

INSPECTION REPORT

HILLCREST SCHOOL

Cramlington, Northumberland

LEA area: Northumberland

Unique reference number: 122383

Headteacher: Colin Gibson

Reporting inspector: Steven Parker
13033

Dates of inspection: 17th – 20th January 2000

Inspection number: 188247

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

© Crown copyright 2000

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties
School category:	Community special
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	East View Avenue East Farm Cramlington Northumberland
Postcode:	NE23 1DY
Telephone number:	01670 713632
Fax number:	01670 737920
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	John Joynson
Date of previous inspection:	3 rd - 6 th June 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Steven Parker	Registered inspector	Science Art Information technology Music	How high are standards? How well are pupils taught?
Susan Walsh	Lay inspector	Equal opportunities Personal, social and health education	How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
David Irwin	Team inspector	English Geography History	How well is the school led and managed?
John Pearson	Team inspector	Mathematics Design and technology Modern foreign language Physical education Religious education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities given to the pupils?

The inspection contractor was:

QICS
Ibsley
4 West Cliff Road
Dawlish
Devon
EX7 9EB

01626 867575

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the

inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

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

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	11
The school's results and achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?	13
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS?	14
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	16
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?	17
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	18
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	20
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	21
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	24

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Hillcrest is a small, mixed, secondary, local authority school, situated in the village area of Cramlington, a rapidly expanding town in south-east Northumberland. It provides education for up to 76 pupils with moderate learning difficulties, aged from 11 to 16. There are currently 72 pupils on roll. Recent admissions to the school have included an increasing proportion of pupils with additional behavioural difficulties and others with speech and language difficulties. Most of the pupils come from outside the town, many travelling quite considerable distances in transport provided by the local authority. Well over half the pupils qualify for free school meals, which is high in comparison with most similar schools. There are no pupils from ethnic minorities. On entry to the school all the pupils have attainments which are below national expectations. All pupils have statements of special educational need.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Good quality educational opportunities are provided for pupils, helping them to achieve a good standard. Pupils generally have positive attitudes and are keen to be independent. Most of the teaching is at least good, with over a quarter being very good or excellent. As a consequence, pupils are learning well. The curriculum is appropriate and relevant, with good provision for extra-curricular activities and personal, social and health education. Parents and carers are kept appropriately informed about their child's progress. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Teaching is good and is a strength of the school. All staff work well together to provide a supportive and encouraging learning environment.
- The great majority of pupils make good progress in their literacy and numeracy studies.
- Pupils' learning is particularly good in English, mathematics, music, health education, physical education and religious education.
- Older pupils achieve well in their work and many gain some accredited qualifications. Most go on to further study and a few secure employment.
- The majority of pupils have good attitudes to work and are enthusiastic to learn.
- Relationships are good and the majority of pupils behave well.

What could be improved

- Arrangements for promoting the welfare and guidance of pupils.
- The use of assessment information more effectively to inform teachers' planning.
- The structure and use of individual education plans to make them more effective.
- The management of difficult and challenging behaviour.
- Curriculum balance for pupils in Key Stage 4.
- Procedures for evaluating the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning.
- The school needs to develop a clearer view of its future function and purpose.
- There is no special educational needs policy.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made satisfactory progress in dealing with many of the weaknesses identified in the last inspection in June 1996. Considerable improvements have been made to the building, which is now safe and attractive. The curriculum is much improved, although there is still some work to do to make it fully balanced. Improvements have been made to the transport arrangements to create a longer school day, but the time available is still below recommendations. The governors are much more involved in the work of the school and fulfil their statutory duties with regard to school policies. There is now a structured approach to holding discussions with staff to identify and meet their professional development needs. Resources have been improved in most subject areas, although there is still some room for improvement. Insufficient progress has been made in relation to developing whole school assessment

procedures, a structured approach to monitoring pupils' progress, a coherent system to support the guidance of pupils and the introduction of a formal teacher appraisal system.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils achieve in relation to their individual targets by the time they leave the school.

Progress in:	by age 16	Key	
speaking and listening	B	very good	A
reading	B	good	B
writing	B	satisfactory	C
mathematics	B	unsatisfactory	D
personal, social and health education	B	poor	E
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	B		

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

There has been a steady improvement in pupils' achievements in most subjects since the last inspection. This is particularly so in Key Stage 4. Standards have improved in writing throughout the school, mathematics at Key Stage 3, where pupils' achievements are very good, as the result of the school's effective use of the National Numeracy Strategy, and in science.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils are positive and keen to attend school. They are interested in what they do and are enthusiastic in their involvement in the wide range of activities available.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	The majority of pupils behave well in school and out in the community. The behaviour of a significant minority of younger pupils gives cause for concern.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils take a mature and active part in the life of the school, especially as they grow older. Most behave responsibly and show genuine concern for each other's welfare. Relationships between pupils and staff and with each other are good.
Attendance	There have been some improvements in the monitoring of pupils' attendance. Attendance is satisfactory overall.

The great majority of pupils present as polite and responsible young people who are glad to be at school and wish to comply with the principles of order and mutual respect that the school fosters. The increasing proportion of younger pupils with more complex needs is a challenge to the school and has the potential to disturb this equilibrium if not managed more effectively.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-16
Lessons seen overall	Good

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

Four fifths of teaching is at least good and over a quarter is very good or excellent. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. The quality of teaching in English is good overall and very good in Key Stage 4. It is also good throughout mathematics, science, and personal, social and health education. Teachers combine good knowledge of their subject and the needs of individual pupils to plan lively and engaging lessons, setting high expectations and encouraging pupils to do their best. Teamwork between teachers and classroom assistants is particularly effective and this ensures that pupils receive sensitive, well-focused support. The majority of teachers do not use assessment information effectively to inform their planning. Some teachers have difficulty in managing the challenging behaviour of a minority of pupils and this can sometimes result in these pupils not achieving as well as they could. All teachers take good account of pupils' communication needs and effectively incorporate aspects of literacy and numeracy into their teaching.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and relevant overall, with valuable additional opportunities to experience aspects of the wider world through outdoor activities and sport. It is not, however, as balanced as it could be in Key Stage 4.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	This is satisfactory overall, with good provision for pupils' personal, social and moral development, helping them to become confident and self directed by the time they leave school. The provision for spiritual and cultural development is less well integrated into the life of the school.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The caring ethos of the school and good policies for health and safety and child protection ensure that pupils are well cared for. There are, however, weaknesses in the systems for monitoring pupils' personal and academic progress and there is no over-arching policy for pastoral support.

When considering the challenge of the wide catchment area, the school does its best to foster and maintain a productive partnership with parents and carers.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher works closely and effectively in partnership with his senior management colleagues to ensure good teamwork within the school. This has led to many valuable improvements and developments in provision. There has been less success in developing a longer-term plan for the school's future, particularly in relation to inevitable changes in the school's population, resulting from the local authority's policy of

	referring pupils with more complex needs.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The governors have a very strong and supportive role and presence in the school. Through their various committees and visits they hold the school appropriately to account and are involved in development planning. They do not, however, have a clear vision about the school's future, which they can share with the headteacher.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The governors and headteacher work closely together in informally monitoring the school's work and using that information to evaluate its performance. There is, though, no clearly defined structure and process, incorporating appropriate criteria, to more effectively inform their deliberations about the school's effectiveness.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes generally satisfactory use of its staff, buildings and learning resources.

