

INSPECTION REPORT

WHITE SPIRE SCHOOL

Bletchley, Milton Keynes

LEA area: Milton Keynes

Unique reference number: 110575

Headteacher: Peter Jones

Lead inspector: Jacque Cook

Dates of inspection: 6 – 9 October 2003

Inspection number: 259033

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	5-19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	158
School address:	Rickley Lane Bletchley Milton Keynes
Postcode:	MK3 6EW
Telephone number:	01908 373266
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Ms Terry Askew
Date of previous inspection:	1 December 1997

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

White Spire, which is large for a special school, currently has pupils aged between seven and 19 and has a residential facility for up to 25 pupils. The designated number on roll is 155, but there are 158 pupils, 100 boys and 58 girls. Pupils may stay in residence for one, or more, of a number of reasons including increasing independence skills, living some distance from the school and experiencing some form of difficulty at home at a particular time of their lives. There were 11 pupils in residence at the time of the inspection. The school is located on the outskirts of Milton Keynes in an urban area and is primarily for pupils with moderate learning difficulties but now includes about 16 per cent (25) with social emotional and behavioural difficulties which is a change since the last inspection. Also there are small number of pupils with additional speech and language difficulties and specific learning difficulties. There are a few on the autistic spectrum. The broader range of learning difficulties includes an increase in the number of pupils with more complex needs. The great majority of pupils are from a white British background. There are six pupils who speak English as an additional language. The school is involved in healthy eating initiatives. About ten per cent of pupils arrive at different times in the year predominately between Years 4 and 10. The number of pupils that join the school before they are in Year 6 is steadily declining and there are now no pupils in Years 1 and 2. Most pupils have very low levels of attainment on entry.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
2351	Jacque Cook	Lead inspector	Art French Music
14347	Joan Lindsay	Lay inspector	
17541	Fran Ashworth	Team inspector	Mathematics Information and communication technology Personal, social and health education Citizenship Special educational needs
20397	Rosa Blunt	Team inspector	English History Geography Physical education English as an additional language
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

White Spire School provides a sound education for its pupils and their achievement is satisfactory overall. The new headteacher provides good leadership, has a clear vision to improve the school and is already making a difference, building on the strong relationships staff establish with pupils. There is satisfactory management of the school and value for money is satisfactory.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Pupils achieve well in English, science, information and communication technology (ICT), humanities, French and physical education.
- The school, particularly the residential provision, successfully develops pupils' positive attitudes and behaviour, even though a few pupils have problems with their behaviour.
- There is an increasing range of examinations, interesting additional activities including sport, good work experience and links with the community which broaden the curriculum.
- There is insufficient checking and acting on information obtained in order to raise pupils' achievements further. This includes a lack of coherent assessment procedures.
- The governance of the school is weak. Effective checks have not been applied and important aspects, such as the care standards, not implemented, leading to weaknesses in the care and welfare of pupils.
- There are too many temporary staff.
- The quantity and quality of information sent to parents are unsatisfactory.
- The accommodation for students in Years 12 to 14 is poor and does not help them develop further.

The school is still recovering from the need, two years ago, to suddenly have to fight the threat of closure. This and significant recruitment difficulties, with five vacancies and four temporary teachers this term, has led to a patchy, but overall satisfactory, improvement since the last inspection of six years ago. Improvements have been made in examination courses, broadening what pupils learn, including those in Years 12 to 14, and through an enrichment programme and activities at lunchtime and after school. Pupils' achievements in ICT, English, science and physical education have improved well and in spite of difficulties, standards have been maintained in a number of other subjects. Insufficient improvement has been made in establishing an assessment system and providing adequate information for parents. There is less unsatisfactory teaching but also less very good or better teaching. The governance of the school is not as good and accommodation remains a problem.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement at the end of:	in relation to individual targets in:	
	subjects of the curriculum	personal and social education
Year 6	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Year 9	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Year 11	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Year 13	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

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

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. Their achievements are good overall in English and science in all year groups. They are satisfactory overall in mathematics, but good in Years 3 to 6 and 11 to 14. Pupils do well in ICT, humanities, French and physical education. Students in Years 12 to 14 make satisfactory progress and achievement overall towards a range of awards.

Pupils' personal qualities including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Most pupils' attitudes are good and they enjoy their work. Behaviour is good overall although a few pupils have difficult behaviour which is not always dealt with well by staff. Attendance is satisfactory and the amount of unauthorised absence has decreased significantly since the last inspection.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but there is a significant amount of good teaching and learning, particularly in those subjects where pupils do well. Most teachers have good levels of subject expertise but a few are teaching unfamiliar subjects which slows pupils' learning. Support staff are effective, particularly in helping pupils with additional special educational needs. Pupils learn well when they rise to challenges and when they find activities interesting and fun. Assessment is unsatisfactory. **The curriculum is satisfactory** and is broadened well by additional activities. **Pupils' care and welfare are unsatisfactory** largely because procedures are outdated or not fully established. **Guidance and support are good overall**, particularly from the careers service and the speech and language therapist. **Links with the community are good and satisfactory with other schools and colleges.**

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory overall. The leadership of the headteacher is good and he has a clear vision for the direction of the school. Although it is early days, the capacity to improve the management and to focus on raising standards is evident. The work of the governing body is set to improve, but has been ineffective in the past, and is still unsatisfactory.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are generally satisfied with the school. They particularly feel the staff are easy to talk to if there is a problem and think their children are made to work hard. They express concerns about unsatisfactory behaviour, the information they receive about their child's progress or how to help them and a few were concerned about the range of activities.

Pupils feel that the school is good. They like most things but all did not feel that teachers helped them to make their work better or that other children behaved well. Students like the teaching and feel they can talk to staff. They think the school is well run but a few expressed concerns about bullying and would like more homework.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Raise the achievement of pupils in all subjects by establishing effective monitoring procedures for teaching and for the curriculum. Use data more effectively;
- Establish effective and coherent assessment and recording systems. This was an issue at the last inspection;
- Improve the standards of care for pupils;
- Improve the governance of the school along the lines that are planned to ensure that governors have high quality first-hand information to enable them to provide an effective challenge to the school;
- Continue to endeavour to recruit staff to fill vacancies;
- Provide better information for parents. This was an issue at the last inspection;
- Take steps in conjunction with the local education authority to improve the accommodation;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Ensure all health and safety policies and checks are up to date;
- Pay due attention to the care standards requirements for residential pupils;

- Ensure necessary information is included in the prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils' achievements are satisfactory overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well and make good progress in English and science.
- Pupils achieve well in information and communication technology, humanities, French and physical education.
- At times, pupils' progress is slowed by the unsatisfactory behaviour of a few pupils.
- Awards are gained in a number of examination courses.
- Unsatisfactory accommodation and too many temporary staff hinder high standards.

Commentary

1. Overall, there is no measurable difference between the achievement of boys and girls, pupils speaking in an additional language and most pupils with additional special educational needs. There is one exception. A few of the pupils who join the school with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties take time to settle into the routine and their progress slows temporarily.
2. Pupils' achievement is not consistent in all subjects. Comparisons made between pupils' results in national tests in English and tracking sheets show that pupils make at least satisfactory, and many make good progress between Years 2, 6 and 9. All pupils make good progress in improving their communication skills. Effective use of the National Literacy Strategy, modified where appropriate, leads to pupils achieving well in their reading and writing. It is a similar picture in science where good progress is evident year on year and pupils' work is of consistently good quality. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the world increases and it is a favourite subject of pupils who get to "find out about things". However, in mathematics, pupils do not do so well and almost a half of the scores analysed show that pupils' levels had not improved well from previous years. Achievement is good for the younger pupils to Year 6, then slows between Years 7 and 10 for many pupils and then improves from Year 11 onwards. These differences reflect the quality of teaching and learning and how effectively the National Numeracy Strategy is implemented. The difficult behaviour of a few pupils who join the school between Years 7 and 10 has an effect on pupils' progress because it takes up staff time. This is a problem throughout the school, but is better dealt with by some staff than others. When activities lack interest for these pupils, they are more demanding and occasionally cause disturbance to learning.
3. The accommodation, equipment and expertise of the teacher for information and communication technology (ICT) make a positive contribution to pupils' good achievement in this subject. The provision of a technician for ICT has been a wise move and this contributes strongly to pupils' success. Although pupils achieve well in physical education there are hindrances to pupils doing better in the facilities available. Both the accommodation and the lack of support assistants after lunch, which are also problems for other subjects, limit what is possible to do. Pupils also achieve well in humanities and in French because they are well taught and make good progress in lessons. In religious education, pupils make satisfactory progress and achievement partly because the main teaching room is so small it limits the teaching styles that can be used. In other subjects, including personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship, pupils' achievements are satisfactory overall. Part of the difficulties in raising the achievement of pupils has been recruitment problems and at present there are five vacancies, four filled by temporary staff. This has also led to a lack of time for adequate checking by senior staff of the quality of education, particularly teaching.

