performed *The Tempest* and another group in English listened to *The Bombay Beat* as they studied stories from other cultures. Music is used very well at the beginning of the day during registration sessions to welcome and introduce pupils, when they join in enthusiastically, and in weekly assemblies.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

101. Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well in activities based on a very wide and varied curriculum.
- Lessons are based upon meticulous planning and preparation.
- Great effort is made to ensure that experiences of high quality are available to all pupils.
- There is no hydrotherapy provision on site for pupils with the most profound difficulties and this is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

102. Teaching and learning are good. Subject-specific skills are developed well by effective demonstrations, individual coaching, and praise. Pupils and students respond very positively and achieve well. They have very good attitudes towards their lessons and are highly motivated. As a result, they all develop new skills, such as scoring 'goals' during target practice, and they show real pleasure in these achievements. The high standards identified during the last inspection have been maintained.

103. Teachers are also very conscious of the importance of developing literacy and numeracy skills as well as physical ones during lessons. Pupils are often required to count, or verbally describe or rehearse a sequence of movements before carrying out an activity so that more skilful accomplishment is achieved. These requests represent teachers' good appreciation of the importance of reinforcing the application of number and language to everyday activities.

104. A very effective subject co-ordinator works hard to provide a very good and successful curriculum for all pupils within the school despite limitations imposed by facilities for those pupils with mobility problems. The varied curriculum covers a range of activities, including dance and swimming, and learning is enhanced through regular visits to a health and sports centre. The pool at this centre has limitations that make it unsuitable for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and so they have to visit a hydrotherapy pool elsewhere off site. The lack of such a facility on site was identified during the previous inspection and the situation remains unsatisfactory. Not all pupils have equal opportunities to develop water skills and many with the most profound difficulties are denied the periods of relaxation and reflection that a hydrotherapy pool provides.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, social and health education

105. Provision in pupils' personal, social and health education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are very well taught and they achieve very well.
- A well organised and effective subject co-ordinator has produced a comprehensive programme of study.
- Pupils study a range of topics that are appropriate to their age and interest as they move through the school.
- Pupils aged 14 to 19 years follow a good careers programme that prepares them well for leaving school.
- Strong links with community facilities support learning.

Commentary

106. Overall, pupils make very good progress and achieve very well. The promotion of pupils' personal development is a key feature of the school's aims and, therefore, it places great emphasis on developing these skills. This is evident in all the work that it does and lessons in PSHE build on this very well to further encourage pupils' personal development in formal and planned ways.

107. Teachers plan very carefully and have a clear understanding of exactly what they want pupils to learn in each lesson. Therefore, they are able to provide activities that match individual needs. Teachers are particularly skilled at including all pupils and they do this extremely well through their use of resources, including new technology, and individually targeted approaches to pupils. For example, a class of Year 10 and 11 pupils with profound learning difficulties made very good progress in their understanding of healthy foods. A very lively reading of *Cold Stone Soup* grabbed pupils' attention and then the teacher employed a multi-sensory approach to making soup in the classroom.

108. Teachers place a particularly strong emphasis on ensuring that activities are appropriate to pupils' age and interests. This is especially evident in the good quality careers module of the PSHE curriculum that contributes significantly to preparing pupils and students for leaving school. A class of Year 10 pupils were seen attending mock interviews for a limited range of jobs from which they could choose. This demonstrated many features of very good teaching associated with the appropriateness of the activity. Relevant vocabulary, such as *seasonal* and *vacancy*, was emphasised and time was very well spent on reinforcing the five important aspects associated with

attending for interview that the pupils had previously identified, such as *punctuality* and *appearance*. 109. Careers education is also enhanced through 'access' courses that pupils follow at the local college and through links with the school's Connexions personal adviser. Not all pupils have the necessary skills to attend off-site work experience placements. However, those who can are well prepared for the placement so that they are able to obtain maximum benefit from it. An organised subject co-ordinator has produced a subject programme that addresses topics such as safety, exercise and diet, personal care, and the psychological aspects of growing up. The school meets its statutory requirement to provide drugs and sex and relationships education well through sensitive and appropriate activities. In addition, all pupils have elements of citizenship built into the programme. In Years 7 to 9 this covers topics such as the environment and the idea of diversity and identity in terms of themselves and others. Older pupils build on this work when they consider more complex topics like the media, government and the law. Consequently, pupils and students in all years develop knowledge and understanding of these aspects through activities that are appropriate to their age and interests. This equips them very well with the skills required to become full members of society.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Inspection judgement

Grade

The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2
Value for money provided by the school	3

Overall standards achieved	3
Pupils' achievement	3

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	4
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
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	3
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	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	1
The quality of the school's links with the community	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3

The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	2

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7); the judgement statement does not apply to the school (8).