The school is appropriately staffed with the recommended numbers of teachers and classroom assistants. The much-improved building provides a generally satisfactory learning environment, but the science room is very small and not well equipped, there is no music room and the library facilities are very limited. Following a significant planned investment in learning resources these are now satisfactory overall and good in some subjects, most notably English, information technology and music. There are however, still some inadequacies in science, religious education and the library book stock.

There is a collective approach to the management of the school in which the headteacher, senior staff and governors work effectively together to a common purpose. Recommended, structured approaches to looking at how well the school is doing are at an early stage of development and the school does not yet have an active approach to planning for its future. The principles of best value, which require the balancing of costs and effectiveness, are not, as yet, fully integrated into the school's management thinking.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like going to school. • The school has high expectations. • The school is approachable and supportive. • There is a good partnership between parents and school. • The school is well managed and led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some concern was expressed about behaviour in the school. • A minority of parents expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of work pupils are given to do at home.

No parents attended the meeting called by the reporting inspector prior to the inspection and, as a result, the evaluation of these views is based on an analysis of returns for the questionnaire. The inspection findings confirm parents' generally very positive views and support their concerns about behaviour. The school has tried very hard to develop an approach to homework that both meets pupils' learning needs and engages their parents. There is, however, no written policy and the principles are inconsistently applied by teachers.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. The characteristics of the pupils for whom the school caters make it inappropriate to judge their attainment against age-related national expectations or averages. The report does, however, give examples of what pupils know understand and can do. Judgements about progress and any references to attainment take account of information contained in pupils' statements and annual reviews. There have been notable improvements since the previous inspection in pupils' attainments by the end of both key stages. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils are now achieving results in National Curriculum assessments that compare favourably with pupils in similar schools. These improvements have been most clear in mathematics and science. During the last academic year, the majority of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 gained Oxford, Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts accredited passes for their work experience portfolios. Most of these pupils also gained bronze awards in the ASDAN scheme for modules in information handling, the community, sport and leisure, health and survival, world of work, expressive arts, the wider world and government. The provision of these accreditation opportunities is a significant advance on the previous inspection findings and the school has plans to extend further the subjects covered to include English, mathematics, science and physical education.

2. The achievement of the majority of pupils is good in most subjects and they make steady progress in their learning. Progress against targets in pupils' individual education plans is equally good in academic subjects and personal development.

3. In English, pupils' achievements are consistently good across the three areas of speaking and listening, reading and writing. The best progress is made in writing during Key Stage 4, which was the weakest area in the last inspection. This overall improvement in English has been as the result of much better teaching, based on detailed planning using good assessment information. The successful implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy has had a significant impact on achievement in mathematics in Key Stage 3, where pupils make very good progress. The good levels of achievement in mathematics across the school are a marked improvement on the previous inspection. The same applies to science where pupils are now making steady progress across both key stages, gaining particular knowledge and skills in relation to experimental and investigative activities. Pupils make very good progress in music and health education across the school and in religious education in Key Stage 3. In physical education, achievements are very good in Key Stage 4, another significant improvement. Achievements are good overall in information technology, design and technology and history. Pupils make satisfactory progress in geography and French.

4. There is no significant variation in the achievements of girls and boys, but a small group of pupils with behavioural difficulties in Key Stage 3 are not achieving as well as they could because they are often not engaged in their lessons or are challenging the authority of the teacher.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

5. The great majority of pupils have good attitudes and are positive about the learning opportunities they are offered. This applies particularly to most pupils in Key Stage 4. Those who travel independently arrive early each morning and are clearly keen to start their day. Parents say that their children like school. Pupils apply themselves diligently to their work

and show their pleasure openly if they succeed in overcoming a challenge. They are equally appreciative and celebratory of their peers' successes. There are many instances where pupils collaborate sensibly in pairs and groups to do their work, for example in science, when they pool their knowledge and understanding to solve problems. Most lessons are characterised by pupils listening carefully to the teacher and each other. Pupils are very good at taking turns appropriately in discussions and respecting the views of others.

6. Behaviour varies across the school but is satisfactory overall. Older, more mature pupils, often display exemplary behaviour around the school and out in the community. The changing character of referrals to the school means that a small, but significant minority of pupils in Key Stage 3 display difficult behaviours that sometimes challenge adults and often cause friction with their peers. It is noticeable that these pupils do not always challenge, particularly in lessons where the materials are presented in a way that engages them or the staff are skilled in managing their behaviours constructively. Behaviour in the playground is boisterous but mostly good-natured. Pupils are consistently polite and welcoming to visitors, often displaying impressive social skills when engaging them in conversation.

7. There is no overt bullying or oppressive behaviour. Pupils understand the rules about this and are clearly confident that if they approach a member of staff for help the issue will be dealt with speedily and effectively. The quite large number of fixed period exclusions, which have increased since the previous inspection, relate to a small number of pupils (one of whom has recently been transferred by the local authority to another, more appropriate setting). The school uses this sanction with care, and has appropriate procedures to return the pupil back in to school in a positive and constructive manner. There were no permanent exclusions during the last year, which was an improvement on the previous inspection.

8. The ethos of the school encourages pupils to think about their own actions and how they might affect others. The combination of this developing self-knowledge and a school culture that clearly encourages respect for others' feelings and beliefs, results in generally empathetic behaviour. The quality of pupils' personal development is good. There are many examples of kindness and personal support. Pupils display initiative in the way they carry out tasks and are pleased to be given responsibility. Some are appointed as prefects and sensibly perform their duties, respecting and enforcing the school rules and setting an example to younger pupils. Participation in outdoor and adventurous activities, such as the sailing project and residential education, all contribute significantly to this aspect of pupils' development. Relationships between staff and pupils are of high quality. Adults are caring, supportive and encouraging and this has a positive effect on the way pupils relate to each other.

9. Whilst there is, at times, a high rate of absence in Year 11 relating to a very small number of pupils, attendance is satisfactory overall.

10. These overall standards have been sustained since the last inspection, with the exception of the behaviour in Key Stage 3. The school recognises the need to rethink its behaviour management policy to manage this situation more effectively.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

11. The quality of teaching is a strength of the school. It is at least good in four fifths of lessons and very good or excellent in over a quarter of them. It is consistently good in Key Stage 4 and mostly good in Key Stage 3. Pupils respond enthusiastically to teachers' lively presentation. They also benefit from the generally well-focused support they receive from

teachers and classroom support staff, working very effectively in partnership. Knowledge of individual pupils' needs is good and informs the approach that staff employ. Pupils are appreciative of the often subtle interventions that result from this knowledge. It is particularly well done in practical activities, like physical education and design and technology, where difficulty or failure in a task is more 'public' and obvious.

12. There has been a turnover of half the teaching staff since the last inspection. This has resulted in better specialist subject provision, particularly in English at Key Stage 4, where it is now very good and mathematics and science across the school. These improvements are reflected in pupils' achievements in those subjects. Most teachers are very clear about what they want pupils to learn. They often go over earlier learning to put the lesson into context and encourage pupils to offer their own ideas about the topic. This was well illustrated in a health education lesson on substance misuse. One pupil had not been at the previous lesson and the teacher cleverly used the opportunity to update him, whilst also checking the other pupils' understanding. This resulted in pupils sharing insights that they had developed in the intervening period.

