

INSPECTION REPORT

QUEENSBURY SCHOOL

Erdington, Birmingham

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103616

Headteacher: Mr W. Warriner

Reporting inspector: Rosemary Eaton
15173

Dates of inspection: 19th – 23rd November 2001

Inspection number: 243293

Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community special
Age range of pupils:	11 to 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Wood End Road Erdington Birmingham
Postcode:	B24 8BL
Telephone number:	0121 373 5731
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr John Bailey
Date of previous inspection:	28/04/1997

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13462	Roberta Mothersdale	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents
14891	Jenny Hall	Team inspector	Science Religious education Equal opportunities	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
10781	Bob Thompson	Team inspector	Mathematics Music	
7327	Tony Dunsbee	Team inspector	Design and technology Information and communication technology	
20466	Alan Tattersall	Team inspector	English Post-16 provision English as an additional language	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Queensbury is a school for pupils aged 11 to 19 with moderate learning difficulties. Currently, 236 pupils attend the school, including 30 students in the sixth form. There are almost three times as many boys as girls. Pupils enter the school with very low levels of attainment. All have statements of special educational need, describing their moderate learning difficulties. Sixty have difficulties with speech and language. Additionally, the school has identified 23 pupils who have challenging behaviour, including a few of the 19 with autistic spectrum disorders. Sixty-eight pupils are from minority ethnic groups, predominantly of Caribbean or Pakistani heritage. Of these, 39 have English as an additional language. 32 of them are in the early stages of learning the language. Urdu and Punjabi are the languages spoken most frequently in these pupils' homes. Pupils travel to school from all over Birmingham. Many make long journeys, involving several changes of bus. The school is involved in a number of local and national initiatives – for example, Excellence in Cities and the Careers Education Business Partnership.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Queensbury is a very good school. Pupils and students make very good progress and achieve very well. The quality of teaching is very good and the school is very well led and managed. It provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils and students make very good progress. Year 11 pupils and sixth form students have most of their work accredited – for example, through GCSE or Certificate of Achievement examinations.
- Pupils' and students' personal development is excellent; the school has extremely high expectations for them to be responsible and independent.
- The provision for careers education and guidance is excellent.
- Pupils have excellent opportunities to continue their learning out of school hours.
- The headteacher, senior staff and governors make sure that the school's aims and values are reflected extremely well in all its work.
- The sixth form offers students a very good curriculum.

What could be improved

- A small number of pupils are poor attenders.
- Not enough use is made of computers to help pupils learn in all subjects.
- Annual reviews and annual reports do not provide enough information to parents about their children's progress.
- The library and the rooms for music and food technology are unsatisfactory. In addition, there are no showers for pupils to use after physical education lessons.

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 was previously inspected in 1997. Since then, it has made good progress. Pupils' progress and the quality of teaching have both improved very well.

The school has tackled all the key issues arising from the previous inspection and has made good progress in most of these. However, annual reviews are still in need of improvement.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils achieve in relation to their individual targets.

Progress in:	by Year 11	by Year 13	Key	
speaking and listening	A	A	very good	A
Reading	A	A	good	B
Writing	A	A	satisfactory	C
Mathematics	A	A	unsatisfactory	D
personal, social and health education	B	A	poor	E
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	B	A		

The school sets targets for Year 11 pupils to achieve in GCSE examinations. Last year, the target – for 20 per cent of pupils to achieve one or more Grade A* to G – was exceeded. Pupils make very good progress and achieve very well in English, mathematics, design and technology and French. Progress and achievement are good in all other subjects, except for geography in Years 7 to 9, where they are satisfactory. Pupils make very good progress in information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11. Sixth form students make very good progress and achieve very well in basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy, and in a wide range of vocational and other courses. In almost all subjects and courses, the achievements of Year 11 and sixth form students are recognised by external accreditation – for example, GCSE or Certificate of Achievement. Pupils with English as an additional language and those with difficulties such as autistic spectrum disorder make progress at the same rate as others.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils and students enjoy coming to school and joining in activities. Out of hours clubs are always attended very well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. The vast majority of pupils behave very well, in lessons and around the school. They conduct themselves very sensibly when out of school – for example, at college, sporting events or on work experience placements.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Pupils and students learn to take responsibility – for example, for travelling independently to school. Relationships with staff and between students and pupils are very good.
Attendance	Good in the sixth form, but unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 11. A small number of pupils are absent regularly.

Pupils and students have very positive views of the school and can describe what they like best about it and how they have made progress during their time there.

Sixth form students have very mature attitudes and regularly show initiative and good sense.

Pupils and students respond very well to opportunities to help others and take on responsibilities.

The school's attendance, although unsatisfactory, is broadly in line with other secondary schools in the area.

