

INSPECTION REPORT

ASTON MANOR SCHOOL

Aston

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103508

Headteacher: Mrs H Roberts

Lead inspector: Mr R Palmer

Dates of inspection: 21st – 23rd February 2005

Inspection number: 268337

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

© Crown copyright 2005

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Type of school: | Comprehensive |
| School category: | Community |
| Age range of pupils: | 11 to 16 |
| Gender of pupils: | Mixed |
| Number on roll: | 707 |
| School address: | Phillips Street Aston Birmingham West Midlands |
| Postcode: | B6 4PZ |
| Telephone number: | 0121 3598108 |
| Fax number: | 0121 3592426 |
| Appropriate authority: | The Governing Body |
| Name of chair of governors: | Mr R Linforth |
| Date of previous inspection: | 26 th – 30 th April 1999 |

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Aston Manor School is smaller than most other secondary schools. It has about 120 more pupils than at the time of the previous inspection and is over-subscribed. Boys outnumber girls in all years. The school gained renewal of its status as a specialist Technology College in 2003. It received the School Achievement award from the Department for Education and Skills in all three years 2001 to 2003. The school participates in the local Excellence in Cities initiative. Pupils' attainment on entry in Year 7 is well below average. Boys and girls come from social and economic backgrounds that are well below average overall, and include a large minority from socially disadvantaged circumstances. The proportion of pupils entitled to receive free school meals is well above the national average. About nine in ten pupils come from ethnic minorities. The largest group is of British Black Caribbean background. About one in 12 pupils is of British white background. Three pupils are at an early stage of learning English. For many pupils, English is not the language of the home. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, about one in four, is above average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is below average. The number of pupils joining or leaving during the course of the school year is a little above that found in most schools.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

| Members of the inspection team | | | Subject responsibilities |
|--------------------------------|--------------|----------------|--|
| 31198 | R Palmer | Lead inspector | |
| 19374 | W Sheehan | Lay inspector | |
| 2491 | D Beaumont | Team inspector | Design and technology |
| 2628 | J Edwards | Team inspector | Physical education |
| 23188 | J Maunder | Team inspector | Science |
| 17868 | E Metcalfe | Team inspector | Art and design Citizenship |
| 19214 | G Price | Team inspector | English |
| 31879 | D Rhodes | Team inspector | Mathematics |
| 31701 | G Rudland | Team inspector | Music |
| 19404 | L Schubeler | Team inspector | Modern foreign languages |
| 4381 | R Sharif | Team inspector | English as an additional language |
| 2626 | M Thompson | Team inspector | Work-related learning |
| 1845 | R Tweed | Team inspector | Religious education Special educational needs |
| 13623 | J Waddington | Team inspector | Information and communication technology Business studies |
| 20497 | V Williams | Team inspector | Geography History |

The inspection contractor was:

peakschoolhaus Ltd
BPS Business Centre
Brake Lane
Boughton
Newark
Nottinghamshire
NG22 9HQ

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

REPORT CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|-----------|
| PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT | 7 |
| PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS | 9 |
| STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS | |
| Standards achieved in subjects and courses | |
| Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities | |
| QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL | 13 |
| Teaching and learning | |
| The curriculum | |
| Care, guidance and support | |
| Partnership with parents, other schools and the community | |
| LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT | 18 |
| Work-related learning | |
| PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES | 22 |
| SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4 | |
| PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS | 38 |

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **good** school. It has many features of a very good school and provides **good** value for money. Standards are below average by Year 11, but represent good overall achievement when compared with pupils' low standards on entry in Year 7. Boys and girls of all capabilities receive a good education. Teaching and learning are good, as are leadership and management. Difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced teachers hinder even higher achievement.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The GCSE results in 2004 indicate very good achievement for pupils of all capabilities.
- Very good teaching and good assessment help pupils to achieve very well in Years 10 and 11.
- Very good senior leadership and management lead to continued good improvement.
- Achievement in geography is unsatisfactory as a result of staffing and recruitment difficulties.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning is insufficient.
- Pupils' very good behaviour and very positive attitudes promote learning.
- The very good quality of care and support and very good out-of-class activities enhance pupils' all-round development and help to ensure racial harmony and a very positive ethos.
- Unsatisfactory accommodation restricts learning in a few subjects and hinders pupils' social development.

Improvement since the previous inspection in 1999 is **good**. Results in external examinations and pupils' achievement are much higher. Teaching is better. The school has addressed the previous key issues well, although improvement has been unsatisfactory regarding provision for geography.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

| Performance compared with: | | all schools | | | similar schools |
|----------------------------|------------------------|-------------|------|------|-----------------|
| | | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2004 |
| Year 11 | GCSE/GNVQ examinations | D | D | D | A |

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Standards are below average overall by Year 11, but are average in business studies, citizenship, ICT, music and physical education. They indicate **good** achievement for boys and girls of all capabilities and different ethnic backgrounds. Results in the National Curriculum tests for English, mathematics and science, taken in Year 9, are well below average, but have improved steadily. In 2004, results in these tests indicated satisfactory achievement overall. Currently standards by Year 9 are a little higher but remain well below average in most subjects, including English, mathematics and science. They show that pupils are achieving well in English and science and satisfactorily in mathematics. Achievement by Year 9 is unsatisfactory in geography, but good in most other subjects. In 2004, the GCSE results were below the national average, but well above those of similar schools. They were much higher than expected from predictions based on pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9. Pupils with special educational needs, and the many pupils whose reported mother tongue is other than English, achieved equally very well in the GCSE examinations. Pupils make faster progress in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9, mainly because by then they have developed better reading and writing skills and have more opportunities to work independently. Currently, standards by Year 11

are just below average and indicate very good achievement in English and science. They are below average and show satisfactory achievement in mathematics. Achievement by Year 11 is good or better in other subjects, except in geography, French and religious education where achievement is satisfactory.

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is **good** overall. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are very good. Attendance and punctuality are good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education provided by the school is **good**.

Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. In English and science, teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. In mathematics, teaching is satisfactory in Years 7 to 11. In most other subjects, teaching is good throughout Years 7 to 11. However, it is unsatisfactory in geography in Years 7 to 9. Pupils with special educational needs, and the few pupils who are at an early stage of learning English, receive good teaching and support that help them to achieve as well as other pupils. High expectations and good classroom management ensure that pupils work productively and quickly in most lessons. Teachers use their subject expertise well to give clear explanations and to enthuse pupils. In the very few poor or unsatisfactory lessons, non-specialist teaching or the teacher's inadequate skills in managing the class resulted in pupils making little progress. In many subjects, teachers provide insufficient opportunities for pupils to use ICT to develop their work. Good procedures for assessment show pupils how to improve their work and help teachers to detect underachievement at an early stage. Marking is thorough in most subjects, although it lacks consistency in a few subjects such as mathematics and geography.

The curriculum is satisfactory. Pupils enrich their learning and personal development through very good out-of-class activities. However, the accommodation for physical education and science and its suitability to enhance pupils' social development are unsatisfactory. The quality of care is good. Pupils receive very good support. Links with parents, the community and other schools are good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **good** overall. The very good leadership of the headteacher and very effective senior management provide a very clear direction for further improvement and a strong focus on raising pupils' achievement. Leadership and management in subjects are satisfactory overall. Financial management is good. Governance is good overall, although the school does not meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses well and set ambitious, but attainable, targets.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and pupils have positive views. Parents say children enjoy coming to school. They like, particularly, the school's high expectations and rising standards, its deservedly good public image, its friendly ethos and very good racial harmony. A few pupils have concerns about bad behaviour by a small minority. However, they recognise that staff deal firmly and effectively with any reported incidents of bullying. Behaviour was very good during the inspection.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- raise standards and achievement in geography;

- enable pupils to make more use of ICT to develop their work in all subjects;
- improve the accommodation for physical education and science and that provided for pupils' social development;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- make provision for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Standards are below average by the end of Year 11. The achievement of boys and girls of all capabilities and backgrounds is good overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in recent years indicate that pupils achieve very well by the end of Year 11.
- Standards are much higher than at the time of the previous inspection.
- Pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory in geography in Years 7 to 9.
- The school's development as a Technology College has a positive influence in raising pupils' achievement.
- Pupils have too few opportunities to use ICT to enrich and extend their work.

Commentary

1. The school's renewal of its status as a specialist Technology College in 2003 and its receipt of the School Achievement Award from the Department for Education and Skills in 2001, 2002 and 2003 indicate its success in adding value to the academic achievements of boys and girls by the end of Year 11. Since the previous inspection, standards are much higher and the achievement of pupils of all minority ethnic backgrounds continues to rise.
2. The results in the National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science taken in Year 9 have been consistently well below average over the past five years. Results are improving at the national rate of improvement. Overall, there is little difference between the performance of boys and girls in these tests. In 2004, the results improved from the previous year, matched those of similar schools and showed that the school was very close to meeting its suitably challenging targets. They indicate generally good achievement for boys and girls of all capabilities, compared with their very low standards when they joined the school in Year 7.
3. The GCSE examination results have been below average over the past three years, but well above average when compared with the results of similar schools. They are rising faster than the national rate of improvement. The results, in 2004, indicated very good achievement for boys and girls of all capabilities, including those with special educational needs, compared with predictions based on pupils' earlier attainment in the Year 9 national tests. The school was very close to meeting all of its challenging targets for performance in the GCSE examinations. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C was below or well below average in most subjects, but was above average in physical education and average in English, double-award science, business studies and home economics. Girls usually attain higher GCSE grades than boys, as they do nationally.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2004

| Standards in: | School results | National results |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| English | 29.7 (28.7) | 33.3 (33.4) |
| Mathematics | 30.8 (28.8) | 36.5 (35.4) |

| | | |
|---------|-------------|-------------|
| Science | 30.0 (29.8) | 33.1 (33.6) |
|---------|-------------|-------------|

There were 151 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2004

| | School results | National results |
|---|----------------|------------------|
| Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades | 43 (42) | 52 (52) |
| Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades | 92 (92) | 89 (88) |
| Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades | 100 (100) | 96 (96) |
| Average point score per pupil | 37.5 (36.2) | 41.4 (40.6) |
| Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects) | 31.6 (30.3) | 34.9 (34.7) |