4. The number of examinations taken by pupils has increased since the last inspection. Last year, four more-able pupils achieved lower grades in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examination in mathematics and seven students gained grades in textiles. A notable high level of achievement last year was the entry level awards gained in French by a particularly able group of Year 10 pupils. This clearly demonstrates the philosophy of entering pupils when they are ready. Seven entry level awards were also gained in mathematics by more-able pupils in Year 10. In Year 11, many pupils achieved entry level awards in mathematics, science, ICT, drama, modern foreign languages and physical education. Ten awards were gained in English and in textiles, five in food technology and three in graphics.
5. More-able students in Year 12 gained entry level awards in business studies and six in numeracy. Between Years 12 and 14, a further three students gained numeracy awards and one in physical education. The range of examination courses has increased since 2002 and widens opportunities for students who were successful in passing Achievement Tests in literacy. Two students gained Skillpower certificates, eight passed the Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) ICT examination and six students gained units towards a Leisure and Tourism General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ). Pupils make satisfactory progress studying for the Award Scheme and Development Network (ASDAN) and last year six pupils gained bronze awards. In Year 13, six students gained the 'Transition Challenge' award and two pupils the 'Towards Independence' in Year 14. This year pupils' and students' work indicates that more are set to achieve these awards.
6. Although it is early days to judge whether statutory targets set will be met most should be achievable. The most difficult may be the improvement in the reading age of all pupils by six months in Years 6 and 9.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance and punctuality in the main school and for students aged 16 to 19 is satisfactory. Pupils' attitudes to school and to each other are positive. The school's ethos and good relationships foster pupils' development into increasingly responsible and reliable young people. Behaviour is generally good. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are encouraged well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attendance has improved and there is less unauthorised absence since the last inspection.
- Good support from the education welfare officer.
- Not all tutor group registers are marked correctly.
- The majority of pupils are polite, helpful and proud of their school.
- A few pupils have difficult behaviour leading to the number of exclusions.
- Pupils are keen to participate in the wide range of activities.
- There is insufficient staffing to manage the behaviour of pupils in corridors and lessons.
- Particularly effective moral and social learning take place in the residential setting.
- Relationships are good and pupils trust their teachers to sort out any problems.

Commentary

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	11.9
National data for similar schools	9.6

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.1
National data for similar schools	2.8

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

7. Pupils generally arrive punctually to school with many enjoying the benefit of the breakfast club before lessons begin. The improvement in attendance figures since the previous inspection has come about as a result of staff phoning parents on the pupils' first day of absence and following up other unexplained absences. The close liaison that now exists with the education welfare officer has also been beneficial in encouraging pupils who have had poor attendance back into school and in encouraging parents to ensure their children attend regularly. Attendance certificates which also reward improvement are effective. A few class tutors do not enter a mark for every pupil at registration which is contrary to statutory requirements.
8. Most pupils have good attitudes to school. They are proud of White Spire and would not want to go anywhere else. They feel safe and happy. Many of them mentioned teachers or support staff as being 'the best thing about my school'. They are interested in their work, try hard and are pleased when they succeed. They respond well to praise but are also happy to praise others for their efforts. Their attitude to school is summed up by the pupils in Year 7 who said; "We all get along together as a team and the teachers are there for us." A few, usually pupils that have arrived more recently, find it difficult to settle to work.
9. Behaviour is good in the majority of contexts. Pupils listen well, show respect for others and can be trusted to do as they have been asked. Pupils respond well to the reward system. Most teachers are skilled in ensuring that no pupil receives too many rewards or punishments, whilst still maintaining an atmosphere of fairness. 'Golden time' is successful as a behaviour management strategy for those pupils with the maturity to control themselves now for a reward later. It also works better in the classes where the activities and equipment are attractive and reserved exclusively for the 'golden time' session. There is insufficient staffing in corridors and a number of lessons to cope with the increasing numbers of pupils in Years 8 to 10 who have behaviour problems. This has a detrimental effect on the concentration and progress of the other pupils in these classes. Although there is an element of bullying, it is dealt with effectively by the school. There were a number of exclusions in the last year which involved nine pupils. This reflects the school's coming to terms with providing for pupils with more complex behaviour difficulties and underlines the need for consistency in behaviour management.
10. Pupils' personal development is good. They are given many opportunities to co-operate when working in groups in class or helping to organise a school event. They take increasing responsibility for performing set tasks, culminating for a number in the job of prefect when they reach Year 11 or Years 12 to 14. Being the class representative on the school council is seen as a very important task. Older pupils spoke of how they form protective attachments to younger ones and safeguard them from boisterous behaviour in the playground. Pupils become more confident as they get older. Participation in work experience and college courses increases their maturity and self-esteem. For example, a Year 12 student who initially shook with nerves now talks to other students on the course and goes to the college canteen to choose her own refreshments.
11. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. Assemblies and 'thought for the week' offer opportunities for reflection on various ideas and values. In religious education lessons pupils find out what is special to other people and learn to respect their beliefs and values. Some lessons provide materials, which excite and captivate pupils. For example a leaf skeleton in art or a set of vivid graphics in ICT.
12. Provision for pupils' moral development is good. They know why you need school rules and in some cases have helped to formulate class rules. There are good opportunities in the PSHE and citizenship programme to discuss and act out right and wrong responses to situations. In the residential provision there are clear moral structures for right and wrong and high expectations of pupils. Pupils know that privileges have to be earned and that breaking rules results in loss of free time. By Year 12, students have a clear view of right and wrong in preparation for life when they leave school.
13. Provision for pupils' social development is good. They have good daily opportunities to develop their social skills. The residential week and all the other trips to museums, parks and theatres

help them to get along with each other and to interact with members of the public. Helping and participating in events in school such as discos, barbecues and talent shows build up a repertoire of social skills for leisure occasions. There are particularly strong routines in the residential provision which develop pupils' ability to take turns and to respect each other's private space. However, in Years 12 to 14, students' opportunities to socialise with each other are restricted through their poor accommodation.

14. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. In geography they compare other communities with their own and in PSHE they consider how they and their families fit into the community. They visit local places of worship, learn about the important religious festivals and find out how marriages are performed in different cultures. The good contribution made by the creative and expressive arts has included listening to the work of world composers, looking at textiles and art from a variety of places and displays from dance troupes from India, Africa and Italy.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	145	14	2
White – any other White background	3	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	4	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	3	0	0

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is satisfactory.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory although there is a significant percentage of good teaching and learning. The curriculum is satisfactory overall but there is good provision for additional activities particularly in the residential part of the school. Pupils' support and guidance is effective but elements of care are unsatisfactory. The school has good links with the community.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Assessment is unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a substantial amount of good teaching and learning.
- Most staff have expertise in the subjects they are teaching but a few are teaching unfamiliar subjects.
- Effective use of praise and encouragement keeps pupils working well.
- Pupils' behaviour is often dealt with well but inconsistencies lead to unsatisfactory behaviour which slows learning.

- Support staff are effective.
- Methods of teaching are restricted by unsatisfactory accommodation.
- A lack of a formal system for assessment leads to varying practice and inadequate use in a number of lessons.
- Use of games and humour makes learning fun – pupils enjoy their work and learn effectively.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 60 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
0 (0 %)	4 (7 %)	26 (43 %)	27 (45 %)	3 (5 %)	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.

- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but there is a considerable amount of good teaching, and occasional lessons where teaching and learning are very good or, conversely, unsatisfactory. There is less unsatisfactory teaching than at the last inspection but also a significantly smaller percentage of lessons where teaching and learning are good or very good. As a result, improvement is unsatisfactory and reflects difficulties in recruiting staff and problems in maintaining the monitoring of teaching over the last year.
- There is little variation between the quality of teaching and learning for different age groups, and in most instances all pupils' needs are met, such as pupils with additional special educational needs or those speaking English as an additional language. There are differences between subjects. English language and literacy are taught consistently well and occasionally, very well. The quality of teaching and learning in mathematics is satisfactory overall. Implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy is not consistent and a few staff lack specialist knowledge, particularly in Years 7 to 14. In one instance, for example, too little time was spent reminding pupils of strategies to work out how to spot numbers that divide evenly by a two or a five and pupils struggled to work out the numbers that divided evenly into 69. Teaching and learning are good in science and make good use of a specialist teaching area. The effective support of a technician is a strong factor in the good teaching in information and communication technology. The careful planning of lessons and interesting range of activities contribute to the good teaching and learning in physical education, humanities and French. In other subjects, teaching and learning are satisfactory.
- Most staff bring out the best in pupils through judicious use of praise and encouragement. They create a positive atmosphere in their lessons which helps to build good relationships. Pupils' self esteem and confidence grow and they are prepared to work hard and attempt more difficult work. In only the second Year 7 textiles lesson, pupils completed their design and decorated the fabric for bags they were making. Where staff are less positive, pupils tend to give up too easily. Praise and encouragement are used well by staff to prevent pupils from behaving unsatisfactorily. Most teachers follow the school systems; however, a few fail, for example, to insist on pupils waiting to be dismissed at the end of a lesson which often contributes to unsatisfactory behaviour in the corridors. It was noticeable that pupils in one class in particular behaved well for certain staff but misbehaved for others.
- In almost all lessons support staff make a positive difference to the progress that pupils make. Good examples were seen in English where two assistants worked well with small groups using appropriate activities for the levels of ability of their pupils. Support staff are very effective when working on a one-to-one basis with pupils on the autistic spectrum and those with behaviour difficulties. They are aware of what these pupils can achieve and provide a good level of challenge for them. Teachers are constricted in what they can do with pupils during the time after lunch when support staff are having their break. In one instance, the

unsatisfactory behaviour of a few pupils led to a loss of momentum in a physical education session because sufficient staff were not available. The way teachers choose to teach is constrained by the size and shape of a number of classrooms which slows pupils' learning, for example, no room to attempt group work. Because pupils are too close together, their behaviour is often less good and time has to be spent dealing with it. Students in Years 12 to 14 make gains in their personal and social development but, despite the best efforts of many staff, the classrooms where they are taught often hinder the effective use of these skills.

19. Pupils learn well when they enjoy their lessons. They participate in activities they see as 'games' with enthusiasm and achieve well. For example, trying to compile the most number of three letter words in an English starter activity or playing a version of 'Simon Says' in French. Humour works well too. In a Year 12 to 14 ICT lesson where they were learning how to send electronic mail (e-mail) the students' interest was captured by the teacher 'asking for a pay rise' on his example. They thought this was a good idea – was it going to be sent? In these examples, the level of difficulty for the pupils was high and they did well. Where work is pitched at too easy a level, pupils do not make the gains they should. Most staff use ICT satisfactorily in their work with pupils. For example, to draw stylised faces representing a range of emotions to complement drawings pupils were doing in a Year 7 art and design lesson.
20. In subjects where there is a clear assessment system, such as in physical education, pupils are very aware of how well they are doing and what they need to achieve to make progress. There is a teacher-devised method in music which is effective but narrow. Pupils have to play increasingly complex pieces and are proud of achievements at higher levels. "I am at level eight" remarked one pupil in Year 9. In many lessons, teachers use questioning well to establish what pupils have learnt although occasionally time ran out for this activity. There is, however, a great deal of inconsistency; for example, comments made on pupils' work vary and there is a wide range of recording of pupils' progress. This supports the concerns of parents that staff did not give their children sufficient information on how to make their work better. Targets may be set for pupils but they are not tightly enough linked to what they can do and what they need to do to improve. Students in Years 12 to 14 commented that many of their targets were to complete work. Assessment is an area that the headteacher has identified as needing improvement.
21. A significant number of parents raised questions about homework. It is used satisfactorily and was regularly set and collected during the inspection. A substantial amount of work sheets are used, partly because of a lack of books, notably in English. Pupils lost 'golden time' if they did not do their homework. Year 7 pupils stated they had homework 'every day and it was checked' and that 'you must do it'. Students interviewed in Years 12 to 14 commented that they did not feel they got enough homework and a lot of it was finishing what they had done in lessons, but good examples were seen of research, for example, connected with child care lessons.

The curriculum

Overall the curriculum is satisfactory and provides a broad range of opportunities. There are very good additional activities. The quality of accommodation is unsatisfactory, as is staffing and resources are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Wide and interesting range of enrichment activities.
- Very good lunch time and after-school activities including opportunities to take part in sport. Very good range of activities for those in residence.
- Effective community-based work experience for pupils.
- Good range of examinations for pupils in Years 10 to 14.
- Lack of overall curriculum plan and checking system.
- Accommodation is poor for students in Years 12 to 14.

- Too many temporary staff and insufficient staff in the residential provision.

Commentary

22. The curriculum meets requirements and the needs of all pupils. It is broadened by a range of activities which capture the pupils' interest. In addition to subjects that are usually taught, during the time they are in Years 2 to 6, pupils go horse riding which increases their co-ordination and confidence. There is good emphasis on teaching communication skills through all subjects, and lessons such as 'circle time' give the younger pupils opportunities to sit in a circle and talk and listen to others. There are enrichment activities for pupils in Year 7 onwards that give an element of choice. Much thought and planning has gone into this element of the school's curriculum and expertise is sought from the local community. A basketball coach improves pupils' skills and artists in felt-making provide ideas and techniques. Pupils work on the 'One World Quilt' and learn how to drum. Real life experiences include in-depth work about re-cycling and sustainability in the locality, membership of the Royal Horticultural Society and the development of school garden areas. The pupils were awarded third place in the 'Greenfinger Awards', a national competition. There is appropriate provision for sex and education and education in the dangers of drug misuse as part of the PSHE programme.
23. There is a very good range of school clubs that meet throughout the day. The breakfast club is also a good social occasion. There are lunchtime clubs in a variety of sports, dance and other interests such as chess, recorder and wildlife. After school there is a trampoline club and, in the evening, a fortnightly youth club with over 50 members on its register. The school has very good contacts with local sports clubs including Wimbledon Football Club, Northampton Rugby Club and MK Lions Basketball Club. The arts are well served by many visits to local theatres and galleries and by having artists in residence, story-tellers, theatre groups, musicians and dance groups in the school.
24. In the residential provision, the curriculum is extended well with activities organised for pupils before breakfast and every evening after school. Swimming and ten pin bowling, for example, give these pupils the opportunity to be active and to mix with others.
25. Community based education and work experience for pupils aged 14 to 19 are good. All pupils in Year 10 are introduced to working in the community with such groups as Age Concern, Oxfam and Mind. Year 11 pupils and Years 12 to 14 students undertake work experience in a variety of settings including local supermarkets, garden centres and day nurseries. This provides good preparation for the world of work.
26. There is a good range at different levels of examinations and awards. Pupils may take entry level examinations from Year 10 depending on their aptitudes. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 work towards gaining the bronze ASDAN award and this work is continued by students in Years 12 to 14 who work on the 'Transition Challenge' and the 'Towards Independence' awards. Although a few parents felt that their children in Years 12 to 14 were not moving on in their studies, the curriculum is different, focused on the next stage of employment or college and builds on what has been learnt previously. Specific courses, such as child care and business studies for the more-able students and lessons in household skills and leisure pursuits, including gardening and Yoga, are introduced. Subjects such as English and mathematics are taught to include what pupils need to know for the future. Additionally, college courses are available but courses leading to an award are studied in school. This is a good improvement since the last inspection.
27. At present there is no overall curriculum plan and many developments have taken place independently. A lack of up-to-date overall plans of what is to be taught in a few subjects together with targets for pupils that are not always sharp enough result in teachers not always being sure about what has already been learnt. This is an area that the new headteacher has identified for improvement. Currently, there are no formal systems for checking what is taught. Although governors have undertaken limited monitoring, this is not linked to an overall strategy

to ensure all areas are covered systematically. Similarly, subject leaders have developed their own processes, some of which, such as English, are more effective than others. This is particularly important when observing teaching is so limited and there is a significant number of temporary staff.