13. There is a good understanding of the literacy and numeracy strategy requirements across the curriculum. Most teachers take full advantage of opportunities that they create through their planning or which come up naturally during a lesson to consolidate pupils' learning through these strategies. Teachers are particularly aware of the vocabulary of their subject and are careful to ensure that they employ suitable methods when helping pupils to decode difficult words or sentences. Most worksheets used are at an appropriate level of text difficulty. Teachers are also alert to the implications of mathematical activity in their lessons and pupils are often pleased to be able to make connections from their mathematics lessons. For example, in design and technology, pupils were planning the position of number combinations on their double cube calendar to be able to display every number from 1 to 31. They showed great pleasure at having worked out the need to reverse the '6' to provide the necessary '9'.

14. Teachers often motivate pupils through challenging them to meet their high expectations. This can either be an intellectual challenge, as in a very effective religious education lesson that was relating the ten commandments to pupils' own experience; or a practical demonstration, as in an excellent dance lesson where the teacher provided a model for pupils to work towards. Praise and encouragement are also well used, often to involve or cajole the more resistant pupils. Once they are engaged in this way, pupils usually then sustain their interest throughout the lesson. This happened in an English lesson where pupils were researching, using the library and book indexes to gather information for their fact file. The teacher gave very positive feedback to reassure the pupil that he was on the right track and this gave him the confidence to do further research independently.

15. The management of difficult behaviour, particularly in Key Stage 3, demonstrated the widest range of approach and effectiveness. The most successful lessons involving the small number of challenging pupils had clear structure and objectives, straightforwardly communicated by the teacher and a variety of engaging activities. Teachers were consistent in their chosen method and avoided direct confrontation. Examples include where a teacher in a maths lesson referred directly to behaviour, making the 'ground rules' clear to the group and assertively applying them; whilst in a music lesson no reference was made to behaviour at all. Instead, the teacher employed the invitation that "I need to see people singing before I invite them out to play an instrument" to very effectively engage a reluctant pupil.

16. The very best lessons are carefully planned, using assessment information to inform the structure and content, taking particular note of individual need. They are well timed to

include all the planned elements, particularly the all-important summary discussion at the end, and have a motivating pace with reminders during individual work about what is required and by when. All of these elements have contributed to the significant improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' learning since the last inspection. However, the often limited use of assessment, the lack of structured use of homework and inconsistent or inappropriate behaviour management approaches, particularly in Key Stage 3, are major areas for development to improve further the quality of teaching.

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

17. The school meets its statutory requirements by providing pupils with a good range of relevant and appropriate learning experiences, including all subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. A good effort has been made to improve curriculum arrangements since the previous inspection, particularly to ensure that all pupils receive their entitlement to the full range of subjects. Discrepancies in the time allocated to certain subjects have been resolved. There is now a good balance of teaching time between the National Curriculum subjects, with an appropriate emphasis on core subjects, particularly English and mathematics, which benefit from effective use of the National Literacy and Numeracy strategy frameworks to raise the standard of teaching and learning. An exception is the teaching of skills in information technology (IT). Whilst the school has already made a significant investment in purchasing resources for this subject it does not yet include discrete lessons on the timetable for all of its pupils. Some Year 11 pupils do receive some instruction in IT skills on the course that they follow at a local further education college. However, the effectiveness of this arrangement is reduced due to there being no curriculum liaison between the college and school.

18. The special educational needs of the majority of the pupils are appropriately addressed by providing learning experiences from programmes of study from earlier key stages as necessary, particularly from Key Stage 2. The use of specialist subject teachers has improved the school's capacity to improve subject provision and is effective for the majority of pupils, who cope well with frequent changes of teacher. There is, however, a lack of consistent whole-school strategies more effectively to meet the educational needs of the significant minority of pupils in the school whose challenging behaviour reduces their ability to access the curriculum. The curriculum provision for a small number of pupils with speech and language difficulties has been improved satisfactorily by negotiating regular input from a speech and language therapist.

19. At Key Stage 4, and in some instances for pupils in Year 9, a good range of age-appropriate activities supplements the National Curriculum to provide breadth. Careers education is provided for two periods a week within school. This is supplemented by a day a week at college for a ten week block when pupils visit different places of work as part of their work experience preparation. Pupils appreciate their often well chosen three-week work experience placements in Year 11, and in a few cases this has led on to employment when pupils have left school. Although this careers and work related curriculum is very strong, there is sometimes a focus on inappropriate jobs for some of the school lessons, which cover careers that would require entry qualifications beyond the capabilities of the pupils. This is, therefore, not always effective, because it encourages unrealistic expectations in some pupils. It is also an inefficient use of time to make such a disproportionate allocation focused on these areas when there are other aspects or subjects that do not have sufficient coverage. For example literacy and numeracy would benefit from increased provision and art, which is not being taught at Key Stage 4, would provide considerable motivation for higher attaining pupils to follow an accredited course. Teachers recognise the need for pupils

to be well prepared for when they leave school. As a result, the provision of community and environmental projects, sports, leisure and adventure opportunities, health topics and expressive arts all make a valuable contribution to encouraging the development of well rounded personalities. These activities expect maximum independence from pupils and many provide good opportunities for pupils to gain external accreditation, both locally and nationally, for their work.

20. The senior management team does not, however, have a structured overview of the curriculum that explains how all of these different subjects and opportunities fit together as a coherent whole for the pupils. This is particularly significant in Key Stage 4, where the range of additional activities is more complex. As reported during the previous inspection, the impact of these activities, which otherwise make a good contribution to the pupils' education, is reduced by a lack of overall planning. There are satisfactory cross-curricular links between subjects, for example the use of mathematical skills in science and design and technology, but these occur incidentally rather than as the result of clear planning.

21. This lack of coherent structure results in some unnecessary overlap between lessons provided at college and those provided at school, and the loss of valuable lesson time, for example when the adventure programme clashes with core subjects. Also, the disproportionate allocation of time to some activities, as illustrated with the careers education programme already mentioned, is not clearly justified.

22. Some improvements have been made to the length and organisation of the school day since the last inspection. Lessons are now of a more consistent length and start and finish punctually. However, the time available for pupils to engage in lessons remains barely satisfactory, still falling short of the recommended time by nearly three hours a week. Although most of the time pupils spend at school contributes effectively to their learning, the time spent in tutor groups and during the afternoon break are particularly unproductive, because the use of this time is not planned.

23. Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is good. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own wellbeing. They are provided with good quality sex education, drugs awareness and guidance on keeping themselves healthy through the good quality programme of personal and social education. This has a considerable impact on their personal development and helps them to make sense of the world around them. Pupils' social and moral development is also influenced by the positive examples that are set by the staff, who encourage an atmosphere of fairness and trust, in which issues are discussed openly and constructively. An upper school assembly that dealt with hurtful and offensive language, and then moved on to deal with racism, was a perfect illustration of how teachers successfully encourage pupils to give sensitive consideration to how their own actions can affect others. A prayer at the end was emotive and affecting for the pupils. Other assemblies were successful in bringing the whole school together to celebrate achievement and consolidate a sense of community, but they did not have the same impact on pupils' sensitivities and did not contribute so well to spiritual awareness. Provision for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. They are introduced to some aspects of art, literature and music from their own and other cultures, but there is little sense of a planned approach to extending their knowledge, particularly of the positive aspects of the multicultural society in which they live.

24. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities for its pupils, though the constraints of school transport restrict these mostly to within the school day. An excellent outdoor education programme that involves all pupils and leads to major sailing and other expeditions broadens their educational experience. Theatre visits, the organisation of fund-

raising events in the local community and a range of sporting fixtures with other schools all make an effective contribution to pupils' education.