There were 127 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. Current standards of work in Years 7 to 9 are well below average, overall. They are a little above those attained in the most recent Year 9 national tests and teachers' assessments and show that pupils are achieving well, compared with their low levels of attainment on entry. By Year 9, standards are well below average in English, mathematics, science and most other subjects. Achievement by Year 9, compared with pupils' low attainment in the subject when they joined the school, is good in English and science and satisfactory in mathematics. It is good in most other subjects apart from geography in which it is unsatisfactory. The long-term absence of the head of department and the use of non-specialist teaching contribute to the underachievement in geography by Year 9.
5. In Years 10 and 11, standards are currently below average overall and in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. They show that pupils of all the different ethnic backgrounds are achieving very well. In English, standards are quite close to average. Compared with their attainment at the end of Year 9, the achievement, by Year 11, of boys and girls of all capabilities, including those identified as gifted and talented and those who have special educational needs, is currently very good in English, science, ICT, physical education and business studies. Achievement is good in most other subjects, but is only satisfactory in mathematics, geography and French. Difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified teachers and an inconsistent quality of teaching restrict higher achievement in mathematics, French and geography. In the general course of religious education in Years 10 and 11, the teaching time available is insufficient to enable pupils to study a few topics in enough depth to reach higher standards. The limited availability of specialist computing resources restricts pupils' use of their competent ICT skills to enrich and enhance their work in many subjects in Years 7 to 11.
6. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as other pupils, because teachers have a good awareness of their individual needs and provide work of appropriate difficulty to keep them interested. Good and well-focused help from the learning support assistants and sensitive teaching account for their good achievement across subjects in Years 7 to 9 and very good achievement in Years 10 and 11. GCSE results attained in 2004 by pupils with special educational needs represent very good achievement. The school has identified pupils who are gifted or talented. Its good procedures for assessing and tracking their progress help to ensure that these pupils achieve as well as other pupils.
7. The school's records show that the GCSE results of pupils of Asian background are higher than those gained by pupils of other ethnic backgrounds. However, taking into account the prior attainment of pupils, there is very little difference in the quality of achievement of pupils from different ethnic groups. The many pupils whose mother tongue is reported as not being English are fluent in English and have sufficient language skills to cope with the curricular demands of

all subjects. The very few pupils who are at an early stage of learning English achieve as well as other pupils and benefit from the special help they receive to improve their skills in speaking, reading and writing English. The school's involvement in a national initiative for raising the attainment of African-Caribbean boys is having a positive effect on their attendance, behaviour and overall achievement. The school is tackling successfully the previous underachievement of Bangladeshi boys and their achievement currently matches that of other pupils.

8. Several factors are responsible for achievement being higher in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have improved their basic literacy and ICT skills well enough to cope more easily than the younger pupils with the reading, writing and research tasks set. The amount of non-specialist teaching is much lower in Years 10 and 11. The 'booster' and revision classes and such activities as the 'Saturday Club', supported through the Excellence in Cities initiative, have a particular and successful emphasis on raising pupils' achievement in GCSE examinations. The efficient and effective deployment of additional resources and funding, provided through the school's status as a specialist Technology College, has a very positive influence on raising achievement throughout Years 7 to 11. It has resulted in smaller classes and more time for teachers to prepare lessons and to focus on matters relating to teaching and learning. The good and sensitive help provided by the learning mentors and visiting 'subject consultants' motivates pupils to work hard.
9. The mobility of pupils into the school during Years 7 to 11 has little effect on performance in external examinations. The school has good procedures to help these pupils to settle in well and for most of them to achieve as well as other pupils.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils display very good attitudes and behaviour. Attendance and punctuality are good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' very enthusiastic approach to learning promotes good achievement.
- Pupils from all ethnic backgrounds co-operate very well and help each other in lessons.
- Attendance and punctuality are good and have improved as a result of very careful monitoring.
- Provision to encourage social and moral development is very good.

Commentary

10. Pupils are justified in describing their school as friendly and supportive of all pupils. They wear the school uniform with pride. The vast majority of pupils of all capabilities and ethnic backgrounds, including those with special educational needs, have very good attitudes to school that help them to achieve very well by Year 11. In lessons and assemblies, pupils are very attentive and listen carefully. They carry out tasks well in class. Many Year 11 pupils attend Saturday morning workshops to support their GCSE work and display an enthusiasm to succeed. Pupils co-operate and contribute well in lessons and help their peers readily when they are struggling. For example, during a citizenship lesson, some pupils helped others who were having difficulties accessing a website. In the questionnaires returned, parents indicated that their children like coming to school.
11. Behaviour in lessons is very good overall. It varies from excellent to occasionally being just satisfactory. By Year 11, pupils' behaviour is consistently very good and older pupils act as very

good role models for younger pupils. The use of the ‘support room’, for pupils who are withdrawn from a lesson, is very effective in helping pupils to reflect on and resolve any issues. Pupils who have been sent to this room say that it provides them with a useful opportunity to ‘cool off’ and avoid confrontations. Pupils report that a few pupils behave poorly and that there is occasional bullying at the school. Incidents of bullying do occur, but the school has good procedures to try to prevent bullying and deals appropriately with any reported instances. Pupils in different year groups say members of staff treat any occurrences of bullying seriously and resolve them quickly.

12. Relationships between staff and pupils are very good and purposeful. They help pupils to acquire mature attitudes to their work and personal development. Pupils chat in a friendly manner to teachers and respect them when rebuked for infringing the school’s rules. They feel that the supportive atmosphere of the school enables pupils from all ethnic backgrounds to mix very well. Form tutors, through the good use of registration time, show a very caring approach to pupils. They use the pupils’ planners very effectively to monitor pupils’ efforts and attitudes on a daily basis. Pupils at an early stage of learning English integrate easily into classes. Pupils who join the school from other schools receive very good support to help them to settle in quickly.

13. Permanent exclusions are low. The school tries many different and carefully considered actions prior to any permanent exclusion. During the previous academic year, there was an over-representation of pupils of British Black Caribbean background in the number of fixed-term exclusions. A detailed analysis of all exclusions shows that the school makes strong efforts to help pupils to behave well. Regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, the exclusions were appropriate and fair responses to pupils’ misdemeanours. The school has very clear rules that, if breached, lead to exclusions, for example in respect of assault on others. Arrangements to promote racial equality meet statutory requirements. Racial harmony is very good.

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 | 58 | 5 | 0 |
| White – Irish | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| White – any other White background | 14 | 0 | 0 |
| Mixed – White and Black Caribbean | 34 | 4 | 0 |
| Mixed – White and Black African | 8 | 2 | 0 |
| Mixed – White and Asian | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Mixed – any other mixed background | 28 | 4 | 0 |
| Asian or Asian British – Indian | 21 | 1 | 0 |
| Asian or Asian British – Pakistani | 66 | 3 | 0 |
| Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi | 131 | 7 | 1 |
| Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background | 13 | 0 | 0 |
| Black or Black British – Caribbean | 225 | 37 | 2 |
| Black or Black British – African | 57 | 0 | 0 |
| Black or Black British – any other Black background | 28 | 3 | 0 |

| | | | |
|--------------------------|----|---|---|
| Chinese | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Any other ethnic group | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| No ethnic group recorded | 5 | 3 | 0 |

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

14. Rates of attendance have improved considerably since the previous inspection and now broadly match the national average. The attendance of pupils in Year 11 is very good. Very effective procedures are in use to track and follow up the absences of identified pupils. However, the school has yet to introduce a first day contact procedure for all pupils. The attendance officer monitors identified pupils very diligently and follows up with home visits and phone calls when required. He knows pupils and their families very well and goes ‘the extra mile’ to encourage attendance, for example providing pupils with alarm clocks or ringing to wake them in the mornings. Punctuality in the morning and to lessons has improved considerably and is now good. Effective support from the educational welfare office helps the school to take legal actions to promote attendance when necessary.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

| Authorised absence | | Unauthorised absence | |
|--------------------|-----|----------------------|-----|
| School data | 6.1 | School data | 1.9 |
| National data | 6.9 | National data | 1.1 |

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

15. Provision to encourage pupils’ social and moral development is very good. Pupils enhance their moral and social attitudes particularly well through the programme of lessons in personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship and through very active participation in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Older pupils are proud to take on responsibilities such as involvement in the school council or acting as prefects. During tutorial time, older pupils act as very good peer role models for younger pupils and encourage the very friendly relationships around the school. Pupils develop good spiritual awareness through thought-provoking activities and presentations in assemblies and in other forms of collective worship, including tutorial sessions. However, because of inconsistencies among tutors, not all sessions provide sufficient reflection to meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship. A Year 7 citizenship lesson on empathy was very effective in promoting the pupils’ awareness of the feelings of others. Pupils were very open about their own experiences, as when one boy said, “When my baby sister was born, I felt invisible.” Pupils enhance and enrich their cultural development through the study of work from around the world in many subjects such as music, art and design and English, as well as through a good range of visits and visitors.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is good. Teaching and learning are good. The curriculum is satisfactory. The quality of care is good overall. Guidance and support are very good. Links with parents, the community and other schools are good.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Assessment is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 helps pupils to achieve very well.
- Pupils assist their own progress by behaving very well and working enthusiastically.
- Teaching is unsatisfactory in geography in Years 7 to 9 and lacks subject expertise.
- Teachers make too little use of ICT to support pupils' learning in several subjects.
- Teachers have high expectations and use a variety of activities to motivate pupils to do well.

Commentary

16. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching has improved considerably since the previous inspection. The proportion of very good or better teaching observed has doubled to around one in four lessons. The proportion of teaching seen that was good or better has improved from four in 10 to seven in 10 lessons. The amount of unsatisfactory or poor teaching has declined to a very small amount. Scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that, in most subjects, they benefit from much very good teaching. Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 because there is less non-specialist teaching, teachers provide the older pupils with better opportunities to work independently and pupils have developed more competent basic skills than pupils in Years 7 to 9. The good teaching of literacy across subjects helps pupils steadily to increase their confidence and competence in carrying out research and to improve the presentation of work as they move through the school. The teaching of numeracy is satisfactory across the curriculum.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 118 lessons

| Excellent | Very good | Good | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Poor | Very poor |
|-----------|-----------|----------|--------------|----------------|--------|-----------|
| 2 (2%) | 26 (22%) | 56 (47%) | 31 (26%) | 1 (1%) | 2 (2%) | 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.