28. 'Golden time' gives pupils opportunities for the last twenty minutes at the end of the day, and for longer for pupils in Years 3 to 6, to make a choice of activity in return for good behaviour. This is a substantial period of time, when as pupils stated "we only get one lesson of ICT a week" and "we don't do art this year and it is my favourite subject".
29. Accommodation in the school is unsatisfactory overall. The ICT room and equipment helps pupils achieve well and similarly the science room is much appreciated; "you get to use the equipment", a Year 7 pupil commented. However, there are significant areas where the unsatisfactory accommodation limits the learning opportunities of the pupils. Many rooms are very small which restricts teaching methods. This is true in design and technology where the textiles room is too small. The art and music room is a good specialist facility although best use is not made of it and the storage of equipment is unsatisfactory. The closure of the swimming pool and the fitness centre, together with the small hall and lack of storage facilities for physical education equipment, significantly limits what is taught. Students in Years 12 to 14 have poor facilities and it is remarkable that they achieve as well as they do. There is no common room or social area for them. They are based in old, temporary, demountable classrooms which do not convey to the students a feeling of being valued and are not even sited together. One can no longer be used because it is in a dangerous condition, another is cramped and cold. As one student remarked "It is difficult to write neatly when you are cold".
30. Difficulties in recruiting staff have led to too many temporary teachers. The deputy headteacher had to take a class last year restricting his management duties. At present there is no deputy headteacher, which continues to be problematic. Pupils' progress is slowed when there is no subject leader to take responsibility for ensuring that work builds on what is learned from year to year. A few staff are teaching subjects where they do not have expertise and confidence, which also limits the progress pupils make. The school has advertised nationally and hopes to fill vacancies shortly. There are, at times, too few staff in the residential provision, potentially leading to gaps in supervision.
31. Learning resources are satisfactory overall, but there are not enough good quality books in English. This prevents them learning really well. Resources are not stored effectively in art and music which makes it difficult, for example, for staff to select instruments for lessons in other classrooms.

Care, guidance and support

The provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety is unsatisfactory overall. There is a good level of support, advice and guidance for pupils. The way the school involves pupils through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very caring teaching and support staff
- Policies relating to health and safety, care and welfare are out-dated or inappropriate
- Care standards in relation to the residential provision have not been adopted
- The work experience programme provides very good support for pupils
- Good support from speech and language therapist
- Good, impartial careers advice from Connexions adviser
- Pupils trust staff to resolve any difficulties they have
- Involvement of pupils through school council

Commentary

32. All staff are very caring and supportive but the procedures for dealing with specific matters are not always adequate. For example, the school needs to implement proper procedures for obtaining parental authorisation to administer medication, the health and safety and child protection policies are out-of-date, recruitment procedures for staff require attention and care standards in relation to the residential provision are only just being implemented. There is no medical room, which affects pupils' privacy as well as the way they can be cared for by staff. One result is that medication in school is currently administered in the reception area, which is unsatisfactory. Routines for administration of medicine in the residential provision are good. Although all staff had a short period of training in child protection procedures recently, there is a lack of sufficient and up-to-date, in-depth training, particularly for those involved in residential care. The school's guidelines for child protection are not included in the staff handbook and consequently, specific information is not given to new staff.
33. Almost all staff are trained in specialist behaviour management techniques, which is important in view of the increase in the number of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties in the school. New staff are enrolled on courses as quickly as possible. The methods for recording any incidents such as difficulties with behaviour so that pupils can be monitored effectively need to be recorded in a bound book both in school and in the residential provision. In spite of the drop in the number of pupils in residence, the staffing levels are not sufficient. There are a few unsatisfactory health and safety aspects around the school, such as potential tripping hazards, which have been notified to the headteacher.
34. A number of issues raised at the previous inspection remain, such as the inadequate number of toilets and the need for a full, formal risk assessment audit across the whole school as well as the lack of an effective health and safety policy. Overall, improvement in this area since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory.
35. Although assessment procedures in the school are unsatisfactory overall, because staff know pupils very well, pupils' personal development is monitored effectively. Changes in behaviour are quickly noticed and time is spent with pupils talking about their difficulties. Individual pupils in residence are not allocated a key worker to follow their progress but every pupil has a care plan and targets are linked to pupils' personal and social targets well. Pupils with specific needs are effectively supported. The provision of speech and language therapy, for example, contributes well towards the progress pupils make in improving their communication skills. They work in a variety of ways best suited for pupils' needs including withdrawing pupils from lessons and working in lessons. In one lesson, pupils in Years 3 and 4 participated in a 'talk time group'. This was highly successful in encouraging pupils to speak clearly, in sentences and to listen hard. Pupils who have particular behaviour difficulties are monitored more closely by the use of tutor sheets that record how well they have behaved at different stages throughout the day and which can then be used to decide whether any 'golden time' has been lost. The headteacher is investigating arrangements to provide an 'independent listener' for those in the residential provision. It is necessary for pupils in residence to have easy private access to a telephone. Although there is a telephone in the office, pupils would have to ask permission. There is no 'child friendly' version of the complaints procedure freely available.
36. Older pupils who go out of school for work experience receive very good support and guidance from the co-ordinator and benefit greatly in relation to their personal development from such support. For example, several students have been encouraged to travel independently to their placements. Pupils also receive good advice and guidance from the careers service at relevant times of their school life. The Connexions adviser visits regularly and gives advice at transition reviews for pupils.

37. The induction arrangements for pupils new to the school are satisfactory although the amount of information the school receives about new arrivals is variable. They are assessed and are paired up with a “buddy” for the initial settling in period. Virtually all the parents who replied to the pre-inspection questionnaire felt that the arrangements for helping their child settle at school were good.
38. The school council has representatives from each class and meets regularly. Pupils are happy that what they raise is taken seriously and result in some changes taking place, such as to get more litterbins. However, the problems concerning the toilet facilities are mentioned repeatedly in the minutes over the last few years. Pupils can also use their tutor time to voice any concerns. Pupils and students of all ages spoken to are very confident that adults will respond to their concerns. This was also confirmed by the very positive response in the pupil questionnaires in relation to pupils feeling that they had at least one adult in school they could talk to if they had a problem.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents are satisfactory. These have not improved since the last inspection. There is a good partnership with the local community. This is a good improvement. Links with other schools are satisfactory and are good with colleges of further education, maintaining the position as at the previous inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Work experience is very good and contributes well to preparing pupils for when they leave school.
- There are effective links with the local business community.
- Good links with colleges of further education broaden pupils’ opportunities to learn.
- Overall, too little information is provided to parents about how well their children are doing. However, homework diaries are used well for residential pupils.
- There are good arrangements for reviewing the progress made by pupils in public care.
- Too little information is provided for parents about the school and the prospectus and governing body’s annual report have information omitted.
- A useful annual questionnaire seeks parents’ views about the school.

Commentary

39. Work experience is very well managed. Over time the school has built up an impressive list of local employers who provide a broad range of opportunities for pupils to sample the world of work. These include shops, garden centres and care homes. The most important aspect that makes these arrangements so successful is the careful and detailed planning that takes place before hand. Pupils are involved in the choice of where they go that genuinely provide them with realistic goals for when they leave school or college. Placements begin in Year 10 and continue each year until pupils leave school. While on work experience, pupils have high quality support from the school’s organiser, including at least weekly visits to check that everything is fine and a carefully detailed record of what the pupil has learned. A review identifies the progress that has been made and any areas needing further improvement. An indication of the success of the scheme is that employers frequently wish to offer the pupils permanent jobs afterwards. Pupils receive a certificate for their work experience achievement through the ASDAN award scheme.
40. Links with local businesses are good. These extend the learning opportunities for pupils in addition to donations to school funds and resources. For example, members of the Rotary Club provide mock interview experience and the school is able to offer a heavily subsidised breakfast club through its contact with a local food store.