25. Satisfactory enhancement of the curriculum is provided through sporting fixtures with other special schools and the use made by Key Stage 4 pupils of courses at the local college of further education. Contacts with the main primary school from which pupils are transferred aids smooth progression of their learning as they change schools. Opportunities for pupils to further broaden their learning experiences and benefit from contact with peers in mainstream schools are, however, unsatisfactory.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

26. The happy atmosphere and the good quality relationships between staff and pupils contribute to an ethos that allows pupils to learn. The school is anxious to raise the self-esteem of pupils and to encourage them to believe in themselves. At present a group of pupils from across the school are attending a project run in conjunction with the local health authority designed to help them become more confident and self-aware.

27. All staff care very much about the pupils' welfare and have their best interests at heart, but, as was observed in the last inspection, the school still has few formalised systems to support the guidance of pupils. No member of staff has overall responsibility for pastoral care and, although the school has established a system of form tutors, and has provided form time, the role of the class teacher is not well defined and there is no guidance for the use of the tutor period. The pastoral system is not well used to encourage and raise levels of attainment.

28. Teachers know the pupils' personal circumstances well and are aware of the needs of individuals on an informal basis. However, the monitoring of academic progress and personal development remains unsatisfactory. The school has developed a whole school assessment policy but few subjects follow it. Whilst the assessment of English is good, formal assessment of mathematics is barely satisfactory and its use in science and many other subjects is limited. Assessment is used to inform planning very effectively in English but in other subjects this only occurs on a very informal basis.

29. Good use is made of information about pupils' attainment on their arrival at the school. Appropriate reading, vocabulary, writing and spelling assessments are used. This information forms the foundation of targets, which are thoroughly recorded and monitored on a termly basis and inform planning. Provision for those pupils with speech and language difficulties has improved significantly, as there is now access to speech and language therapy.

30. Teachers use individual education plans as a means of monitoring progress. The school has worked hard to write very full individual education plans (IEPs). Unfortunately they are too complex and often reflect what pupils have studied rather than establishing a manageable number of clearly defined and easily measurable targets. As a result, the IEPs cannot be used wholly effectively to measure progress. They are not used at present to monitor and promote pupils' personal development or to bring about improvement in standards of behaviour. There have been attempts in the past to implement individual behaviour plans, but the targets were too broad and the system was found to be unworkable. The school is currently looking to develop this approach to better effect.

31. The school's behaviour policy was praised in the previous report and was said to make a significant contribution to the good standards of behaviour reported. Changes in the

characteristics of the pupils attending the school have eroded the success of this policy. It still works well for older pupils. However, a small but significant minority of pupils in Years 7 and 8 have increasingly complex needs, often accompanied by patterns of behaviour that can be difficult to deal with. It is no longer possible to manage the behaviour of these pupils by relying on good relationships and the positive role models that are provided by staff, although these factors are still very important. There are no formal policies or guidelines to help teachers and support staff to better manage challenging behaviour. Different teachers are employing different methods for dealing with pupils, and there is a lack of consistency in the way they approach the problem. The school has yet to seek the support of a full range of outside agencies to advise them on how to develop more successful ways of managing this situation. Sensible and effective steps are taken to ensure that bullying does not occur and those pupils who have challenging behaviour are disruptive rather than threatening.

32. Significant improvements have been made in procedures to ensure pupils' health and safety. The school has implemented a written health and safety policy and has raised levels of awareness concerning health and safety issues. Procedures for risk assessments are starting to develop but these have not yet been formalised. The school is aware that further improvements still need to be made to health and safety procedures, including ensuring that 'good housekeeping' (for example tidiness and attention to trailing flexes) is practised in all areas of the school. Child protection procedures are of good quality and the school is conscientious in this area.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

33. The school has satisfactory links with parents, which have been sustained since the previous inspection. Parents are confident that they can approach the school should any problems or questions arise. Those parents who responded to the questionnaire associated with the inspection were generally very satisfied with the school.

34. Parents are informed about the progress of their children through the annual review process and are also supplied with copies of their child's individual education plan. The written record associated with the annual review serves as an annual report. Report content for English is of very good quality. It clearly informs parents what their children know, understand and can do and the progress they have made. In contrast, the mathematics reports inform parents only about how their child has responded to the subject rather than clearly communicating what progress has been made. Science reports are similar. Reports on personal, social and health education give a clear and informative view on pupils' progress. The reports for other subjects vary in quality and often concentrate on reporting pupils' attitudes rather than their progress. The school's prospectus is informative and welcoming.

35. The school is keen to involve parents in their children's learning. It provides them with regular opportunities to discuss their child's progress at termly meetings to discuss individual education plans and annual reviews. Parents often find it difficult to visit the school on a regular basis as the school takes pupils from a relatively wide catchment area and attendance at the termly meetings is low. However, parents do make an extra effort to attend occasions that involve their children, particularly when they perform in such activities as the carol service.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

36. During the period since the last inspection, the headteacher has successfully created a collective team approach to the management of the school. His leadership has provided

clear direction throughout this time, although the impact of this has been constrained, due to his carrying a heavy teaching load prior to the current academic year. The significant changes that have been made within the teaching staff have alleviated this situation. The working relationship between the headteacher and the governors is good and productive.

37. The governing body holds the school appropriately to account for performance and improvement through its committee meetings and receiving and debating the headteacher's termly reports. Agendas for the meetings are appropriately triggered by the school development plan, the setting of targets and regular budget reports. There is, however, no whole school special needs policy and no nominated member of staff with responsibility for identifying and ensuring that pupils' additional special needs are appropriately supported. The changing school population and the presence of an increasing number of pupils with additional needs such as challenging behaviour, has resulted in an increased need for a special needs policy and co-ordinator. All governors are assigned responsibility for various areas of the curriculum and appropriately focused visits have recently started to take place. Since the last inspection, the governors have continued to develop their ability to take an active role in strategic planning for the school. Whilst they have made significant progress in this ambition, they do not, as yet, have a shared vision about the school's future function and purpose. The process for development planning is satisfactory but is not yet paying appropriate attention to the school's longer term development needs. With appropriate leadership from the headteacher, governors have the capacity to work in partnership to shape the direction of the school.

38. The headteacher recognises a trend in the changing roll of the school and the need to be proactive in approaching the challenge of any LEA initiative to include pupils with moderate difficulties in the mainstream of education. It is now important to equip staff to embrace these changes confidently and to develop appropriate links with mainstream schools. The aims and ethos of the school show that pupils are valued and well cared for. The members of the senior management team have a clear understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses and are using this knowledge to plan how to make their partnership more effective. However, within the job descriptions for the senior management team there is an inequality in the delegation of responsibilities. This results in an over-demanding load for the senior teacher.

39. The school has a commitment to good relationships. Interactions between the headteacher, staff and pupils are all positive. All teachers and classroom assistants show considerable sensitivity to the needs of individual pupils.

40. All staff have clearly stated job descriptions. Details of the school's procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching are clear and the process has commenced with the deputy headteacher and the senior teacher. They have yet to be applied to the remaining staff and a full appraisal cycle has not, therefore, been completed. The headteacher views Investors in People (I.I.P.) as an appropriate vehicle for appraisal and this was a feature of the post Ofsted Action Plan of 1996. As part of this process, professional development interviews are in place and have resulted in the inclusion of individual targets on each job description. Where teachers and classroom assistants work closely together in planning activities and evaluating standards, as for example in English, improvement since the last inspection is evident and pupils make progress. The impact of this approach has, however, not been felt across all subjects, and will require training for both classroom assistants and teaching staff. This has been identified as a priority need, although it does not appear in the school development plan. Progress has been made since the last inspection in relation to the development of a more effective approach to the induction of new staff. This now enables them to settle quickly into the routines of the school. All staff have access to an informative staff handbook.