17. The quality of teaching and learning in English and science is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. In mathematics and French, it is satisfactory throughout Years 7 to 11. Teaching and learning are good or better in other subjects, apart from geography, in which they are unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9, but satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. The long-term absence of the head of department and the use of non-specialist teaching in Years 7 to 9 hinder better achievement in geography.
18. Teaching for pupils with special educational needs is good in most lessons, because the work matches pupils' needs well. The good use and deployment of learning support assistants and learning mentors help these pupils to achieve as well as other pupils. Teachers manage pupils with behavioural difficulties sensitively and effectively and have very good awareness of their needs. The pupils identified as gifted or talented make the same rates of progress as other pupils in most subjects, although, as in English and science, they do not always receive work in class that stretches them fully. The few pupils at an early stage of learning English play a full part in lessons because the support teachers help them to improve their linguistic skills and ensure that subject teachers know what work best suits their individual needs.
19. Pupils of all capabilities contribute considerably to their learning. Even when the teaching is dull, as in a few mathematics and geography lessons, they work with enthusiasm and want to learn. They listen carefully, show interest and concentrate well to complete the set tasks. Their very good behaviour and very positive relationships with each other and with the staff help to create a purposeful climate for learning to take place. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 learn quickly, because they make good use of their improving literacy skills to assist their work across

subjects. A few teachers make good use of ICT to make interesting presentations that stimulate pupils' interest in the work. However, in many subjects, pupils have too few opportunities to use ICT to develop their skills of independent study or to extend and enrich their learning. In art and design, for example, the lack of appropriate computing resources restricts pupils' achievement and limits the range of learning activities.

20. The headteacher and senior managers work hard to ensure that teachers and pupils have high expectations for academic success. They know that recruiting difficulties in subjects such as geography, mathematics and French have resulted in an inconsistent quality of teaching. They take appropriate action, such as the use of visiting consultants and advanced skills teachers and the deployment of learning mentors to improve the quality of teaching in these subjects. The good implementation of the National Key Stage 3 Strategies for teaching and learning helps to develop teaching and learning well in nearly all subjects, and particularly in English and science.
21. In the best lessons in Years 7 to 11, very good planning helps pupils of all capabilities to consolidate their previous learning and, through a range of interesting, relevant and suitably challenging activities, to build well on earlier work. Teachers ensure that pupils know exactly what they are expected to learn and the relevance of the work to past and future learning. Lessons proceed quickly and pupils achieve well because teachers check frequently that pupils understand the work and give them good feedback and guidance on their progress. Teachers use their good expertise in their specialist subjects to give enthusiastic, clear and detailed explanations, taking care to involve all pupils during question-and-answer activities. They ask probing questions and provide a good sequence of well-timed activities that enable pupils to see how well they are doing. Through good discussions in groups and in the class, they review and reinforce what pupils have learned.
22. In the lessons that are satisfactory rather than better, mainly in Years 7 to 9, pupils find the work uninspiring at times. This is because, as seen in a few lessons in mathematics, the teacher directs too much of the work and gives pupils little opportunity to do their own thinking. In the small number of unsatisfactory or poor lessons, the teacher's inadequate skills in managing the class or lack of expertise in the subject result in pupils underachieving.
23. Good procedures for assessment, including those for pupils with special educational needs, help pupils to improve their work. The setting of challenging, but realistic, targets for pupils, based on information of good quality about their attainment and potential, raises the expectations of teachers and pupils. The frequent monitoring of pupils' planners by tutors helps to detect underachievement quickly and to take prompt remedial action, such as extra tuition or mentoring. Assessment and marking within subjects are good, but inconsistent. In English, very clear and accurate assessment, very careful marking and thoughtful oral feedback help pupils to know what they need to do to improve. In mathematics and geography, marking is often perfunctory and pupils get insufficient guidance on how to improve. In most subjects, as in music and science, pupils in Years 10 and 11 have a good understanding of the requirements of public examinations and tests and know what to do to improve their performance. The use of assessment to influence the teaching programme is at an early stage in most subjects. The use of homework to support learning is good.

The curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory. Extra-curricular provision is very good. The resources for learning are good, but the accommodation is unsatisfactory overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good extra-curricular activities greatly enrich pupils' academic and all-round development.
- Very good and extensive links with local primary schools assist progression of learning.
- Shortcomings in accommodation restrict pupils' achievement and social development.
- The time for teaching PSHE and religious education in Years 10 and 11 is too short to enable some topics to be covered at more than a basic level.

Commentary

24. The curriculum has improved satisfactorily since the previous inspection. It meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. It is good in Years 7 to 9 and has breadth and balance. It meets well the needs of pupils of all capabilities and aptitudes, including those who have special educational needs. Well-planned schemes of work ensure continuity and progression that support pupils' achievement. In Years 10 and 11, the curricular provision is satisfactory, rather than better. This is because, despite many very positive features including the broad range of vocational courses, the short amount of time available for teaching the PSHE programme and the general course in religious education means that coverage of several topics is basic and does not permit extension work. Although the requirements for religious education are met, the school recognises that it needs to provide more time for the general course to be taught effectively in Years 10 and 11. Very good curricular links with primary schools result in very good continuity and good progression in pupils' learning.
25. The contents of the PSHE programme meet statutory requirements and the teaching is good throughout Years 7 to 11. The sex education programme is good, because it enables pupils to consider, in a mature manner, such important moral issues as trust, loyalty, relationships and outside pressures. External agencies, such as the medical profession, contribute well to the teaching of sex and drugs education. A local community voluntary organisation helps pupils to understand the issues surrounding the young homeless. Careers education is good and helps pupils to prepare well for the next stages in their education and future careers. Pupils value the good work-experience programmes and arrange their own placements with help from school staff and the careers adviser.
26. Pupils and parents value greatly the enrichment provided through the extensive range of extra-curricular activities, which are a real strength of the school. Active participation by large numbers of pupils in these activities promotes their academic and all-round development very well. Pupils take part enthusiastically in several team sports, such as netball, football, athletics, basketball and cricket. Many subjects help pupils to raise achievement further, by providing 'drop-in' clubs, revision classes, homework clubs and Saturday classes that offer study support and extension activities. Pupils develop their social and cultural awareness through a variety of subject-related excursions, as well as through residential visits to Wales. In English and drama, a good range of theatre visits, competitions, drama festivals, regular visits by a local black poet, public speaking, and school productions, enhances academic achievement and pupils' personal development.
27. Very good inclusion of all pupils is a very positive feature of the curriculum. All pupils have full access to the National Curriculum and other courses. In Years 10 and 11, the development of vocational courses meets well the needs of pupils of all capabilities. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. Teachers and learning support assistants plan well to match the work to pupils' individual needs. Withdrawal of pupils for additional literacy work is

managed sensitively to minimise disruption. Departments have identified the gifted and talented pupils and are, increasingly, providing them with work of suitable challenge and difficulty, both in and out of class. A few higher attainers enter the GCSE examinations early in a few subjects such as English, art and design and biology. The Ethnic Minority Support staff provide good and sensitive help for pupils for whom English is an additional language, including the very few who are at an early stage of learning English. The different cultures and their contribution to wider society are celebrated annually as, for example, through a 'black history' week, when pupils learn about the contributions of black people throughout history.

28. The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is satisfactory. The low turnover of staff aids the continuity of pupils' learning. However, the school experiences difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced teachers in subjects and has current shortages in geography, mathematics, drama and religious education. The governors made a positive decision to improve staffing ratios as a key strategy for raising pupils' achievement. This policy has worked well and the resultant smaller classes are instrumental in raising standards.
29. Resources for teaching and learning are good and meet curricular requirements as a result of the additional funding from the school's involvement in the Excellence in Cities programme and its development as a Technology College. However, in subjects such as art and design, geography and history, pupils have little access to ICT hardware and software to support learning. The library's facilities are satisfactory, although the limited book stock, lack of a librarian and shortage of space deter pupils from using it at times other than in lessons.
30. The accommodation remains unsatisfactory, despite the building improvements since the previous inspection. Facilities for science are unsatisfactory because of a shortage of laboratories. In physical education, changing facilities are inadequate and the lack of playing fields restricts learning both within the timetable and in extra-curricular activities. Pupils cope very well with the narrow and inadequate corridors, but facilities for dining and social development are unsatisfactory.

Care, guidance and support

The quality of pupils' care, welfare and health and safety is good. Pupils have very good support, advice and guidance, based on monitoring. Systems to seek and act upon pupils' views are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good relationships and very careful monitoring of their welfare help pupils to feel valued.
- Very good arrangements for induction help pupils to settle in quickly.
- The careers programme prepares pupils well for their next career steps.
- Procedures for health and safety are improving and are now satisfactory.