41. Only a few pupils attend other schools for some of their lessons, to extend what they learn and to prepare them for a possible return to a mainstream school. Arrangements for supporting these pupils in the other school's lessons are good; however, too little information is provided before the placement begins. There are good links with colleges of further education, with weekly attendance by older pupils on a range of courses. This familiarity with college life helps pupils when they attend full-time after leaving school.
42. Reports sent to parents contain too little information about the progress their children are making and about the topics they are to learn about. However, the homework diaries used by residential pupils give helpful details about what they have done during the week. These diaries are also used well by residential staff to help pupils with their homework in the evenings. The school effectively involves all relevant persons in the annual reviews for pupils who are in public care. However, there is little parent involvement in many reviews. This, together with IEPs not being sent home routinely, restricts parents' ability to become involved in their children's education. There is also too little information for parents provided about the school. The governors' annual report to parents and the prospectus do not include all of the required information. The published attendance figures for pupils differ from those sent to the Department for Education and Skills. The school does carry out a valuable annual questionnaire survey of parents' views. The homework diaries were revamped in response to parental comments; however, there is no parents association to develop further opportunities for their involvement in school.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The newly appointed headteacher is providing good leadership. The management of the school is satisfactory. The governance of the school is ineffective.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The newly appointed headteacher has been effective in enabling other staff to demonstrate their leadership qualities; he has created a new strong sense of purpose and direction.
- Improvement in teaching quality has been hindered by the difficulties of recruiting full-time, well-qualified teachers, and the uncertainties caused by the local education review of special education provision.
- The school development plan does not reflect current aims and vision of the school.
- Day-to-day finances and administration are good.
- Senior leaders are building effective staff teams.
- The governing body is very supportive of the school; however, in the past, they have not been effective in monitoring the performance of the school.
- Staff induction is not sufficiently formal and structured.
- Several areas of the school accommodation are unsatisfactory or poor.
- Pupils' statements, for those who benefit from residential education, are not up-to-date.

Commentary

43. The newly appointed headteacher has been immediately effective in re-structuring the senior management team into a new leadership team. He has also extended the team further to take in views and comments from middle management teachers. Although very new, this appears to be working well and is giving staff a voice in the school which was lacking previously. Staff appreciate this, take their responsibilities seriously, and as a result are working extremely hard to implement positive aspects to raise standards.
44. The school has been short of at least three full-time teachers for some considerable time and is now short of five. This resulted in the deputy headteacher having to teach full time for the whole of last year. Consequently, aspects of the school, such as lesson observations and monitoring, have been considerably hindered during the last year. This has contributed to there being less very good teaching and learning and as a result, has limited the amount of

very good achievement by the pupils. Subject leaders have been unable to monitor their own subject when taught by other teachers. The school acknowledges this, and is doing all it can to fill vacant positions by recruiting teachers. The headteacher and the governing body are prepared to continue under difficult circumstances, for example, without a deputy headteacher, in order to find the correct person for the job, in view of the long-term goal to benefit the school and raise standards.

45. Two years ago staff read in a local paper that the school was about to close. This came as a bolt from the blue and, although the school knew special education provision in the authority was under review, no mention had been made of White Spire closing. This had a detrimental effect of the morale of staff and senior staff have had to work hard to lift staff to re-establish the positive ethos in the school. Although there is a good ethos in school there is still some uncertainty waiting for the final outcome of the local education authority special education review. This contributes to difficulties in attracting teachers to join the staff.
46. The current school development plan is actually from the previous management, as the headteacher, leadership team and the governing body have not had time, in four weeks, to update the plan. Consequently the plan does not clearly reflect the vision of the changes in the way the school is planned to develop. This has been acknowledged by the school and is a priority in their planning. The decision has been taken to evaluate 'golden time' which has been running for a year and has a varying success rate.
47. The management of the school is on balance, satisfactory overall. An effective meetings structure has been established and is working well, ensuring staff are kept informed. There are strengths in the smooth day-to-day running of the school, which is good. Staff with high quality administrative skills are very knowledgeable about day-to-day matters. The bursar produces clear figures for the finance committee and also attends meetings to further explain to the governors and answer any questions raised. The governors appreciate this and as a result, have a better understanding of the financial running of the school.
48. Through the guidance of the headteacher and his vision of a collaborative team style of leadership, senior staff are building effective teams, such as the key stage curriculum team. This is a new initiative but is already beginning to have an effect on the way in which the curriculum is to be planned, tracked and recorded. This in turn is expected to raise standards within the school.
49. Members of the governing body are very committed and supportive of the school but in the past have been ineffective in carrying out their duties. They have not carried out their role adequately to find out for themselves how well the school is doing, have not provided sufficient challenge when information has not been forthcoming, not ensured that statutory requirements are met or that care standards are met in the residential provision. Issues also remain from the last inspection. The clear vision and innovative approach of the new headteacher gives the governors the opportunity they need to carry out their responsibilities. For instance, they are nominating individual governors to specific areas of the school, including literacy and numeracy and are developing structured visits to school such as the residential provision. The relationship between the governors and the new headteacher look to be positive and governors are keen to take this opportunity to hold the school to account as 'critical friends' and work together to increase standards.
50. There are inadequate systems to ensure that recruitment procedures are carried out correctly. Staff induction is neither sufficiently structured nor formal to ensure that new staff get to know important elements about the school and pupils as quickly as possible. For example, information concerning child protection is not covered in the induction process. This is being remedied before any new appointments are made and demonstrates how effectively management issues are being dealt with.

51. The last inspection report was critical of elements of the accommodation. This has not been successfully tackled and for Year 12 to 14 students is now poor and is a barrier to their further improvement. One of their temporary classrooms has been taken out of use as unsafe. The breadth of last year's examination courses in physical education was narrowed due to lack of the swimming pool and a fitness room. These areas have closed, but no replacement has been offered.
52. Occasionally pupils in school are offered opportunities to be in residence for up to four nights per week, to enhance their education. At the moment there are 11 pupils in this facility and clearly, it has a beneficial effect on their attitudes, behaviour and personal development. However, as at the last inspection, there are no referral and admission criteria, they are only just being developed, and none of the pupils have had their statements of special educational need amended to include this provision. This is very unsatisfactory and lacks appropriate risk assessment.
53. Overall, leadership and management of the school have made a slight improvement since the previous inspection but have potential to make further improvement. The shared commitment of staff ensures that pupils' needs are met and high morale in school has been a key factor in this improvement and raising of pupils' achievements.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	1520073	Balance from previous year	-15233
Total expenditure	1489835	Balance carried forward to the next	15005
Expenditure per pupil	9500*		

* This figure includes income and expenditure for pupils in the residential provision.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4 AND SIXTH FORM

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make good progress and achieve well in a variety of examinations.
- National strategies are used well.
- Pupils learn well when they understand and enjoy their tasks.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- The literacy and English co-ordinators provide effective leadership of the subject throughout the school.
- There is no system for checking that teachers set the same standards for pupils when they assess their work.
- Data collected is not systematically analysed.
- Resources, including books, are limited.