41. Considerable investment has been made in new technology. The identified priority is now to maximize the potential of this equipment as a vehicle to enhance the delivery of the curriculum. The school secretary carries out school administration and budget control very efficiently and effectively.

42. The principles of best value, which require active comparison of costs and standards with similar schools, attention to the extension of school activities and widest possible consultation, have not yet been formally embraced by the school. Contracting arrangements for the maintenance of the school grounds were, however, within the guidance framework for competitive tendering. County library services and LEA services have been effectively employed. Just prior to the inspection, an audit was conducted by the LEA, which identified a number of organisational and procedural issues that required attention. The governors are developing an action plan to deal with the recommendations.

43. The school has carried forward a significant budget surplus for the past two years that has been well outside the recommended maximum of 5%. There have been a number of reasons for this situation that were beyond the control of the school, but it was deemed prudent to maintain the surplus to meet a number of identified needs. The most important of these options to be considered are the building of girls' showers and improvement of the existing boys' showers. It is also necessary to build a garage for the school minibus. The governors have worked closely with LEA finance staff to produce a plan, which will reduce the surplus to an acceptable level over the next three years.

44. Since the last inspection there have been significant key staffing and role changes. There are sufficient teachers with appropriate training and subject expertise to meet the needs of the curriculum, and teachers are well supported by the number of classroom assistants.

45. The key issue from the previous inspection concerning accommodation has been addressed and the outside of the school is now safe and well maintained. Classrooms provide a stimulating place for pupils to learn in most curricular areas. However, accommodation for music, religious education and the library is poor.

46. The provision of resources varies across curricular areas. A significant investment has been made in English, information technology and music. The previous report considered science and the library to be inadequately equipped and this is still the case along with the subject of religious education.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

47. In order to improve educational standards and the quality of education provided, the headteacher, staff and governors should:

- develop a policy on pastoral guidance and personal and social education that identifies a co-ordinator, defines principles of care, describes structured systems and details the role and purpose of the form tutor; (paragraph 27)
- ensure consistent application of the school's assessment policy, more effectively to inform teachers' planning and identify pupils' academic and personal development achievements. On the basis of this experience further develop the policy;(paragraphs 16,28)
- develop a more manageable and usable model for individual education plans that:
 - establishes a small number of clearly defined and easily measurable targets that

- would inform teachers' planning for individual pupils and could be used effectively to measure progress. This should then improve the quality of reports to parents;
- incorporates personal development and behaviour targets where appropriate;(paragraph 30)
 - produce a policy for special educational needs;(paragraph 37)
 - after seeking advice from a range of appropriate agencies on how best to formulate a policy to enable more effective management of pupils' challenging behaviour, develop whole-school strategies for behaviour management;(paragraphs 6,10,16,18,31)
 - carry out a full audit of the curriculum, with particular reference to Key Stage 4, with a view to creating a more coherent and better balanced range of learning opportunities;(paragraphs 19,20,21)
 - build on the existing systems to develop a more formal and structured approach to monitoring curriculum provision and the quality of teaching and learning. Use the information gathered to evaluate outcomes and inform future planning and development work; (paragraphs 19,20,21,37,40)
 - further develop the role of the governors to:
 - enable them to be more effective in strategic planning for the future development of the school, most particularly in relation to its function and purpose, and
 - devise and implement methods for evaluating school effectiveness and applying the principles of best value. (paragraphs 37,42)

48. In addition to the key issues above, the following less important areas for development should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- further extend the length of the school day to more accurately reflect the recommended time; (paragraph 22)
- complete current research to identify appropriate accreditation of learning at the end of Key Stage 4 and introduce courses as soon as possible, most especially in science; (paragraphs 1,20,65)
- continue with the programme of improvements to learning resources to bring all subjects up to a satisfactory standard; (paragraph 46)
- develop and consistently apply a policy for the provision of homework (paragraph 16).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

49

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

25

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
-----------	-----------	------	--------------	----------------	------	-----------

6	21	53	20	0	0	0
---	----	----	----	---	---	---

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	72
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	41

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	1
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	1

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	2.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	6.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	10	8	6	14

12 pupils gained Oxford, Cambridge and Royal Society of Arts accreditation for their work experience portfolios.

9 of these pupils also gained bronze awards in the ASDAN scheme for modules in Information Handling, The Community, Sport and Leisure, Health and Survival, World of Work, Expressive Arts, The Wider World and The Government.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	72
Any other minority ethnic group	0

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	16	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	7.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	9.3
Average class size	14

Education support staff: Y7 – Y8

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	201

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
----------------	---------

	£
Total income	316,191
Total expenditure	293,494
Expenditure per pupil	4,134
Balance brought forward from previous year	28,895
Balance carried forward to next year	51,595

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	72
Number of questionnaires returned	23

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	65	31	4	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	57	35	4	4	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	36	51	13	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	30	43	18	9	0
The teaching is good.	61	30	0	0	9
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	61	39	0	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	74	17	0	0	9
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	74	26	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	70	26	0	0	4
The school is well led and managed.	66	26	4	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	78	18	0	4	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	68	27	4	0	0

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

ENGLISH

49. Achievements in English are good. All pupils are assessed on entry into the school and their test results in reading, vocabulary, writing and spelling form the foundation of detailed targets. Comprehensive records are kept in order to monitor learning and inform planning and pupils are awarded certificates of merit as they achieve mutually agreed targets. Examples of work are kept for each year and pupils' good achievement and progress over time can easily be measured.

50. During Key Stage 3, pupils make good progress in developing their reading skills. They develop an understanding of the importance of expression and know about the use of speech marks in both their reading and writing. In their writing, pupils identify information words from a story and select appropriate words from a word bank to provide a detailed description. They write simple sentences in sequence and are beginning to enjoy writing longer pieces. Reticent speakers are developing the skills and confidence to participate in conversations and to offer opinions in discussions. By the end of this key stage, writing is legible, vocabulary is appropriate, there is evidence of punctuation and pupils are becoming more confident in applying their word building skills and speaking in front of a group. During Key Stage 4, lower attaining pupils have the confidence to ask for help in reading. They enjoy reading and happily participate in reading groups, which are managed efficiently with the excellent contributions of classroom assistants. Pupils are familiar with, and successfully use, the index of a book to locate information in creating a topic fact file. All pupils make good progress in developing their writing skills and, by the end of the key stage, many are producing a range of work for different purposes and audiences. The use of IT to word process their work enhances pupils' learning experiences and gives them satisfaction in the finished product. Speech and language therapy assists pupils in concentrating, maintaining eye contact and turn taking. As a result they become confident communicators who can participate in a range of discussions. All pupils make valuable contributions to role-play activities and higher attaining pupils demonstrate skill and flair in drama workshops.

51. The quality of teaching is good overall. Thorough planning ensures purposeful activities, which challenge the pupils at appropriate levels. For example, in a year 7 lesson on the alphabet, the Titanic theme tune was used very successfully as an introduction to encourage pupils to participate productively in the later, more challenging activities. All teachers and classroom assistants make excellent use of praise and thoughtful questions, which encourages participation and stimulates thinking. This was illustrated well in a Year 11 lesson when pupils were studying advertisements for cars and looking for abbreviations in the text. Lessons are taught at a lively pace and pupils are inspired and motivated to participate and to achieve to their potential. Teachers have high expectations, good subject knowledge and good relationships with the pupils. Teaching is excellent where teachers use a variety of teaching strategies and build on pupils' contributions in order to extend their learning. A Year 9 group made good progress when studying leaflets with a view to producing their own by using a word processing programme on the computer. The lesson had pace and variety that motivated the pupils to try an engaging range of activities that challenged them to extend their knowledge and skills.