Commentary

31. Adults in the school provide friendly and sensitive support that helps pupils of all capabilities and different ethnic backgrounds to mature and grow in self-esteem. The daily scrutiny of school planners is a very effective method of monitoring pupils' attendance and attitudes to lessons. When pupils fail to receive recognition of a good lesson in their planner, tutors discuss the issue sensitively to encourage pupils to improve. Provision for the welfare and guidance of pupils with special educational needs is good. Learning support assistants and learning mentors play an important role in helping these pupils to develop confidence and self-esteem.
32. The well-established school council encourages pupils to put forward their suggestions for improving the school. Councillors enjoy contributing to the school's development and are proud of the improvements they have helped to make, for example to the canteen's facilities.
33. Very good procedures for induction ensure that pupils of all backgrounds settle quickly into Year 7, as confirmed by the vast majority of questionnaires returned by parents. Year 7 pupils say that a strength of the school is that "everyone bonds quickly". Pupils in the main feeder primary schools have many opportunities to meet teachers at the secondary school through teachers visiting their school or visits to the secondary school. The 'Primary Team' teach both at the primary schools and the secondary school enabling them to know pupils very well and to ensure a very smooth transition for pupils. The school evaluates the needs of pupils joining in other years very well and provides good support to help them to achieve as well as other pupils.
34. The school provides good opportunities to supplement the impartial career guidance provided. For example, a 'Pop stars' day encourages pupils to reflect on the process of recruiting and the needs of employers. The staff that have recently been appointed to co-ordinate the careers guidance are enthusiastic and eager to provide as many opportunities as possible to broaden pupils' horizons and raise their aspirations. Visits to colleges and universities encourage pupils to have high aspirations. Last year an increased number of pupils, over two-thirds in Year 11, proceeded to further education. The Year 11 pupils are correct to say, in discussions, that opportunities such as mock interviews, visits to other colleges and visitors to the school, including a drama group, help them to be well informed about the choices available to them.
35. Procedures for health and safety have improved since the previous inspection and are satisfactory around the school. A few points relating to health and safety were brought to the school's attention and received appropriate attention. The site manager and staff take quick action about any concerns and promote a safe environment for all. Good procedures are in place to monitor the day-to-day safety of pupils in school. The governing body has recently appointed a governor to oversee the arrangements for health and safety within the school and to oversee the school's actions. Good procedures for child protection and effective training ensure that all staff are aware of their duties.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's partnership with parents, other schools, colleges and the community is good. Parents have positive views of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are supportive and are pleased with the school's continuing improvements.
- Good relationships with the community and other schools promote learning and citizenship.
- Parents are well informed and encouraged to be involved in their child's learning.

Commentary

36. Through views expressed at the pre-inspection meeting and in questionnaires, parents indicate that they have very positive feelings about most aspects of the school. A few parents have concerns about behaviour and bullying. Behaviour is very good in lessons and at break times. In discussion, pupils say that the school deals promptly and effectively with any reported incidents of poor behaviour or bullying. Through feedback forms at parent consultation meetings, parents have good opportunities to express their views.
37. Links with feeder primary schools are very good. Through the transition project for Year 6 to Year 7, the school employs three teachers with primary school experience, who have developed very effective links with primary schools. This 'Primary Team' provide many good initiatives to help pupils to make good or better progress. For example, pupils identified as requiring extra support in Year 7 are taught for some subjects by their form tutor, a primary trained teacher, and this enables these pupils to achieve well. The team teach pupils from Years 5 to 9 and help to ensure that teaching methods are consistent across subjects. Links with local colleges and with other secondary schools are good and developing well. The school is successful in encouraging the local community to be involved in the school, for example people from local industry help to provide mock interviews for pupils. The physical education department's good links with local sporting clubs help to extend the range of learning for many pupils. Well-established links with a neighbouring special school provide good opportunities for pupils from both schools to learn together.
38. The quality of documentation for parents is good and keeps them well informed about the school's work. Parents have good opportunities to be involved in their child's education, particularly through the effective use of school planners. However, the school's recent introduction of workshops to help parents to understand their child's learning has not yet attracted many parents to attend them. Pupils' annual reports include useful information about their progress, personal organisation, behaviour, coursework, homework and key skills. They report clearly on pupils' attainment and progress by means of National Curriculum and GCSE levels and grades. However, as highlighted in the previous report, they do not consistently explain what pupils can or cannot do and a few targets are too vague. The interim updates of pupils' performance provide a good snapshot of their achievement and help parents to understand if their child is making sufficient progress.
39. The prospectus provides a good overview of school life and meets requirements. The school recognises that last year's governors' annual report did not provide all of the necessary statutory information. The template for the current year's governors' report meets statutory requirements. The school planners provide a good two-way communication between home and school and a useful opportunity for parents to monitor their child's progress on a daily basis. They are effective because teachers update and monitor the planners regularly and carefully. The school provides frequent opportunities for parents to meet with staff on the target setting day and at meetings to discuss interim and end-of-year reports. The parents of pupils with special educational needs work closely with the school to help pupils to make good progress towards

their individual targets. The parents of pupils who have a statement of special educational need generally make a positive contribution to the annual reviews.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is good. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. Senior management is very good and middle management is satisfactory overall, although affected adversely by difficulties of recruitment. Governance is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership by the headteacher and senior team promotes high expectations.
- The school's very good ethos encourages racial harmony, enhances pupils' personal and academic development and results in staff enjoying working at the school.
- Good systems for monitoring performance help to raise standards.
- Recruitment difficulties hinder learning in a few subjects.
- The school does not meet statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship.

Commentary

40. The very good, energetic and purposeful leadership of the recently appointed headteacher promotes a culture of high expectations amongst staff, pupils and parents. It ensures that the school provides a very good and racially harmonious environment for learning to take place and continues to improve. In setting a very clear educational direction for the school, the headteacher receives good support from a committed and well-informed governing body and a very good senior team, who have a diverse but complementary range of skills. Improvement since the previous inspection is good because standards have risen substantially and the quality of teaching and learning has improved well. The school has received three successive School Achievement Awards in recognition of its success in public examinations. Pupils and parents are correct to say that the school is well managed. A good and growing reputation in the local community has resulted in increased numbers of pupils wishing to attend the school, which is now over-subscribed.
41. Senior management is very good. Heads of year and form teachers make a major contribution to the calm and purposeful ethos of the school and form good and sensitive links with parents. They identify underachievement quickly and take rapid and effective remedial action. The curriculum directors work closely and very effectively with all staff to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Procedures for monitoring, reviewing and following up the school's performance are good at all levels. Leadership and management of subjects are good overall, but inconsistent. For example, they are very good in English, where strong teamwork, clear vision, precise and clear documentation and teachers' enthusiasm lead to pupils' very good achievement and rapidly rising standards. However, in a few subjects, such as geography, long-term absences and difficulties of recruitment have a seriously adverse effect on the quality of leadership and management. As a result of the sensitive promotion of the staff's well-being and carefully targeted support, the school has no difficulties in retaining staff, who are enthusiastic and proud about working in the school. The leadership and management of special educational needs have improved since the previous inspection and are good. Regular meetings between special educational needs teachers, learning mentors, learning support assistants and subject staff help to ensure that work matches individual pupils' needs.
42. Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They take a full and active part in planning the school's improvement. They set clear priorities and are

prepared to make difficult decisions, such as maintaining small classes, in order to improve learning, at the expense of delaying the building of much needed dining facilities. Governors carry out their duties well, apart from meeting the statutory requirement for the provision of a daily act of collective worship.

43. The school improvement plan has sensible priorities based on a good analysis of current needs. However, it covers only one year and the school is aware of the need to develop longer-term planning. Effective deployment and use of additional funding, arising from the school's Technology College status and involvement in initiatives such as the Excellence in Cities scheme, have helped to promote very good achievement by Year 11. The provision of small class sizes and good learning resources in many areas of the school helps to improve teaching and learning and to raise standards. The good implementation of performance management sets realistically ambitious targets for staff and pupils and helps to raise expectations. The effective implementation of the national workload agreement enables teachers to spend more time on improving their teaching skills and to prepare and mark work well.
44. Financial management and planning are good. Systems for day-to-day management operate effectively. The allocation of funding links closely to the priorities identified in the school improvement plan. Governors play a full part in the process of setting and monitoring the budget and are well informed about financial matters. With the good support of the finance officer and the expertise of key governors, they pay careful attention to achieving best value, occasionally awarding contracts to external agencies. The balance carried through to the current financial year is larger than usual, but has, appropriately, been earmarked for the building of new dining facilities. The latest available audit of the school's finances in January 2005 concludes that financial systems provide the school with a 'reasonable assurance' that systems work effectively.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

| Income and expenditure (£) | | Balances (£) | |
|----------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| Total income | 3 175 407 | Balance from previous year | 76 382 |
| Total expenditure | 3 035 858 | Balance carried forward to the next | 215 931 |
| Expenditure per pupil | 4240 | | |

45. The main aids to pupils' achievement are good and better teaching, small class sizes, very good extra-curricular activities including 'booster' classes, very good care, support and guidance, high expectations, very good behaviour and attitudes, very good senior leadership and management and good middle management, and good use of additional funding. The main barriers to raising achievement are problems in recruiting teachers, some inadequate accommodation and insufficient use of ICT in several subjects.
46. Taking into account the funding received by the school, the social and economic backgrounds of pupils and the current quality of education and achievement, the school provides good value for money.

WORK-RELATED LEARNING

Provision in work-related learning (WRL) is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good links with local employers enhance the school's programme for WRL.
- Teachers do not consistently make explicit reference to WRL when it occurs in lessons.

Commentary

47. Careers education is good. It provides pupils with a firm grounding on which to base further choices about their future education and careers. Pupils receive sensible advice and guidance from Year 9 onwards, through the school-based PSHE programme and formal careers interviews in Year 10 or 11. They benefit from the good support of the Connexions service. Discussions with the co-ordinators of WRL and with pupils show that pupils value the well-prepared programme of work experience undertaken for two weeks in Year 10. It helps pupils to acquire a good understanding of workplace expectations and practices.
48. The statutory requirements for WRL are covered through teaching in all areas of the curriculum, such as undertaking tasks and activities in a work-related context in mathematics. The WRL co-ordinators record carefully pupils' experiences and learning in subjects that are relevant to their understanding of the world of work. However, subject teachers do not consistently make pupils aware of the WRL aspects of the topics they are studying. Good plans are in place for training staff to inform pupils more readily about the relevance of what they are learning to their future career opportunities.
49. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow at least one vocational course. This gives them a valuable insight into working life. Good links with local employers ensure that the programme of day and half-day events, such as the Year 9 'Name that Job' competition, Year 10 'employability skills' day and Year 11 mock interviews, are useful, enjoyable and informative for pupils of all capabilities.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE English examination results for 2004 were an outstanding achievement.
- The work of pupils by Year 11 shows very good gains from the low standards on entry to the school.
- Very good teaching is helping to raise standards of work year on year.
- Very good leadership and management have led to substantial improvement.
- Higher attaining pupils gain few of the highest grades in examinations