Commentary

54. Pupils in all year groups make good progress and achieve well in English. This can be seen both in lessons and in the longer term by each individual's improvements in test results. Older pupils and students achieve well in a variety of examination courses at Entry Level 1, 2 and 3 and in Key Skills and Certificates of Achievement. Pupils' progress and achievement have improved since the last inspection. This is partly due to the introduction of a skilful adaptation of the Literacy and Key Stage 3 Strategies and to the good quality of the teaching and learning. Teachers make clear to pupils the objectives of the lesson and, as a result, pupils know what they are expected to do and enjoy activities. Younger pupils identify the initial letters of their names and complete name puzzles. They get a lot of fun from dressing up as characters and reading a big book together showing real pleasure and anticipation as the final pages are reached. Pupils in Year 9 talk about the characters in the book they have been reading and use computers to design a cover to illustrate the story. *Macbeth* is studied in Year 10 and pupils work together to develop script ideas based on scenes from the play. Students in Years 12 to 14 are very involved and share good ideas with staff and each other as they look for sources of information for their Key Skills presentations.
55. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use their expertise and knowledge of pupils' needs to plan lessons well. In each lesson, activities are well matched to pupils' interests and abilities to ensure concentration is maintained. For example a quick fire competition to build as many words as possible from randomly drawn letter cards was keenly fought by pupils in Year 9. While in Year 10, pupils were able to use their knowledge of how to build dramatic tension to good effect in their script writing.
56. English has two subject leaders, a literacy co-ordinator and an English coordinator, and this arrangement works well. They have ensured that plans and overviews are in place and that meetings with those teaching English are held regularly. There is information about the levels of achievement of all pupils including test results for reading and national tests or tasks at the end of Years 2, 6 and 9. This contributes to the good improvement made overall since the last inspection. At present, there is no system for checking judgements made by teachers about the levels achieved by pupils or a systematic analysis of test results that would enable their use as part of assessing progress or to help set appropriate targets for the future. A further barrier to pupils achieving very well is the limited resources. There is a shortage of appropriate

big books for younger pupils. It is difficult for them to see text and pictures clearly when the class listens to a story. Other pupils have to share books because there are not enough group readers for some lessons. Additionally, a number of books show signs of wear and tear. The library is sparsely stocked and has limited supplies of both fiction and non-fiction books.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

57. Language and literacy are appropriately developed in other subjects. There is a good emphasis on teaching new words in almost all lessons. Staff take time to write words on whiteboards, for example, so pupils can see them and read them with their teachers. As part of a Year 5 and 6 science topic on tooth care, a poem was used. In a lesson about Harvest Festival, the speaking and listening skills of pupils were developed during discussions about where foods come from. Pupils use word processors effectively in information and communication technology and develop their vocabulary and spelling skills. Older students use their skills in discussion and in reading for information to help them to achieve parts of their ASDAN awards.

French

58. Pupils' work and two lessons of French were seen, one in Year 9 and one in Year 10. The high quality of the teaching seen in these lessons and the clear outline of what is to be taught contribute towards the good rates of progress the pupils make towards the entry level examination. This maintains the standards described at the last inspection. Last year pupils in Years 10 and 11 gained examination success; so, this year, French is not being taught in Year 11. Pupils enjoy the 'games' and try hard to get things right. The active, dramatic teaching and use of French to give instructions is carefully done, so that pupils have the level of support they need. This is important because pupils join the school, as late as Year 10, and may not have studied French before. The teacher successfully builds confidence which ensures they learn. Visual clues, such as the teacher miming activities, are used in a version of 'Kim's game' where an item used in the classroom is removed from a tray and pupils have to say in French what it is. A simple recording system has been developed but, because entries are not dated, it does not show how well pupils are making progress.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils do better in Years 3 to 6 and 11 to 14.
- The National Numeracy Framework has improved the structure and content of lessons.
- The activities and the help offered are well matched to pupils' ability levels.
- The subject is not always taught by specialist staff.
- Assessment, recording and tracking pupils' progress are inconsistent.
- Storage and display space are restricted because there is no specialist room.

Commentary

59. Pupils' progress and achievement are good in Years 3 to 6 and in Years 12 to 14. They are satisfactory in Years 7 to 10. The majority of pupils make significant gains in their mathematics between Year 2 and Year 6. According to the data available, progress slows considerably after that. Progress varies between classes, with some showing better achievement than others. Pupils' work shows that they are making progress, mainly in consolidating the four rules of number by practising them in lots of different ways. By the end of Year 11, the vast majority of pupils achieve entry level awards; several at level 3 and a few also succeed at the Foundation Level GCSE examination. One student who succeeded with GCSE mathematics will this year be able to study for a GCSE examination in statistics.

Others, in Years 12 to 14, work towards an adult numeracy qualification. There are more opportunities for students to apply mathematical ideas to situations outside school so they learn how to use mathematics in a wider range of situations.

60. The variation in the progress and achievement made by pupils is largely due to similar differences in the quality of teaching and learning. The ideas and materials introduced by the National Numeracy Strategy are well used in Years 3 to 7. Pupils are encouraged to use strategies like putting the larger number in their heads and counting on, to complete mental addition. Good use is made of video and equipment for demonstrating to the whole class. In Years 8 to 11 teachers' familiarity with National Numeracy Strategy ideas is less consistent and some teachers' confidence in their own mathematics is less sure. Activities do not hold pupils' interest in a few classes in Years 8 to 10 because teachers have to spend more time controlling behaviour than helping pupils learn. Good use of 'show me boards' and an interesting number challenge did, however, eventually calm and involve a Year 9 class. One difficulty for staff is the lack of a base for mathematics which means they have to carry equipment to whatever room they are teaching in. This and the size and shape of a number of rooms restrict the range of teaching methods they can use. In Years 12 to 14, questions are often presented through other subjects or in a pictorial way so that pupils still want to work hard even though a number have been working at the same level for a long while. Teachers know their pupils well and work is set which is at the right level but there is no consistent record kept of the gains they make. In all classes observed the teaching assistants were giving very good help and encouragement to the pupils they were supporting.
61. The leadership of this subject is good and the management is satisfactory. The co-ordinator is enthusiastic and has good subject knowledge. She has high aspirations for the pupils she teaches and is a good role model for other staff in the way she teaches. She has introduced materials and ideas from the National Numeracy Strategy, which most staff are using to advantage. However, there has been less success in introducing Numeracy-style lesson planning and assessment. There is insufficient monitoring of teaching and tracking of pupils' progress for her to see where help might be needed. Although assessment and the lack of a base are unresolved from the last inspection, satisfactory improvement in other matters has been made. Teaching for older pupils is now satisfactory and is good for students in Years 12 to 14. A suitable range of examinations has been developed.

Mathematics across the curriculum

62. Mathematics is evident in a range of other subjects. In the Year 3 to 6 classes opportunities to count and compare numbers come up regularly outside mathematics lessons. Older pupils draw bar charts and present data in tables in design and technology. In ICT, pupils start working with databases and changing the amounts on simple spreadsheets. Pupils in Year 11 used their knowledge of shapes to design packaging and then costed their product. Students in child care consider the needs of the growing baby and the cost of equipment.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All pupils achieve well in the various elements of science.
- Provision for science has improved since the last inspection.
- Pupils' work is planned to have good links with other subjects.
- The co-ordinator, now known as subject leader, is well aware of what needs to be done to further improve standards within science.
- Annual reports to parents need to contain more specific progress in science.

Commentary

63. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and pupils achieve well. This is the same for all pupils including less able and more able, those with additional special needs and those speaking English as an additional language. Good achievement is directly linked to the high quality of teaching. This is good improvement since the previous inspection when provision and achievement were judged to be mainly sound. The curriculum is now well established and the checking of pupils' work enables lessons to be planned to meet the needs of individual pupils. A science laboratory has been developed and resources improved. Pupils appreciate these facilities and enter the laboratory quietly and sensibly. They understand the need for safety and behave accordingly. There is a 'work ethos' and all pupils know that when they are in a science lesson, they are expected to do their best.
64. Links are made well with other subjects to reinforce learning. In a primary science class, pupils investigated the popularity of foods and found out whether the most popular foods were the healthiest or contained most fat. Through good support from the teacher they linked their mathematics experiences well to the lesson by physically building up block graphs of their results. One pupil used his dyna/vox, a small speech synthesiser, effectively to communicate his views to the class. This was very good use of ICT to enable the pupil to fully participate in the lesson. Students in Years 12 to 14 investigated literature on pregnancy testing. Part of their project was to use their literacy skills to re-write the information they found in a 'teenage friendly' way, using everyday language teenagers would understand, such as substituting 'doctor' instead of 'GP'. They went on to prepare a leaflet using their presentation skills on the computer.
65. The science subject leader provides good leadership and manages the subject enthusiastically. She has good subject knowledge and understands the picture of how the subject is improving across the school. By comparing results year on year she can show continuing improvement. Pupils have opportunities to gain grades and awards and a good record of success has been built up over the years. The leader is well aware of what to do to further improve science. She has been unable to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching in other lessons, mainly because the school has been three teachers short and this has had a 'knock on' effect that subject leaders have not had the opportunity to carry out lesson observations. It is planned that when the numbers of staff permit, these observations will be reinstated.
66. Annual reports to parents show what pupils have covered and which topics they have been taught, but they lack information on what pupils know, can do and understand. The leader acknowledges this and plans to rectify the problem in the next reports that go to parents.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT is **good** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' progress and achievement in ICT are good
- Teaching and learning are good and staff knowledgeable
- Various levels of examinations are available to suit all pupils
- All classes use the well-resourced, well-equipped computer room
- Pupils enjoy ICT and try hard
- Some teachers' written lesson planning is minimal
- No assessment system or record of coverage kept