52. The school has an effective scheme of work, which is under constant review. Pupils work mostly from good quality work sheets that have been generated within the department and which effectively support set learning objectives. Many of these work sheets have been

specifically designed to sustain and match pupil interest. They are age appropriate and include such topics as the report of a Newcastle United football match and the "Spice Girls." The introduction of features of the National Literacy Strategy in English lessons and literacy targets across the curriculum are due to a well organized co-ordinator and a well managed subject. Although it does not appear on the timetable, drama is used to support pupils' communication and creative skills. Theatre workshops, visits to the theatre and improvisations have contributed to pupils' experience of Shakespeare. Credits in the ASDAN Youth Award Scheme are earned by pupils when they participate in performances for the rest of the school.

53. The school has invested in a wide range of books for literacy and the stock of reading books is good and motivating. However, the overall range of books in the library, particularly for reference work, is limited and in some cases books are old and in need of replacement. The accommodation for the library, placed as it is in an open space that sees a lot of movement through it, is not suitable and this restricts the potential for its use. Resources are used appropriately and play an effective part in reinforcing learning.

54. Overall, there have been significant improvements in English since the previous inspection.

MATHEMATICS

55. Overall, the achievements of pupils in mathematics are good.

56. During Key Stage 3, very good achievements and progress are related to the school's effective use of the National Numeracy Strategy framework. In Year 7, pupils demonstrate, orally, their very good understanding of time as represented by seconds, hours, days, months and seasons, and how these units relate to each other. In Year 8, pupils achieve a very good understanding of the need for standard units of measurement through comparing measurements made using their own 'rulers'. In Year 9, pupils very ably identify equivalent values for fractions, using pictorial examples.

57. During Key Stage 4, the achievements of pupils are good. Pupils in Year 10 have a good understanding of the meaning of vertical and horizontal and are able to measure angles. In Year 11, pupils make a scale model of a kitchen, demonstrating good progress in developing their measuring skills in millimetres so that they are able to make some accurate estimates of the height of objects. There has been very good improvement in the achievements of pupils in mathematics since the previous inspection, when pupils made satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3 and unsatisfactory progress at Key Stage 4.

58. Generally, the attitudes of pupils to mathematics lessons are very good. Pupils are attentive, interested and eager to contribute. They persist with their tasks, co-operate and support each other and behave well. A significant minority of pupils, particularly in Years 7 and 8, has difficulty sustaining their interest, are easily distracted and sometimes disrupt lessons. At Key Stage 4, most pupils are able to work independently, though a few need support.

59. The teaching of mathematics is very good at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. Very good improvements have been made since the previous inspection, when much of the teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory. At Key Stage 3, teaching is enhanced by very good subject knowledge. The successful use of the National Numeracy Strategy is reflected in the effective use of challenging questions that motivate pupils and hold their attention. Lessons are well planned, are managed well to maintain a brisk pace and demonstrate very

good teaching of basic skills. At Key Stage 4 all pupils are encouraged to participate. The pace of lessons and the good range of activities provided holds their concentration. Resources are used well to aid teaching and pupils receive good support from classroom assistants.

60. Despite the high quality of teaching in mathematics, the use of clear and consistent strategies for assessing and recording pupils' achievements (and then using that information to inform future planning) is not very well developed. The good recording of progress against the national numeracy objectives in Key Stage 3 is, however, a significant improvement and could provide a model of good practice across the whole subject.

61. There is satisfactory use of mathematical skills and concepts in other lessons, for example the use of charts and graphs to interpret data in science and the use of measuring skills in design and technology. However these links are incidental rather than planned and opportunities are missed.

SCIENCE

62. Most pupils' achievements in science are good right across both key stages.

63. During Key Stage 3, pupils are making good progress in developing an understanding of how light is reflected, through activities that involve the study of other physical reactions, like, for example, a ball bouncing off a wall. These early experiments inform older pupils' more sophisticated analysis of reflection and refraction during Key Stage 4, when they are using ray boxes and mirrors to explore the qualities and characteristics of light beams. In these circumstances the teacher's good, focused questions, encourage pupils to think more deeply about what they are observing. Well thought out and prepared extension activities enable higher attaining pupils to think further about the implications of black and white reflecting surfaces. Two pupils, working very successfully together, share their findings that "black absorbs light and white reflects it". Follow-on work also makes valuable cross-curricular links with mathematics when pupils use protractors to measure and compare angles of reflection. The teacher's very effective use of plenaries at the end of these and other lessons encourages pupils to understand the need to experiment and develop fair tests for their hypotheses.

64. These lessons are typical of others covering a range of topics. When, for example, pupils are studying their own bodies, they are making good progress in understanding inter-related topics, such as the flow of blood around the body, and the linked importance of the heart and lungs when they are studying the impact of exercise on their body chemistry. Good use of information technology to research related topics through CD roms enables more detailed study and extends pupils' understanding. Similar work on materials and their properties, electricity and magnetism help them to develop good skills of systematic enquiry and to make links across their own experiences to understand the importance of science in their daily lives.

65. Pupils collaborate well, working in pairs and small groups, and their behaviour is generally good, because the teacher is both enthusiastic and enabling in his encouragement of a questioning approach to the world around them, whilst making his appropriate expectations clear through his quiet authority. Older pupils are not achieving as highly as they might because they are not following an accredited course that could provide both a more progressive structure for learning and important motivation. The school is currently researching alternatives, in the hope of introducing certificated qualifications in the subject for the next cohort of Key Stage 4 pupils.

66. Whilst the quality of teaching in lessons is good and pupils are consequently achieving well, the schemes of work that they are following are not as detailed as they could be, to include clearer objectives. Neither is there a proper structure to the assessment and recording of their achievements. Planning is, therefore, not assuring progressive learning across the full range of curriculum requirements for all pupils. Teaching does take account of individual need through sensitive and well-focused support, to which classroom assistants make a valuable contribution. There is not, however, a consistent approach to planning the activities with these individual needs in mind. The specialist accommodation is satisfactory, but it is small and limits the range of activities that can be followed. Resources are barely adequate, although they are supplemented by borrowing particular equipment when required.

67. The previous inspection was critical of the provision for this subject. There has been a significant improvement in both the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements. An increase in the time allocated for the subject and the recruitment of a specialist teacher have been important contributors.

ART

68. Whilst only one art lesson was observed during the inspection, because of timetable constraints, it was possible to scrutinise sufficient samples of pupils' work from across the school to supplement the evidence from this lesson and support a judgement about the standards and quality of teaching in the subject.

69. Pupils' achievements in the subject are generally good across both key stages. They use pencils and paint successfully to produce attractive pieces of work that are celebrated in well-presented and engaging displays around the school. When experimenting with colour, both in structured exercises and in their more creative pieces, they come to understand how to mix colours, and the impact of primary and secondary colour combinations. Their sketch books demonstrate a growing understanding of shape, form and texture and some pupils are able to evaluate their own good progress objectively in the comments they write on their work. One pupil's note on a good quality display of how to develop an image over six sketches declared "I liked doing this work because it showed that I could do well if I tried". The quality of the work that pupils produce reflects not only their own interest and enthusiasm, but indicates empathetic, encouraging and focused teaching, supplemented by good teamwork with able classroom assistants. Fabric embroidery hangings, expressive and accurate self portraits in pastels, good quality collage work and pieces 'in the style of' various famous artists indicate enthusiastic engagement in the work and often good progress in developing appropriate skills and creativity. There is, however, a rather limited range of techniques and materials employed, and this reflects the teacher's admitted bias to graphics and limited subject knowledge.