Commentary

50. When pupils join the school in Year 7 their standards of English are very low. The results in national tests for 2004 were well below the national average, but were above the average for similar schools. In recent years, results have improved more rapidly than they have nationally. Current work is still well below average by Year 9, but has improved since the previous inspection. Overall this indicates good achievement for boys and girls of all capabilities, including those who have special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language.
51. GCSE results for English in 2004 were close to the national average. They show excellent achievement for Year 11 pupils in the improvement they make from Year 7. These results were also outstanding compared with the average for schools with similar national test results in Year 9. Boys were further behind girls than nationally. This was because a number of boys of low attainment in English joined the school after Year 7 with a consequent dip in the overall attainment of boys, even though they achieved very well. Pupils from all ethnic backgrounds work hard and achieve equally well. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve very well. Occasionally, those identified as gifted and talented are not always sufficiently challenged. As a result the proportion achieving the highest grades and levels in tests and examinations is a little lower than might be expected.
52. Pupils have well below average speaking and listening skills. Most express themselves clearly and listen politely, but the range of language employed is usually narrow. In lessons, pupils respond to oral questions readily, but answers are often very short and undeveloped. Working with partners, they show only rudimentary skills because tasks do not often encourage more developed talking. However, by Year 11, pupils have developed greater assurance in their oral work. They make very good progress when meeting the challenge of GCSE oral assignments.
53. Reading is not as well developed as in many schools. Few pupils read widely and only limited numbers borrow books from the library, where the stock of fiction is modest. Pupils often read aloud hesitantly, although they generally convey meaning effectively. By Year 9, pupils show

that, when reading texts such as *Frankenstein* and *Macbeth*, they have a good grasp of detail, but the level of their understanding is quite shallow. Work on Wilfred Owen's *Dulce et Decorum Est* showed little awareness of how the writer uses language. By Year 11, pupils have improved their analysis of literature and show in their responses to poetry, such as that of Seamus Heaney, that they have a clear grasp of meanings that lie beneath the text.

54. Written work is well below average in Years 7 to 9. Pupils present their writing well and strive to improve it through careful planning. However, most written work is quite brief and undeveloped. The spelling of even lower attaining pupils is usually competent, but expression is often awkward. By Year 11, the writing of most pupils is very well organised. Although only the highest attaining pupils write at length with ease, all pupils make very good use of drafting and re-drafting to construct thoughtful responses. Discursive writing is very well researched and maturely expressed. The short stories of higher attaining pupils are vivid and show good use of language. Pupils make good and appropriate use of their ICT skills to produce work in English.
55. Learning and teaching are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers plan lessons very well, using programmes for pupils in each year that provide a stimulating range of activities. As a result, pupils enjoy English, behave very well and make rapid progress in lessons. In a very good lesson for Year 7 pupils on persuasive writing, the teacher fired them with her own enthusiasm. Pupils were, therefore, keen to show off their oral skills in 'selling' her a glass of water and all made very good progress. In an excellent lesson for Year 11 pupils on the poem *Revenge*, by Nicaraguan writer Tomas Borge, the teacher had meticulously prepared background maps and other materials to raise levels of interest. Because of the pace of the lesson and the total involvement of all pupils, they made excellent progress. A shortcoming in a few lessons is the insufficient provision of additional challenging work for higher attaining pupils to enable them to move further in their learning. Teachers make very good use of marking and assessment to determine what to teach and to show pupils how to improve their work.
56. Leadership and management of the department are very good. Teachers are, justifiably, very enthusiastic about the substantial recent improvement in the standards of pupils' work. They enjoy working together and have clear ambitions for future success. Notable departmental strength is evident in the additional lessons and other support provided for pupils, particularly in Year 11. This has enabled the pupils to achieve considerable success in examinations. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good, particularly in respect of the quality of teaching and the standards of pupils' work.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

57. Pupils have well below average standards of language and literacy in Years 7 to 9 and below average standards in Years 10 and 11. They receive good support for improving literacy in most subjects. However, in geography pupils have scant help for improving their knowledge of technical language. In other subjects, a regular focus on specialist vocabulary ensures that pupils are more confident and competent when talking or writing. In English, a structured approach to spelling and other aspects of language is having a substantial and positive effect on the quality of pupils' work. Pupils in all years improve their skills in language through such support as good displays of work in design and technology and physical education, good help in structuring their writing in history and ICT and good focus on patterns of language in modern foreign languages. Use of the recently improved library is not yet sufficiently widespread to make a major contribution to raising levels of literacy.

Modern foreign languages

Provision in modern foreign languages is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards and achievement are improving as a result of some good teaching and good support outside of lessons.
- The number of pupils who continue to study French beyond Year 9 is low.
- Good support from the senior management of the school helps to counter difficulties caused by problems in the recruitment of suitably qualified teachers.

Commentary

58. By Year 9, standards are well below the national average. Nevertheless, they represent satisfactory achievement by all pupils, including those with special educational needs and those whose mother tongue is reported as being other than English. Pupils' listening and reading skills are better developed than their speaking and writing skills.
59. The results in GCSE examinations in French have been well below the national average in the past three years, but represent satisfactory achievement for the small number of pupils taking the course. Standards in the current Years 10 and 11 indicate a gradual improvement but remain below average. They show that boys and girls of all capabilities and different ethnic backgrounds achieve satisfactorily by Year 11, as a result of committed teaching and their own hard work. As with younger pupils, speaking skills are weak, but the few higher attaining pupils now produce coursework that shows knowledge and application of a good range of vocabulary and structures.
60. The quality of teaching and learning throughout the school is satisfactory, with a few good features. Many lessons proceed at a lively pace and hold pupils' attention because teachers use a variety of appropriately challenging and relevant activities that sustain interest. When teaching is good, pupils are well motivated and enjoy participating actively in the work. In most lessons, good relationships among pupils and between the teacher and the class provide a good climate for learning to take place. In these lessons, teachers plan the work carefully to match pupils' individual needs and manage the pupils well to ensure good behaviour and concentration. Occasionally, however, when the teacher does most of the work and talks for too long, pupils become bored. In such lessons, the work does not always match pupils' different capabilities. As a result, pupils do not engage fully in the work and many lose interest in studying French. Teachers arrange Saturday and 'Early bird' classes before morning school to provide Year 11 pupils with valuable extra support to prepare them for the GCSE examinations. Pupils improve their linguistic skills through the good and sensitive help provided by the learning support assistants and the foreign language assistant.
61. As a result of recent and unresolved difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced teachers to the department, one full-time acting head of department and one part-time teacher teach all of the French lessons. The school has, understandably, found it necessary to reduce the allocation of teaching time for pupils in Years 7 and 8 to only one lesson per week. This temporary arrangement holds back higher standards and achievement. The satisfactory leadership and management of the subject are shown in a strong commitment to improving standards and increasing the number of pupils taking French in Years 10 and 11. The school's senior management provides valuable support for the implementation of procedures to improve the monitoring and development of teaching methods and learning within the department. Teachers make satisfactory and increasingly effective use of assessment and marking to show pupils how to improve and to determine what to teach. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory and standards, which initially fell sharply, are now higher than they were at that time.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' very good attitudes enable them to learn satisfactorily, even when teaching is dull.
- Teaching does not always engage the pupils' interests and imagination.
- The booster classes for potentially underachieving pupils in Years 10 and 11 are helping to raise standards.
- Teachers use assessment well to identify areas for improvement.
- Marking and feedback to pupils about their progress are inconsistent.

Commentary

62. Results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9, in 2004, were well below average and indicated unsatisfactory achievement. Current standards of work by Year 9 are higher and, although well below average, represent satisfactory achievement compared with pupils' low standards on entry in Year 7. In a Year 9 lesson in which standards were average, pupils were competent in mental calculations of percentages and accurate in placing various equivalence groups in order. However, many pupils in Year 9 lack competence in converting to decimals such fractions as two-thirds, which have a recurring decimal point.
63. The GCSE results, in 2004, were well below the national average for all schools. When compared with pupils' prior attainment at the end of Year 9, they showed satisfactory achievement for pupils of all capabilities. Current work in Years 10 and 11 and results in mock examinations and GCSE coursework indicate that standards are rising, but are below average. They show that the achievement of boys and girls of all capabilities and ethnic backgrounds is satisfactory by Year 11 across all aspects of the mathematics courses. The curriculum provides satisfactory opportunities for pupils in all years to use ICT to develop their mathematical skills. Pupils acquire adequate competence in the use of calculators.
64. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. About half of the teaching is good and sometimes very good. The rest is just satisfactory, and, in the words of a few Year 9 pupils, "often boring", because it does not capture pupils' imagination and interest. Pupils' very positive attitudes and behaviour help them to work well to complete the work set, even when the teacher's presentation and the tasks set are uninspiring. The best teaching features dynamic and enthusiastic teachers who use their good expertise in mathematics to motivate pupils to work productively and learn quickly. These teachers have a clear understanding of pupils' preferred learning styles and plan their teaching accordingly. Teachers have adopted the strategy of the three-part lesson, which ensures a good pace of learning in the good or better lessons. In other lessons, the 'starter activities' do not always provide enough challenge and interest to motivate all pupils. Occasionally the revision sessions held at the end do not focus enough on what pupils have learned and how to prepare them for the next stage of learning.
65. Teachers use assessment well to identify potential underachievement, which they then tackle by providing out-of-school hours 'booster classes', targeted at identified pupils in specific topics. This is helping to raise standards. Marking is inconsistent and written comments in pupils' books, whilst encouraging, do not give enough guidance to pupils about how to improve.
66. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Difficulties in recruiting specialist teachers have resulted in much mathematics being taught by non-specialists in recent years. Since September 2004, mathematics has had an increased allocation of time in Years 10 and 11, which is already having a positive effect on standards. The programme of monitoring teaching and learning has identified areas where support is needed. A visiting advanced skills teacher provides useful support and advice.

67. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. The school has resolved the key issues pertaining to mathematics and examination results have improved considerably, though GCSE results are well below those gained in English and science.