Commentary

67. Overall, pupils make good progress and achieve well. By the end of Year 6, pupils use the basic tools of a drawing program, know how to enter text and a few of the ways to alter layout. They are supported well by staff who help them with their letters and spelling. As is clear from the progress seen in pupils' work, teaching and learning are good on the whole for all pupils, although during the inspection teaching and learning ranged from good to unsatisfactory. This was largely due to technician support becoming unexpectedly unavailable. As a result, occasionally there was too much talking from the teacher which led to restlessness and misbehaviour. Effective use is made of the projector to demonstrate to the whole class and also to use pupils' work as good examples for others to follow. This helps to build pupils' confidence. Teachers are good at spotting common errors and stopping the class to make useful teaching points. In the majority of lessons pupils work at different levels according to their ability and no one is held back. By the end of Year 9, for example, pupils make presentations using PowerPoint, a number with straightforward pages, others using video clips and effects. Pupils had made such good progress by the end of Year 11, last year, that they all achieved an Entry Level qualification, the majority at level 3. Students in Years 12 to 14 continue to improve their skills while studying for an appropriate examination; an adult computer literacy qualification or a Basic Skills ICT qualification. They use ICT wherever it is appropriate in other lessons and learn everyday skills, such as how to send attachments with e-mails.
68. In the majority of classes there is a good relationship between staff and pupils. The staff have good subject knowledge, are patient and encouraging and use humour well. As a result, pupils' interest is maintained, they are keen to learn and the more adept are happy to stop and help a classmate who is stuck. The well-equipped and resourced ICT room is used by all pupils. They enjoy being able to use an up-to-date machine each and this helps them do well. The technician has an important role in keeping the hardware and software functioning and also as a teaching assistant. Lessons are planned to make good use of his skills and are less effective when he is not there.
69. Leadership and management are good. The subject leader is confident, enthusiastic and has high aspirations for pupils and the subject. He provides a good role model for other staff that teach and use ICT in their work. The curriculum is wide and develops pupils' skills year by year but short-term planning is lacking in detail. This occasionally results in a lack of extension work readily available for pupils who finish their work early. The staff know how well each pupil is doing, but there is no record kept of what each pupil can do in order to show progress and help improve pupils' achievement by setting targets that they understand.
70. There has been very good improvement in this subject since the last inspection. It has gone from a narrow curriculum, cramped conditions and inconsistent teaching to confident, competent staff offering a wide range of opportunities in a new computer suite.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

71. Pupils make good use of the skills they have learned in ICT in most other subjects. They word-process reports, stories and poems whenever they can, as many find this easier than handwriting. This happens even in French. They scan photographs in to enhance their topic work and find and import suitable pictures from a CD Rom or the Internet to illustrate their writing. In design and technology, pupils downloaded company logos from the Internet to help them design their own. Pupils and teachers search the Internet for information; for example, pupils in Year 7 found out about levers for design and technology and PSHE teachers chose real accounts of bullying to bring their message home. Teachers use videos to enliven their lessons but few are as yet doing their planning using a computer.

HUMANITIES

Humanities

72. Pupils made good progress in the two lessons seen and showed commitment to their work. They enjoyed the lessons and behaved well. Pupils were taught well and the teachers' subject knowledge and the quality of planning and resources were good. A strong contributory factor to the high quality of teaching and learning is the work of the humanities subject leader. She has developed a wide range of resources carefully linked to modules of the humanities curriculum. There is also a carefully planned and very good range of community links that support the work in humanities. Pupils work files show that their achievements in humanities are good which maintains standards from the last inspection.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a good emphasis on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The main teaching room is too small and adversely affects standards.
- Pupils are well managed.
- The curriculum has been improved.

Commentary

73. Religious education is taught to every class in the school which gives all pupils an insight into religious beliefs and enhances their spiritual, moral and social development well. As a result of satisfactory and, at times, enthusiastic teaching, pupils make sound gains in their knowledge and understanding of a range of faiths. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 show a good knowledge of festivals, particularly the Christian Harvest Festival. They understand the need for various conditions to allow crops to thrive and thank God for providing them and enabling food to grow. Older pupils study sacred literature, such as the Torah and the Koran. They are very interested in religious practice learning that the Torah is kept in an Ark and covered with a mantle. Year 11 pupils voice their feelings sensibly, for example, about arranged marriages. Students in Years 12 to 14 showed great maturity and were very sensible when discussing the way various faiths deal with births, death and marriages.
74. The main teaching room is far too small for the size and number of pupils in classes. This inhibits the strategies which teachers would like to use and leads to pupils making no more than satisfactory progress and achievement overall. For example, it is impossible to allow pupils to move around the room to examine artefacts and resources, or move to work in small groups. It is very difficult for teachers, but they deal with any resulting difficult behaviour well and successfully, often using humour, praise and encouragement to keep pupils interested.
75. Leadership of the subject is satisfactory and the curriculum has improved since the previous inspection. The school continues to teach to the Agreed Syllabus, but work has been modified to be at the right level for pupils. Older pupils pursue an ASDAN module and achieve the award on completion.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

Provision for design and technology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well in textiles and are successful in a good range of qualifications.
- Assessment of what pupils have learned is unsatisfactory.
- Subject leadership is beginning to address the areas required for further improvement in design and technology.

Commentary

76. Pupils' progress and achievements are satisfactory overall. They do well in textiles, which is an area that has developed well since the last inspection. Pupils in Year 6 design and prepare tasty sandwiches, using ingredients from different countries. In Year 9, they design and construct a range of projects, such as a wooden clock faces and tie dye bags. They learn about and make healthy food. Older pupils make models with moving parts, using levers, cams and wheels. Year 11 pupils prepare for and model their examination work in a fashion show. Many gain Certificates of Educational Achievement in textiles and food studies. They are also successful in OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts) entry level awards in textiles and graphic productions and GCSE in textiles.
77. Teaching is satisfactory overall. It is good for textiles, where good planning and class management ensure that pupils work hard and learn new skills effectively. However, except for pupils working towards examinations, there is insufficient assessment of what they know, understand and can do in all aspects of design and technology. This limits their progress as teachers do not have sufficient information to plan as well as they could.
78. Since his appointment less than two years ago, the subject leader has identified and begun to develop areas where further improvement is needed, such as assessment and the facilities for working with wood. Valuable links have been established with businesses that have benefited the subject's resources, including new machinery for woodworking and regular supplies of fabrics. While resources are satisfactory overall, there are too few cookers and sinks in food technology. This restricts pupils' progress as they have to share facilities even when they are capable of working independently. Accommodation is satisfactory overall, with spacious facilities for food technology and working with resistant materials; however, the room used for textiles is too small. Overall, satisfactory improvement has been made since the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

79. Two lessons were seen in art and design and work was scrutinised. It is not possible to make an overall judgement on art and design. There are indications from pupils' work that they make satisfactory progress. A good start is made in Years 3 to 6 where pupils improve their co-ordination skills as they work with a range of media and techniques including collage, paint and pencil drawings such as sunflowers in the style of Van Gogh. At present, there is no subject leader. As a result, pupils' achievements are lowered. Timetabling arrangements are unsatisfactory. This is because the art room is used for teaching English when pupils in Year 7 are too cramped in a classroom to work well. Displays of work in the art room are in many instances more than a year old and unlinked to current areas of work. There are also missed opportunities, for example to explore the work of portrait painters, because temporary staff are

not specialists or aware of what resources may be available. Sketch books show a gradual development of skills over time.