70. Pupils who are anxious and negative about their own abilities are well supported to overcome these emotions and successfully helped to develop skills and confidence. Higher attaining pupils are sensitively guided towards significant improvements in their technique and ability to see and analyse. As a result they are able to talk about their own work objectively and knowledgeably. Pupils' positive engagement in lessons, application and perseverance in the face of challenge and generally good behaviour, indicate the teacher's motivational skills and the pupils' own enthusiasm for and interest in the subject. In this context it is not appropriate for the study of this subject to have been withdrawn from the Key Stage 4 timetable in the current year. A number of pupils expressed their own dismay at this decision. Their concern about this limitation on the breadth of their curriculum experience is valid, particularly for those who might be capable of having their good work accredited.

71. The combination of lack of detailed planning to ensure full coverage of the recommended syllabus, limited use of structured assessment and records to inform that planning, and inadequate resources, has resulted in the high standards of teaching and learning observed during the last inspection not being sustained over time.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

72. The achievements of pupils in design and technology are good across the school and they make good progress in developing the necessary understanding and skills to produce good quality work.

73. During Key Stage 3, pupils, in their first lesson of food technology, successfully learn the basic cooking skills of mixing and rubbing-in ingredients to make rock buns. They establish good routines for working in the kitchen and are helped to consolidate that learning through the sensitive teamwork of the teacher and classroom assistant. Another group, new to working with resistant materials, make good progress with learning the basic skills of cutting, filing, smoothing and polishing plastic, to make a key ring, to which they add their own designs. The teacher's good demonstrations, clear instructions and thoughtful use of questioning to develop pupils' ideas and check their previous knowledge, all contribute very successfully to the effectiveness of this lesson.

74. Year 8 pupils successfully work out their own designs for a calendar from a specification and demonstrate good cutting skills as they prepare their materials. Others use their good skills at mixing then kneading bread dough to show a good understanding of the use of yeast. Pupils are enthusiastic and eager to succeed. They listen carefully to instructions and make good contributions. Teachers' very good subject knowledge, reflected in their good planning, ensures that these complex lessons are well thought out and effectively managed. This ensures that all pupils get the necessary individual support and guidance that they require to extend their knowledge and improve their skills.

75. During Key Stage 4, pupils aim towards gaining external accreditation for their work. They design their own clock base, working successfully from a design specification. They have a good understanding of the practical restrictions on their designs and are helped to realise them successfully through well-structured lessons that make the best use of time and resources. Pupils are interested in their designs and projects and are consequently well behaved. They have good ideas and help each other to complete their tasks. In food technology, pupils make good designs for their own pizza topping, which they then successfully prepare and cook. In some of the food technology lessons, opportunities for links with mathematics, such as the weighing of ingredients, are not always taken.

76. Good use is made of the resources available. They are of a good quality for food technology. The range of tools and machinery available for designing and making using resistant materials, though satisfactory, limits the range of activities that can be offered.

GEOGRAPHY

77. Whilst only a small number of lessons were observed during the inspection it was possible to gather evidence from planning, records and samples of work to evaluate pupils' achievements and the quality of teaching.

78. At present the curriculum is being re-organised, which necessitates pupils being

taught the same study units across both key stages. These study units are based on the National Curriculum programmes of study for Key Stage 3, which are suitably adapted to be age appropriate in Key Stage 4. Pupils make satisfactory progress in developing an understanding of a range of key concepts about physical and human processes and the necessary research and analytical skills to further their understanding.

79. When studying tectonic processes pupils are able to use an atlas to locate Japan and they can label some cities. They are aware of the significance of finding evidence and are able to identify the effects of an earthquake on people through reading and listening to personal accounts. Higher attaining pupils in Key Stage 4 develop an understanding that the damage to a city is not restricted to what is above the ground. In a lesson on volcanoes pupils were learning about their key features and using a key to illustrate them. They were, however, expected to stay on a task beyond their present capacity and those with behaviour difficulties found it difficult to sustain their attention for the whole period. Good focused support from the classroom assistant helped to keep pupils on task in this and other lessons. Although the resources for the subject are appropriate there is scope for a broader variety, which would enable pupils to further develop their own information gathering and enquiry skills.

80. The quality of teaching in geography lessons is sound overall. The teacher's subject knowledge is satisfactory and classroom routines are well established. Lesson objectives are shared with the pupils, vocabulary is reviewed and the lesson concludes with a summary of what has been achieved. There is a good use of questions and excellent use of praise and encouragement to help pupils to understand difficult concepts. Pupils' work is marked in a consistent and positive manner.

81. Improvements since the last inspection have been limited due to the current re-organization, which is not yet complete. During this period of change to the curriculum a positive attempt is being made to include features of the National Literacy Strategy in lessons and the teacher's planning carefully embraces both geography and literacy targets.

HISTORY

82. All classes are studying the same topics during a period of curriculum re-organisation. Topics are based on the National Curriculum programmes of study for Key Stages 2 and 3 and are appropriately adapted for older pupils.

83. Pupils enjoy their history lessons and consequently, their achievements are generally good across both key stages. They show interest in the activities and treat resources with respect. Thoughtful and strategic seating arrangements orchestrated by the teacher show an awareness of the individual needs of each pupil and contribute to a good working environment and good behaviour. Relationships within lessons are good. Pupils collaborate successfully in pairs and groups and work productively with the teacher and classroom assistants.

84. Teaching of history is good. As pupils participate in class activities they effectively use secondary sources and through their observations they can answer questions about the past. The teacher extends pupils' historical knowledge and skills through excellent one to one teaching during the lesson, good use of praise and challenging questions. Lessons are well planned and delivered at an appropriate level to ensure that all pupils learn. Clear instructions help pupils to know the objectives of the lesson and to organize themselves ready for the activities. They make good progress in learning to compare the difference in life during 1750 and 1900 and they are starting to show a sense of chronology as they recognize

the characteristics and features of the periods. Pupils' achievements are well supported by appropriate field trips, which are followed up with the use of work-books created by the teacher. The high quality of these books and the good links that the teacher has with the local Colliery Museum staff enhances provision and delivery of the curriculum. Resources include a CD roms, videos and books, but artefacts have to be borrowed or brought in by the pupils.

85. Objectives in history also embrace literacy targets, and these are monitored carefully and reviewed on a termly basis. The planning of the subject recognizes the importance of language and pupils confidently approach their lessons with knowledge of the essential vocabulary necessary for understanding and learning.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

86. There are currently only two discrete timetabled lessons for this subject, one each in Years 7 and 8, and, because of the timetable structure, it was only possible to observe one of them. Pupils in Year 11 follow a study module as part of their college studies, although no information was available to evaluate this work. However, observations of pupils' use of information technology across a range of subjects and samples of their work enabled a judgement to be made about their generally good achievements and the overall satisfactory quality of teaching.