Mathematics across the curriculum

68. Pupils' mathematical skills improve from well below average in Years 7 to 9 to below average by Year 11. Their skills are sufficient to cope with the work in subjects across the curriculum. Pupils make satisfactory use of their computational, statistical, graphical, interpretational and measuring skills to assist their work in many subjects. They use these skills to particularly good effect in science in creating graphical representations of physical situations, and in design and technology to weigh, measure and calculate accurately. However, in geography, pupils lack accuracy in constructing graphs and have few opportunities to practise and apply their skills in number. Events such as a visiting theatre group's performance of 'Mathematics is fun', and whole-school assemblies on numeracy raise the profile of numeracy throughout the school. Pupils have enrichment in mathematics during activities in out-of-school hours such as participation by a large number of pupils in the national 'mathematics challenge' event. The whole-school numeracy policy is satisfactory. However, it is not monitored closely enough to ensure a common teaching approach to key mathematical skills across subjects.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership of the department contributes well to rising standards.
- Very good teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 help pupils to achieve very well.
- Very good relationships between teachers and pupils create a climate of co-operation that enhances learning.
- Investigative skills are not as good as pupils' scientific knowledge and understanding.

Commentary

69. In 2004, results in the national tests in Year 9 were well below average, but indicated good achievement. Results have improved faster than the national rate of improvement. Currently, standards by Year 9 are slightly higher, but remain well below average for boys and girls, across all parts of the science curriculum. GCSE results, in 2004, were below average and represented very good achievement. By Year 11, standards in current classes are below average across all aspects of the science courses. Throughout all years, pupils are less competent in practical investigations and experimenting than they are in gaining scientific knowledge and understanding. In view of pupils' very low attainment on entry to the school in Year 7, achievement for boys and girls of all capabilities and different ethnic backgrounds is good by Year 9 and very good by Year 11. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as other pupils because teachers and the learning support assistants make sure that the work matches their capabilities and interests.
70. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers make good use of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy to plan lessons very well and provide a good range of practical activities that motivate pupils to work hard and with interest. Pupils in all years respond very positively to the teachers' good use of motivational strategies

such as rewards for meritorious work. Pupils develop their skills in mathematics well through working out formulae and interpreting graphs. Teachers help pupils to improve their literacy, with a good emphasis on pupils' understanding and use of key scientific words. Pupils make satisfactory use of computers to support their work in science, but do not use ICT enough to gather and analyse information and to make graphical displays. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils and among the pupils create a climate of co-operation that enhances learning.

71. The best teaching is very knowledgeable and gives time for pupils to think for themselves, as seen in a Year 10 revision lesson concerning metals, acids and alkalis. In answering the teacher's questions, pupils were prone to speak before thinking. The teacher responded by insisting that they took a minimum of 30 seconds for quiet thinking time, to consider and prepare more appropriate answers. Where teaching is satisfactory, mainly in Years 7 to 9, pupils occasionally spend too long copying material and have few opportunities to develop investigative skills of predicting, planning and evaluating experiments. Higher attaining pupils usually make good or better progress because the work matches their capabilities. Most teachers mark work regularly, and in encouraging ways. However, they do not always give pupils a clear enough indication of how well they are progressing, and what they need to do in order to improve. Displays of pupils' work in the laboratories are attractive and conducive to learning.
72. The department is very well led and well managed. There is a clear vision, supported by good policies, to raise pupils' attainment further. Curricular developments, such as the introduction of applied science and biology GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11 and revised schemes of work that reflect best practice, contribute positively to the pupils' very good achievement by Year 11. Pupils further improve their achievement as a result of initiatives arising from the school's development as a Technology College. These include the provision of additional textbooks, scientific and computing equipment, a weekend residential GCSE revision course and Saturday classes for GCSE revision purposes. Departmental monitoring of teaching and learning is not fully effective in sharing good practice, so that teaching, though good overall, lacks consistency. Improvement since the previous inspection is good and standards are much higher than they were then.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are rising and pupils' achievement is very good by Year 11.
- Very good support for pupils' learning within and outside of lessons promotes achievement.
- Careful planning of assignments motivates pupils to work hard.
- Unsatisfactory management of ICT across the curriculum means that pupils have insufficient opportunities to use ICT to extend their work in many subjects.

Commentary

73. Standards by Year 9 are below average. They represent good achievement for pupils of all capabilities and different ethnic backgrounds, who commenced Year 7 with ICT skills well below average. Throughout Years 7 and 9, pupils make good progress in developing operational skills in handling a range of software. They carry out Internet research with increasing

confidence and competence. The well below average writing and number skills of many pupils restrict higher standards in the presentation of work.

74. The school entered pupils for the GCSE examination for the first time in 2004. Although results were below average, they represented good achievement, particularly taking into account that these pupils had not benefited from discrete ICT classes in previous years. By Year 11, standards are currently average. This is very good achievement, especially as pupils are studying the dual-award course in the time allotted for a single subject. Pupils are now more evaluative in their work, for example in assessing the ICT requirements of a variety of clients. Because their standards of literacy have improved, pupils write more extended and accurate accounts of their investigative work. Boys and girls of different ethnic backgrounds, including those with special educational needs and those at an early stage of learning English, achieve equally well. Pupils enhance their achievement through the completion of much ICT work in out-of-class clubs and activities and in very good completion of homework and coursework tasks.
75. Teaching and learning are good. Careful planning ensures that the work and projects set match pupils' capabilities and motivate them to succeed. Activities are stimulating and engage pupils' interest well, even in difficult work such as the legal framework and its implications for users of ICT. Teachers manage time very well. As a result, the revision sessions, usually held at the end of lessons, are effective in consolidating learning, as seen in lessons in which pupils explored the possible applications of difficult and challenging multi-media software. The small proportion of pupils who do not follow the examination course in ICT have a more limited, but improving and satisfactory ICT experience, through related skills developed in other subjects, particularly in design and technology. Teachers' good use of their subject expertise, for example in the study of the effects of modern technology on urban society, helps pupils to gain a competent knowledge and understanding of issues surrounding ICT in everyday life. The good deployment of the varied learning resources and the teachers' good support for individuals help to ensure that all pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve very well.
76. Good leadership sets a clear vision for the subject with a strong emphasis on raising standards. Very good management keeps suitably detailed records and uses assessment well to determine the content and methods of teaching. Very good communication within the department enables staff to know the pupils and their needs very well. Pupils in all years are clear about their targets. In Years 7 to 9, pupils do not always know what they need to do to improve their work, but pupils in Years 10 and 11 receive good guidance and advice about how to improve. The close focus on developing further the capabilities of pupils in Years 10 and 11 who are near the GCSE grade boundaries helps to raise the expectations of teachers and pupils.
77. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards are rising in Years 10 and 11, helped by the good out-of-lesson support and the careful matching of the examination's requirements to the learning needs of pupils. The quality of teaching and learning is improving as a result of more specialist staff, particularly for pupils in Years 10 and 11.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

78. Pupils' skills in ICT are generally competent enough to support their work across the curriculum, although they receive insufficient opportunities to use ICT in many subjects. The co-ordination and management of ICT across the curriculum are unsatisfactory. They do not provide a central and coherent picture of the ICT skills obtained by pupils and how these should be used and developed in different subjects. The use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning is satisfactory. The increasing use of the school's website for accessing materials by staff and

pupils promotes learning. In music, pupils make very good use of modern technology for composition and performance. Good use of ICT in English helps pupils to improve their skills in research and presentation. However, in subjects such as art and design and geography, the absence of ICT equipment and a lack of curricular planning for its use hinder pupils' achievement. In design and technology, the lack of associated software for the available equipment restricts the range of learning experiences for pupils. Teachers' use of interactive whiteboards is growing but few teachers know how to use them to full advantage in presenting work and involving pupils.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are not high enough as teaching lacks specialist knowledge and is unsatisfactory overall.
- Many pupils underachieve in Years 7 to 9 as the range and depth of study are inadequate.
- The lack of a head of department results in poor leadership and unsatisfactory management.
- Teachers are committed, caring and supportive of pupils in their charge and work hard.

Commentary

79. Standards by Year 9 are well below average and represent unsatisfactory achievement. The quality, amount and type of work in pupils' books are inadequate. High attainers receive work of insufficient challenge and make unsatisfactory progress. Pupils with special educational needs often receive specialist assistance that helps them to progress satisfactorily. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls or pupils of different ethnic backgrounds. By Year 9, pupils have an inadequate grounding in geographical skills. Map work is weak and many pupils lack competence in the accurate presentation and analysis of statistical data. Pupils have a poor understanding of spatial patterns and knowledge of place.
80. Recent GCSE examination results have been very low against the national and school averages and indicated unsatisfactory achievement for the small number of pupils involved. The subject is much less popular than nationally because the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is taught by non-specialist teachers and, because of the long-term absence of the head of department, lacks co-ordination. Currently, standards are well below average by Year 11 and below average in Year 10. Over Years 10 and 11 pupils' achievement is currently satisfactory, compared with their low standards in geography at the end of Year 9. The best independent GCSE projects are of good quality.
81. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Teachers' management of pupils is usually good, as are pupils' attitudes and behaviour. Relationships are good and teachers are committed and supportive of pupils in their charge. Most lessons have a good structure, but teachers' general lack of expertise in the subject means that they do not always define precisely enough the knowledge, understanding and skills that they expect pupils to learn. Pupils rely far too much on their teachers, who do too much for them. Expectations, pace and productivity in many lessons are not high enough and result in underachievement. Teachers rarely take enough time to place the lesson in its geographical

context and to consolidate fully previous learning. Insufficient use of fieldwork, local Ordnance Survey maps, atlases and visual aids in teaching restricts higher achievement.

82. Despite attempts by the school's management to appoint a head of subject there is still a vacancy. The lack of a subject specialist to lead curricular planning and to draw up detailed schemes of work results in poor leadership of the subject. Management is unsatisfactory and causes inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and assessment including day-to-day marking. Pupils have very little experience of fieldwork in Years 7 to 9 to develop their practical and investigative skills. The lack of a planned programme for the use of ICT to assist pupils' learning hinders progress. Improvement since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are rising and pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 11 as a result of good teaching.
- Good leadership has a positive effect on pupils' learning and overall standards.
- Pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour promote good learning.
- Insufficient fieldwork and too little use of ICT restrict curricular provision.