Music

80. Four lessons were seen in music; therefore it is not possible to make an overall judgement in music. Records show that pupils in Years 3 to 6 make satisfactory progress as they develop a sense of rhythm, play percussion instruments and enjoy listening to music. Improvements made since the last inspection have been limited due to the lack of expertise and guidance, because there is no subject leader at present. This results in unsatisfactory progress in Year 7. Activities selected do not have the necessary equipment or the space. For example, there were not enough drums for a whole class activity and four pupils had to use their lunch boxes. A skilled temporary teacher teaches Years 8 to 10. Expectations of work and behaviour are very high and pupils in Year 9 play recorders to a good standard. In Year 10, pupils develop their cultural awareness well building up their knowledge of composers and different types of music. Video clips of 'Cats' and 'Bugsy Malone' were used well to illustrate the musical. Although there is a music room, it has a dual function with art and also houses the careers library. Storage is poorly arranged for ease of access. A weekly lunchtime recorder club enables pupils to play at a very high standard working towards an examination award.

Expressive arts

81. This course is organised well for pupils in Years 10 and 11. There is an emphasis on drama but elements of dance, art and music are introduced. Last year 21 pupils achieved an entry level award in drama. All pupils in the year group are involved in the course. Only one lesson was visited which was a Year 10 drama session. Pupils showed high levels of concentration in their depiction of scenes before and immediately after a train crash. The quality of the teaching was such that pupils managed well despite individuals having to leave and rejoin the lesson due to interviews with the careers adviser. Pupils made great gains in their ability to work as a team, a valuable means of developing social skills. They especially enjoyed the warm up activities playing 'follow my leader's actions' enthusiastically. This involved one pupil taking the lead, others in the group following and changing actions as necessary and another pupil trying to discover who was the leader of the group.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make good progress and achieve well.
- Good links with other sports providers and specialist coaches.
- The lack of support staff hinders teaching at times.
- The subject is well organised and managed.
- There are carefully planned curriculum units with an assessment system.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory.
- There is a very good range of extra-curricular sporting opportunities.

Commentary

82. Pupils make good progress and achieve well in all year groups and entry level awards are gained by the end of Year 11. Since the last inspection, specialist coaching has been introduced and this has helped to ensure that skills are well developed, which shows good improvement. Also opportunities to apply skills in games both in school and in matches with other schools have increased. The subject leader has organised a series of well-planned curriculum units that are designed to ensure that pupils improve their skills in a range of activities. Younger pupils are enthusiastic in dance lessons remembering the simple sequences they have learned and listening carefully to instructions. They can move

rhythmically and count steps together. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 improve their football skills as they listen carefully to the coach and demonstrate skills in passing and shooting. Older students enjoy trampoline lessons and make very good progress in understanding why they should do certain things, for example, warm up exercises. They listen carefully to instructions before attempting moves on the trampoline.

83. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall; it ranges from very good to satisfactory. Where teaching is very good teachers have high levels of expertise in the sport or activity and plan and teach lessons where activities are not easy yet ensure success. For example, in sessions on the trampoline, pupils demonstrate their skills to others and keep their own record cards so that they understand the progress they are making. Where teaching is satisfactory, teachers are hindered by the lack of sufficient support staff to meet the needs of the pupils. This leads to a slowing of pace which occasionally results in difficult behaviour from pupils.
84. The subject is led well. There is an effective assessment system with school-based certificates that pupils work hard to achieve. A very good physical education handbook gives clear advice and guidance on subjects including the curriculum, pupils' dress and health and safety. Unsatisfactory accommodation limits the range of activities. The school hall is small and has restricted storage facilities. Other specialist areas such as the swimming pool and the fitness room have been closed because of health and safety concerns.
85. There are very good opportunities for pupils to take part in sports clubs. Very good links have been made with a range of sports providers in the locality including Wimbledon Football club, Northampton Rugby club and MK Lions Basketball club. Pupils' enthusiasm and enjoyment are enhanced by opportunities to visit these facilities. Pupils' standards are high and the under-14 football team has recently won the Sport Milton Keynes sports achiever of the month team award which they will collect from the mayor early next year.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

One lesson of business studies and one and a part of a lesson on childcare were seen. Several lessons that contributed towards the ASDAN award were seen and are recorded under subject headings.

Business studies

86. Seven students gained awards in business studies in both 2002 and 2003. The course is at entry level. Students explore business opportunities there may be in school. In the lesson seen the work was not sufficiently structured and pupils did not make the progress they should. In the same lesson two pupils were studying independently for their GNVQ in **leisure and tourism**. One was successfully establishing routes to places in Milton Keynes with a great deal of support. The other was merely copy typing from a holiday catalogue and received no help or guidance. Progress in this instance was unsatisfactory.

Child care

87. The child care course for students in Years 12 to 14 started this term and is partly taught through science. The teacher's planning is good and pertinent and well prepared resources are used to ensure pupils understand, such as the bird's nest to prompt suggestions about the care needed for young. As a result, students are keen to work hard and they produced well-devised charts showing the needs of a baby. They are prepared, in response to careful questioning from the teacher, to give a sensible point of view arguing that some items are not as important as others. For example, "a baby can be carried; you don't really need a pushchair".

Asdan

88. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are making satisfactory progress towards gaining a bronze award but the amount of time they have is limited. In Years 12 to 14, time is increased but, so far, the number of awards of 'Transition Challenge' and 'Towards Independence' have been limited. However, students' work shows their evidence is building up steadily. Students are encouraged to 'think hard' about the design of their greeting card in the self advocacy and communication part of the ASDAN challenges. Opportunities are taken to discuss a range of events where cards may be suitable including Eid, Fathers' day, and Christmas which develops multi-cultural awareness. One student works out a design on the computer.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Provision in personal, social and health education and citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Inconsistent quality of teaching and learning
- Number of staff lack training in PSHE and particularly in citizenship
- Good relationships between staff and pupils help pupils think about important issues in a mature way
- Materials not always appropriately adapted
- A comprehensive scheme of work but lack of assessment system
- Good links with the careers service (Connexions)

Commentary

89. Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress and achievement in PSHE lessons. Pupils' progress is not consistent as the quality of teaching, although satisfactory overall, is inconsistent and ranges from good to unsatisfactory. This is because there has been a change from specialist teaching to the subject being taught by all tutors. There has been inadequate training which means that a number of staff are not familiar with the materials and lack confidence in teaching a subject which is not one of their areas of expertise. Citizenship in particular is an area which is new to most members of staff and has not been fully integrated in to the school's PSHE policy. Teaching is good when there is a positive relationship between staff and pupils. In these lessons pupils are helped to think about important issues in a mature way. Pupils in Year 11 explore what they would look for in a partner and how to treat a friend. They understand the meanings of words because they are carefully explained within their own experiences. For example, 'reliable' was likened to 'he says he will send you a text and he does'. Many teachers plan their lessons to ensure that all pupils participate. They look for real examples on the Internet, ask pupils to bring in personal items, for example photos of people who are significant to them, to enliven and personalise discussion. When materials are not adapted to suit the class, it occasionally leads to a few pupils becoming badly behaved and they miss out because they are sent out of the lesson.
90. The subject leader only took over the subject a year ago, also leads a core subject and so has not had a great deal of time to make changes. Leadership is, however, satisfactory. A clear strength is the comprehensive scheme of work which develops each area year by year, although the section for Years 3 to 6 now needs reviewing. Assessment is unsatisfactory but objectives for each section provide good opportunities for developing a system. The programme includes visits from outside professionals, including good input from the careers Service. Many of the materials are ready prepared for teachers to use.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	4	4
How inclusive the school is		4
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	4	4
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	4	4
Overall standards achieved		4
Pupils' achievement	4	4
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		3
Attendance	4	4
Attitudes	3	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		3
The quality of education provided by the school		4
The quality of teaching	4	4
How well pupils learn	4	4
The quality of assessment	5	5
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	4	4
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		3
Accommodation and resources	5	5
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		5
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	4	4
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		4
The quality of the school's links with the community	3	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	4	4
The leadership and management of the school		4
The governance of the school	5	5
The leadership of the headteacher		3
The leadership of other key staff	4	4
The effectiveness of management	4	4

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