87. Pupils throughout the school can use word processing programmes confidently to present their work and, as they become more proficient, to edit it. They load, save and retrieve data and use CD roms to access materials when researching a topic, for example in science and history. Use of the technology across the curriculum ensures that pupils make steady progress in developing and applying a range of skills. There are now much improved resources for this subject, following significant investment, and there are plans to extend them still further. The school is about to gain internet access and has recently started work on the use of video conferencing. In the lesson that was observed, a group of Year 7 pupils used this facility for the first time to link with another local special school. They were enthusiastic and excited by the experience and behaved remarkably maturely in conducting conversations with their opposite numbers. It was clear that the teacher had ambitious plans to use this technology productively, most particularly in relation to developing pupils' social skills, alongside helping them to understand, appreciate and control its characteristics.

88. Most staff are able and confident users of IT, as the result of training over time, and are beginning to realise its potential in their own subjects. Their own confidence is valuable in encouraging pupils to use the technology appropriately and productively.

89. The last report was very critical of this aspect of the school's work and much development work has been done to improve provision for the subject. Much further work does, however, need to be pursued. There is still no scheme of work and no clear plan to incorporate skills' teaching, including the use of spread sheets, data bases and desk top publishing, into the timetable for Years 9 and 10. The lack of any clear structure for assessing, recording and reporting pupils' achievements is another weakness, although informal evaluation does give staff a reasonable view of pupils' capabilities, enabling them to plan the subject's integration into some lessons.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

90. Whilst only a limited number of French lessons were seen during the inspection in Key Stage 3, it was possible to judge pupils' achievements using evidence from these observations combined with the teacher's records and reports.

91. Pupils' achievements in learning French are satisfactory, as they were at the previous inspection. Most pupils are able to recite the names of numbers 0 to 10, greet each other, respond to greetings in French and ask each other their names. During Year 8, pupils are able to ask questions about where another person lives and give appropriate replies in French, using correct words for streets and roads. In Year 9, pupils are able to recognise many different types of shops and add the names of things sold in them to their increasing vocabularies. Some higher attaining pupils are able to ask for directions to a particular type of shop. Throughout the key stage pupils are more successful with oral rather than written responses.

92. The teaching of French is satisfactory overall. Subject knowledge is good, language skills are satisfactory and teaching methods are developing. The lessons are well planned and organised. An appropriate mix of French and English is used to enable pupils to access the lessons. The emphasis on oral work is balanced well to maintain the pupils' interest and give them success. Supporting the lower attaining pupils so that they achieve the tasks set to the whole class caters for the range of different abilities.

93. Pupils are generally enthusiastic about their French lessons. They are interested in the activities, particularly games, and make satisfactory oral contributions. Pupils generally behave well in lessons, but a significant minority of pupils in Years 7 and 8 has difficulty sustaining interest and remaining on task, particularly in less structured exercises, and sometimes disrupt the work of other pupils.

MUSIC

94. The last inspection was critical of the fact that this subject was not part of the school's curriculum. It did, however, recognise that pupils sang well and enjoyed the small amount of music that they experienced. Resources have been very much improved since then and now include a good range of percussion instruments, guitars and electronic keyboards. Pupils have also had access to computer based composing software. For most of the time since the last inspection, music was taught to just the Key Stage 3 pupils for one period a week by specialist teachers on temporary contracts. The high quality of pupils' performance at the carol concert before Christmas was testament to this improved provision. They sang and played with skill and confidence.

95. From just before this concert, a specialist teacher was recruited on a temporary basis, and this term she has been providing one period a week for every class in the school. The results of this input have been dramatic and promise to raise the profile and standards of the subject considerably.

96. Pupils engage enthusiastically in the very well planned and structured lessons and are rapidly and successfully consolidating their previous learning, further developing their skills in ensemble and solo performance. Excellent classroom management ensures that all pupils are motivated and involved in the activities. Very effective support from another teacher and classroom assistants adds significantly to the overall success of the lessons. A clearly developing structure introduces pupils to increasing challenge and more sophisticated demands. During the lessons, their ability to maintain a consistent rhythm, sustain a base ostinato throughout a piece, sing clearly and tunefully and vary the dynamic of their playing and singing improves significantly. Pupils' progress is clearly very good and they are

developing a range of knowledge and skills across the subject that will enable them to achieve well over time.

97. There is at present no clear framework for planning and the assessment and recording of pupils' progress, but, should the current teacher remain on the staff, it is clear that such organisational structures would soon be in place and operational.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

98. The achievements of pupils in physical education are good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. The level of achievement at Key Stage 4 has improved considerably since the previous inspection.

99. During Key Stage 3, pupils learn basketball skills from a visiting professional coach. They demonstrate good co-ordination and control of the ball and are able to dribble the ball backwards. Pupils show an understanding of the rules of the game and make good improvements to their ability to score baskets, although a significant minority of pupils in Key Stage 3 has difficulty behaving properly, because they are not managed effectively. Pupils also make good progress in developing a good grip of the stick and good passing skills in unihoc, so that they then use them successfully in a practice game. During Key Stage 4, some pupils develop their own very good creative dance routines while others develop very good passing, shooting and ball control skills in football.

100. The teaching of physical is good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. Very good subject knowledge is reflected in the very clear and sometimes excellent demonstrations and instructions. Lessons are well planned and organised. Skills are built up very successfully in small steps, with ongoing assessment and correction. Lesson aims are very clearly expressed at the start and are reviewed at the end of lessons. Overall the quality of teaching in physical education has improved since the previous inspection.

101. Generally, pupils have good attitudes to learning in physical education lessons and behave well. They listen well, try hard to follow instructions and keep to the rules when playing games. There are good relationships between pupils, particularly at Key Stage 4, where pupils show a good level of independence and responsibility.

102. Good use is made of satisfactory accommodation and resources, though lessons are hindered by unsatisfactory changing facilities, particularly for girls. The use of the hard-surface playground area for games is restricted by the close proximity of fencing to marked pitch boundaries. This fence was part of earlier refurbishment work and was erected in this position as a solution to previously identified health and safety concerns.

103. An excellent outdoor education and adventure programme, and a good range of sports competitions involving other schools enhance the physical education curriculum for all pupils.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

104. Only a very small sample of religious education lessons was seen during the inspection in Key Stage 3, but samples of pupils' work and records supplemented these observations to enable judgements to be made.

105. Pupils' level of understanding and knowledge of religious education themes is good. They demonstrate a good understanding of right from wrong, based upon an adapted version

of the ten commandments which takes account of local issues. As a result, they are able to appreciate the need for rules in society. The majority of pupils reflect these understandings in their behaviour and relationships within the school.

106. The teaching of religious education is very good. The lessons demonstrate good planning, are well organised and involve all pupils fully. Very good use is made of questioning, linked to good praise and reinforcement to draw responses from pupils and build upon their previous knowledge. Lesson presentation is imaginative, captivates the pupils' interest and has high expectations of pupil involvement.

107. Pupils have good attitudes to learning in religious education and even those pupils who frequently can display challenging behaviour, behave well. Pupils attend well to the lessons and provide good answers and ideas that demonstrate their interest.

108. The religious education scheme of work provides good coverage of the subject for both key stages. Although it informs, satisfactorily, the long-term planning of lessons, it contains insufficient detail to aid medium or short-term planning. The provision for assessing and recording pupils' achievements is very limited.

109. Resources for the subject are satisfactory for the current topic, but are unsatisfactory for supporting teaching about the beliefs of a range of different faiths and cultures. There has been some improvement to teaching quality and pupil achievements since the previous inspection, but not to the level of resources.

110. Daily assemblies that successfully incorporate broadly moral themes and an act of collective worship enhance religious education effectively.