Commentary

83. Pupils enter Year 7 with very low standards in history. By Year 9, standards have risen and, though well below average, indicate good achievement for pupils of all capabilities, including those with special educational needs. In Years 7 to 9, pupils acquire a basic grounding in historical skills. Most have a competent knowledge and understanding of events and the main people studied and are beginning to appreciate their importance in the overall context of study. Knowledge of chronology is weak. Pupils use documentary sources satisfactorily but many pupils have difficulty in interpreting sources of evidence. Pupils with special educational needs and the few who are at an early stage of learning English achieve as well as the other pupils and benefit from the sensitive help provided by the learning support assistants. There is no significant difference in the progress of boys and girls or of pupils of different ethnic groups.
84. In 2004, GCSE results improved and, though well below the national average, represented satisfactory achievement compared with pupils' standards at the end of Year 9. Currently, standards have risen further by Year 11 and are below average. Achievement over Years 10 and 11 is generally good. However, higher attainers in Year 11 achieve very well because they receive very good teaching and are well motivated, work hard and want to do well. Pupils' skills in the interpretation of historical sources have improved considerably and are broadly average. Nevertheless, their competence in critical evaluation is below average. The regular testing, booster classes and very good revision booklets provide very good preparation for GCSE examinations and promote higher achievement.
85. Teaching is good overall and includes some very good teaching. Management of lessons is very good and motivates pupils to work productively and enthusiastically. Teaching strengths include very good planning, a good variety of well-structured and interesting tasks and the engagement of pupils in active learning. The best teaching is lively and challenging, and has good pace and high expectations to ensure that pupils work productively. Teachers enhance the presentation and development of the work through the good deployment of well-prepared and effective

resources. However, they do not make enough use of stimulating visual materials to enrich learning and, in a few lessons, rely too much on unrefined textbook extracts. Learning benefits considerably from the teachers' very harmonious relationships with pupils and the pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour in lessons.

86. Leadership and management are good. Curricular planning is thorough and of good quality. Teachers make satisfactory use of assessment and marking to influence what they teach and to show pupils how to improve. The lack of a coherent programme for ICT restricts the development of pupils' skills of investigation and research. Pupils have insufficient opportunities to extend their knowledge and understanding through visits to historical sites and museums and to study local history. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards are rising and teaching has improved.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The many pupils following GCSE courses achieve very well.
- Teachers plan lessons very well.
- Pupils' very good attitudes to learning ensure that lessons are purposeful and effective.
- Limited time for the non-examination course in Years 10 and 11 restricts higher achievement.

Commentary

87. Pupils' standards are below average by Year 9. They begin to understand that there are different kinds of questions in religion and that people of different faiths treat them differently. They have a competent knowledge of Hindu beliefs and practices, and of Christian beliefs about death and resurrection. In the context of the very low standards that pupils show on entry to the school, current work represents good achievement. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 enjoy the opportunity that religious education provides to consider moral issues. Many are keen to study the subject at GCSE level.
88. Large numbers of pupils take the GCSE examinations in religious and Islamic studies. The GCSE results in 2004 were broadly average and represented very good achievement. In current GCSE classes, standards are average and reflect very good achievement by Year 11 for the many pupils involved. Pupils draw on their own ideas and experiences in understanding how different faiths treat moral dilemmas such as euthanasia. Muslim pupils draw successfully on their heritage in understanding the teaching and significance of the Qur'an. Standards on the non-examination course in religious education are below average but indicate satisfactory achievement overall. The short amount of time available for teaching this course in Years 10 and 11 means that the minority of pupils who do not take the GCSE course develop only a basic knowledge and understanding of the topics and issues studied in the agreed syllabus for religious education. The school is aware of this and is preparing improved arrangements.
89. Teaching and learning are good overall. They are very good in the GCSE classes in Years 10 and 11. Teachers plan lessons very carefully to give pupils good opportunities to share their knowledge of different faiths and to make their own considered responses to religious questions. Topics such as the life of Martin Luther King contribute well to pupils' moral and social development. Teachers emphasise the common elements in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which enhance pupils' cultural understanding. Teaching for GCSE pupils in Years 10

and 11 helps them towards improved standards by showing them how to prepare good answers to examination questions. Teachers do not make enough use of ICT to enhance pupils' learning. Pupils of different ethnic backgrounds and capabilities, including those with special educational needs, bring very good attitudes to lessons. They work with sustained effort and concentration and respond very positively to the tasks and activities set.

90. Good leadership and management provide well-considered schemes of work and stimulating materials that help non-specialist colleagues to teach effectively. The department makes too little use of local places of worship as resources to enrich the curriculum. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. The quality of teaching and learning has improved considerably and has led to higher standards, particularly in GCSE examinations. The department's capacity to improve provision further is good.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

Provision in design and technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are rising and getting close to the national average by Year 11 because teaching and learning are good.
- Achievement is good because teachers plan lessons very well to meet pupils' needs.
- Pupils' very good behaviour and attitudes assist learning.
- Design and drawing skills need further development in Years 7 to 9.
- Pupils make insufficient use of ICT to extend their work in all years.

Commentary

91. Standards by Year 9 are below average. They show that boys and girls, of all capabilities and different ethnic groups, and including pupils with special educational needs, achieve well, compared with their low standards in the subject on entry in Year 7. In Years 7 to 9, pupils improve most aspects of their work well. However, their drawing and design skills and competence in workshop-based practical skills are not good enough for them to reach average standards by Year 9. Throughout Years 7 to 11 and across all the material areas, pupils have insufficient opportunities to use ICT to help them to produce work of the highest standard. Access to ICT facilities is inadequate and the department has insufficient software to develop pupils' skills fully in computer-aided design.
92. GCSE results, in 2004, were below average but indicated good achievement for the very large number of pupils entered. Currently, standards are below average by Year 11 and show that pupils of all capabilities are achieving well. As pupils grow in confidence, many are achieving very well in Year 11. Standards are close to the national average in food technology, textiles and childcare, but remain firmly below average in resistant materials and graphic products. Pupils learn effectively and make good progress, often in spite of limited literacy skills, because teachers use a range of methods and activities that match pupils' needs well. Pupils with special educational needs receive good individual help and work of suitable difficulty. The highest attaining pupils have a good range of extension tasks that keep them working at full stretch.

93. Teaching and learning are good throughout Years 7 to 11, including much that is very good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject to motivate pupils and to plan lessons very well to ensure continuity and progression. In the best lessons, they inform pupils clearly of the work to be done and its relevance and check their progress at the end. Because activities are well structured with a strong emphasis on practical work and investigations, pupils readily tackle what is expected of them and learning and achievement are good. Pupils want to learn. Their motivation is such that they frequently attend the after-school and Saturday sessions to make progress with coursework. Assessment and marking are thorough and give pupils a clear sense of the progress they are making. Pupils receive good assessment and advice at the end of a project, but do not always have clear enough guidance on what is required to reach the next level in learning. Throughout Years 7 to 11, pupils' very good attitudes to work and very good behaviour promote good learning. They are supportive of one another, co-operate well with teachers and grow in self-esteem.
94. Good leadership and good management result in effective teamwork and good teaching of a well-planned curriculum. Very good systems record pupils' attainment and achievement and track closely their progress in order to correct underachievement quickly. Good monitoring and sharing by the staff of their skills and expertise and the setting of realistically ambitious targets raise the expectations of staff and pupils. The technician and learning support assistants provide teachers and pupils with good support that enables pupils to achieve well. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. The school's development as a specialist Technology College has helped standards and teaching in the subject to improve well.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Two lessons in **drama** were sampled. Satisfactory teaching enabled pupils to make satisfactory progress in performing different types of characters and evaluating their work. The GCSE examination results for 2004 were below average but indicated good achievement for the large number of entrants. Currently the teaching is by temporary and non-specialist staff, because the school has had difficulties in recruiting specialist teachers of drama.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and contributes directly to good achievement.
- Pupils produce very good work in surface texture and object drawing.
- Inadequate provision in ICT restricts pupils' learning.
- Pupils' below average skills in literacy hinder their independent learning in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

95. Current standards are below average by Year 9. They represent good achievement for all pupils, compared with their below average skills on entry to the school. Pupils acquire good skills in mark-making techniques to achieve tone and texture in their drawings. They gain a good awareness of the power and effect of line. Standards of painting in watercolour are below average because pupils do not understand fully the techniques of watercolour. Drawing from observation is particularly good in Year 8.

96. In 2004, GCSE results were well below average and pupils did less well in art and design than in most of their other subjects. Current standards in Year 11 are a little below average but show that pupils are achieving well. The gifted and talented pupils were entered for the GCSE examination in Year 10 and gained above average results. They are now studying the GCSE course in textiles and their standards are above average. The proportion of pupils doing GCSE art and design is over three times the national average. Pupils' practical work is average, particularly in observed drawings. Their below average skills in literacy hinder their ability to research the work of artists and art movements for inspiration. Their written notes do not do justice to their ideas in developing topics. They do not do enough homework to reach the higher grades. In general, pupils in all years enjoy art and design and are composed and confident in practical work.
97. Teaching and learning are good in all years. Teachers make the work interesting and relevant. Planning and marking are done in good detail. However, the written planning and guidance for improvement given to pupils are too complicated and do not provide a step-by-step approach to ensure that they understand how to work independently. Inadequate provision of ICT within the department means that pupils rarely use ICT to manipulate images or to experiment with colour and composition.
98. Leadership and management are good. All documentation, including planning, assessment and recording, are thorough. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development by considering these aspects within the work of artists and art movements.
99. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. There is now good provision for the gifted and talented. However, there is still inadequate provision in ICT.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement in lessons is now good because of very good teaching.
- Good leadership is well focused on developing and improving the provision.
- Musical activities positively reflect the cultural diversity of pupils.
- Standards have recently been affected adversely by staff absence.

Commentary

100. Standards by Year 9 are below average. They represent good achievement because, on entry to the school, pupils' standards in music are well below average. Pupils have gaps in understanding because of recent staff absence. They know about musical styles, but their performing skills are underdeveloped. Staffing absence had an adverse effect on the GCSE results in 2004, which were well below average. Standards in the current Year 11 group are average and represent good achievement. Pupils develop good structured compositions through using ICT effectively. The higher attaining pupils produce imaginative and stylish work.
101. The teaching and learning observed were very good. However, scrutiny of work indicates that during the recent long-term absence of the head of department, pupils' learning was satisfactory. Learning in the lessons seen was very good because well-planned teaching ensured that the

work was of interest and suitable challenge to meet the diverse needs of all pupils in the class and, especially, to extend the highest attaining pupils. Teachers explain concepts in carefully chosen language that enables all pupils to understand. Therefore, pupils with special educational needs, and those for whom English is an additional language, learn as well as their peers. Imaginative activities engage pupils' interest. Teachers motivate pupils to learn through providing good opportunities for them to use ICT to support their work, particularly in composition. In lessons, excellent links with the work that pupils are doing in other subjects enhance learning. Teachers' high expectations promote very good attitudes and behaviour. Pupils receive very good individual support and learn to work collaboratively on short, focused musical tasks. They have very clear guidance on what they are expected to achieve in lessons. In Year 11, pupils know how to improve their work, and this motivates them to reach higher standards.

102. In spite of recent staff absence, leadership and management are good. Clearly articulated plans for the development of the department and thoroughly planned schemes of work place a strong emphasis on raising achievement and improving teaching and learning. Good systems for recording progress and for involving pupils in the assessment of their work help pupils to know how well they are doing and how to improve. Pupils develop their interest and enthusiasm for music because musicians from the local community regularly and frequently undertake workshops. The department celebrates cultural diversity through the music and instruments used in class, and the very good extra-curricular opportunities. Over 50 pupils take Steel Pan tuition. The good accommodation has a positive effect on learning, although a lack of soundproofing impedes pupils' concentration. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in 2004 were well above average and indicated very good achievement.
- Pupils achieve very well because teaching is consistently good or better.
- Very good leadership promotes a worthwhile and wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- Very good relationships between staff and pupils assist learning.
- Inadequate accommodation restricts pupils' achievement.

Commentary

103. Standards are below average by Year 9, but indicate good achievement compared with the well below average standards of pupils on entry. In a Year 9 lesson, pupils gave competent answers to questions about pulse rates and what happens to the heart during interval running. Year 8 pupils acquire an adequate knowledge of orienteering. In netball, girls make satisfactory progress but have below average skills and accuracy in passing and receiving the ball.
104. The GCSE examinations results, in 2004, were well above average and show that the pupils involved achieved very well, compared with their attainment in physical education at the end of Year 9. Currently, standards are average overall both in the GCSE classes and on the general course taken by all pupils. Many pupils on the GCSE course are reaching above average standards. Achievement is very good for boys and girls of all capabilities and different ethnic backgrounds on both courses by the end of Year 11. In Year 10, girls achieve well in basketball

even though their knowledge and understanding of the game are well below average. All pupils know the importance of a warm-up prior to exercise and many take responsibility for their own and group sessions. In the GCSE course, written work is below average and mainly involves pupils copying notes, with little opportunity for extended writing. Pupils show a good understanding of factors affecting participation in sport.

105. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers' enthusiasm and high expectations, especially on the GCSE course, motivate pupils to work productively. Good planning of lessons ensures that all pupils know the purpose of the work and how to assess how well they are doing. Pupils with special educational needs integrate well and play a full and active part in all lessons and usually make good or better progress. Occasionally, the highest attaining pupils do not receive work and activities of sufficient difficulty to extend them fully. However, the school's programme of extra-curricular activities provides many good opportunities for the talented pupils to enhance their performance, for example through the junior athlete programme. All teachers are competent in ICT but pupils do not have enough opportunities to use ICT to enhance their work in lessons. Pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour assist learning and there are very few non-participants in lessons.
106. Very good leadership and good management ensure that all teachers have high expectations of pupils and share a commitment to raising standards. Good monitoring of teaching and regular reviews and sharing of good practice help to ensure a consistent quality of teaching and learning. The assessment of pupils' work is good overall, but the marking of pupils' GCSE work does not show pupils clearly enough the progress they are making towards their predicted grades. The unsatisfactory accommodation restricts the range of learning activities. The uneven playing surface of the netball court needs upgrading, particularly as the outdoor provision is inadequate, with no playing field or grassed area to extend curricular opportunities for all pupils.
107. Pupils extend and enrich their work and raise achievement through high participation in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. School teams are successful in a range of sports and are particularly successful in athletics, cricket and basketball competitions. A high proportion of pupils have achieved success at local and regional level. Sporting clubs in the local community, such as a nearby rugby union club, provide valuable coaching for pupils out of school time that helps many pupils of all capabilities to improve their sporting, social and teamwork skills.
108. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. GCSE results have risen consistently and teaching continues to be good. However, the changing facilities have not improved, remain inadequate and have an adverse effect on raising standards further.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in 2004 were average and showed that pupils achieved very well.
- Pupils' very positive attitudes support learning very well.
- Good use of assessment keeps pupils well informed of their progress.
- The use of assessment to determine targets and to decide what to teach is inadequate.

Commentary

109. In 2004, the GCSE results were average and represented very good achievement for the large number of boys and girls entered. Many pupils performed better in business studies than in the other subjects they sat. Currently, standards are average by Year 11 and indicate good achievement for pupils of all capabilities and different ethnic backgrounds, compared with pupils' well below average standards in the core subjects at the end of Year 9. Pupils in Year 10 write with increasing confidence and depth about business activity within a changing environment, for example in analysing the means by which companies expand. Literacy skills improve as a result of good teaching and are close to average. Pupils are less confident and competent in oral discussion. They listen well but have below average speaking skills. In Year 11, pupils learn to back up their opinions with sensible reasons, for example in work on quality control. Work folders are increasingly well organised, as pupils recognise their importance as aids to revision for examinations. Higher attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 show above average evaluative skills, for example in their work on human resources in different organisations. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because teachers ensure that the learning materials match pupils' individual capabilities and interests.
110. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers make effective use of the well-designed schemes of work to plan lessons well and to set work of appropriate difficulty for all pupils that makes full use of the time available. At times, the teacher does not place the topic of study in a wide enough context to consolidate pupils' understanding, as seen in lessons dealing with methods of production. Visits to local industry give good support to developing and deepening the pupils' understanding, for example of flow production. Pupils' mature attitudes and willingness to undertake individual research and to be responsible for their own learning help them to achieve well.
111. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The marking and assessment of pupils' work are good. The monitoring of pupils' individual performances and regular feedback inform them of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Analysis of data helps to raise standards, though setting targets for the department is at an early stage. The department has no clear view on the attainment of different groups of pupils or of how to use information from assessment to influence what to teach.
112. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Attainment is improving and achievement remains very good. Resources to aid learning have increased.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Work was sampled on the **personal, social and health education (PSHE)** programme, which is taught to all pupils in Years 7 to 9 for one period a week and in Years 10 and 11 for one period every other week. PSHE consists of appropriate courses in citizenship, sex and relationships, drugs education and support for learning. A few of the courses on sex education, relationships and the homeless are taught by specialist external agencies. The quality of teaching and learning observed in PSHE was satisfactory. Lessons were well planned using a variety of teaching methods involving individual and group work. Boys and girls of all ethnic backgrounds discussed maturely their understanding of and the definitions of discrimination, racism and stereotyping and reflected on the effects of these on others. Pupils worked well both independently and in pairs, supporting and challenging the views and ideas of others.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils show very good awareness of their responsibilities as citizens.
- Good leadership and management ensure that pupils receive all elements of the course.
- Very good extra-curricular provision encourages pupils to participate in events and to exercise responsibility.
- The limited amount of time for teaching the formal course in citizenship hinders higher standards in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

113. Standards are below average by Year 9 and average by Year 11. They indicate that pupils of all ethnic backgrounds and capabilities, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language, achieve well throughout Years 7 to 11. In all years, pupils are actively involved in the life of the school and display very good attitudes and understanding about fairness and respect, especially for the wide diversity of ethnic groups within the school. They discuss issues such as civil rights through broader topics such as conflict. Most pupils can justify their opinions on personal, social, political and ethical issues orally. They learn to show empathy and consider a range of points of view. Below average skills in literacy restrict the written work. Links with voluntary groups help to extend pupils' awareness of the duties and responsibilities associated with citizenship.
114. Teaching and learning are good. Many different teachers teach citizenship in subjects across the curriculum. These lessons supplement the work provided in the discrete lessons in citizenship, taught by form teachers, in Years 7 to 9 and within the PSHE programme, taught by a specialist team of teachers and visiting speakers, in Years 10 and 11. The limited time available to teach citizenship in Years 10 and 11 restricts the depth and detail of work covered in topics such as crime and punishment.
115. Leadership and management are good. Planning is thorough and there is a commitment by senior managers, including the co-ordinator, to promote citizenship as central to the ethos of the school. Good co-ordination and procedures ensure that all the major elements of citizenship are covered in a range of subjects. Assessment and reporting are well developed. However, there is a recognition that more needs to be done to make assessment fully effective in informing pupils how well they are performing compared with national expectations. There is a clear commitment to raising standards and ensuring that the subject has a growing and positive influence on pupils' personal development.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

| <i>Inspection judgement</i> | <i>Grade</i> |
|---|--------------|
| The overall effectiveness of the school | 3 |
| How inclusive the school is | 2 |
| How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection | 3 |
| Value for money provided by the school | 3 |
| Overall standards achieved | 3 |
| Pupils' achievement | 3 |
| Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos) | 2 |
| Attendance | 3 |
| Attitudes | 2 |
| Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions | 2 |
| Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 |
| The quality of education provided by the school | 3 |
| The quality of teaching | 3 |
| How well pupils learn | 3 |
| The quality of assessment | 3 |
| How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs | 4 |
| Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities | 2 |
| Accommodation and resources | 5 |
| Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety | 3 |
| Support, advice and guidance for pupils | 2 |
| How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the school's links with parents | 3 |
| The quality of the school's links with the community | 3 |
| The school's links with other schools and colleges | 3 |
| The leadership and management of the school | 3 |
| The governance of the school | 3 |
| The leadership of the headteacher | 2 |
| The leadership of other key staff | 3 |
| The effectiveness of management | 3 |

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