The majority of pupils are punctual and attend regularly.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Very good	Very 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.

English and mathematics are taught very well. Teaching is good in science. Personal, social and health education is taught well in Years 7 to 11 and very well in the sixth form. The skills of communication, including literacy and numeracy are taught very well. The school meets the needs of all pupils very well, because teachers are very aware of their individual strengths and difficulties. Teachers use praise and encouragement very effectively, so pupils try very hard. Because teachers have good levels of specialist skills and knowledge, they are able to plan lessons that challenge pupils to reach high standards. However, they do not plan consistently for pupils to make use of computers to help them learn. Learning support assistants and technicians make very good contributions to teaching and pupils' progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good in Years 7 to 11 and very good in the sixth form. The curriculum meets pupils' needs and has a very relevant emphasis on English and mathematics. The sixth form curriculum is firmly focused on preparing students for their future lives and it equips them very well.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good. The support provided by the specialist teacher makes a very strong contribution to the progress made by pupils and students. Additionally, other teachers plan very effectively to meet their needs.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Pupils' social development is provided for extremely well. The provision for moral and cultural development is very good and there are satisfactory opportunities for spiritual development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Health and safety procedures are comprehensive and very well organised. The procedures for child protection are satisfactory.

The school works very well in partnership with parents.

There are excellent opportunities for pupils to take part in activities out of school hours.

The provision for careers education and guidance and work experience is excellent. Pupils' progress is supported very well by the very strong links between the school and the local community. Very good relationships with a number of colleges and training centres strengthen the curriculum for sixth form students.

Not enough time is allowed in Years 7 to 11 for pupils to learn art and religious education.

The school is very careful to ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to learn and make progress.

Pupils' attendance is checked on and promoted very rigorously, supported by the very effective transport arrangements.

A wide range of staff work together very effectively to support pupils' personal development and encourage them to behave well. There are excellent procedures for eliminating bullying and racism. Pupils feel safe.

In several subjects, teachers do not collect enough information about how well pupils are learning.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher, in partnership with the deputy headteacher, leads the school very well. The other senior members of staff provide strong and very able support.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Very good. Governors are very well informed and committed to the school. They play an important part in shaping developments.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. Methods of checking on and developing teaching are good. The school does not compare the progress of different groups of pupils.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Spending is linked very clearly to the school improvement plan. Specific grants are used very effectively to help pupils make progress.

The school is well staffed with teachers and learning support assistants. Resources for learning are good. The accommodation is satisfactory overall, but there are some important weaknesses.

The school works very hard to apply the principles of best value.

There are very effective systems for identifying priorities and planning the actions needed. These involve staff, governors, other people who work with the school, parents and pupils.

Staff have very good professional development opportunities. New staff are given a very good introduction to the school.

Very good use is made of information and communication technology in order to provide the governors with up-to-date financial information.

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 school and are making good progress.• Teaching is good.• The school has high expectations for children to achieve.• Parents would feel comfortable approaching the school with concerns.• The school is well led and managed.• It is helping their children to become more mature and responsible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A significant minority are concerned about the provision of homework.• A smaller number feel that they are not kept well informed about their children's progress.

The inspectors agree with the parents' very positive views. The provision of homework is good, but pupils often don't have time to write down what they are expected to do. Annual reviews and annual reports do not give parents a clear enough picture of how well their children are getting on.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils in Years 7 to 11 and students in the sixth form make very good progress and achieve very well. This represents a very good improvement since the previous inspection, when progress was satisfactory overall. The main reason for these higher standards is a similar improvement in the quality of teaching, now also very good. Since the previous inspection, very good improvements have been made to the curriculum – for example, more time is now allowed for teaching and learning. These have also had a positive impact on pupils' progress. The range of accredited courses offered to pupils has increased and is now very wide. As a result, nearly all pupils achieve at least one accredited award at the end of Year 11.
2. In 2001, GCSE successes were achieved in English (grades F and G) and mathematics (grades E and F). Pupils exceeded the school's target for 20 per cent of Year 11 pupils to achieve one or more GCSE pass at grades A* to G. In the Certificate of Achievement, pupils gained passes in English, mathematics, science, art, design and technology, geography, history, French and physical education. National Skills Profile awards were achieved in retail, motor vehicles, information technology and catering. Sixth form students build on their earlier successes, gaining accreditation in English, mathematics, geography, French and information technology. Recognising their achievements in vocational courses, students were successful in units of work entitled 'Planning a Holiday' and 'Shop Assistant' and in Caring. Additionally, a group of nine students gained the Team Enterprise Award for their car-valeting scheme.
3. Pupils enter the school with very low levels of attainment. They achieve very well and make very good progress in speaking and listening, reading, writing, mathematics, design and technology and French. Progress and achievement are good in science, art, history, music, physical education, personal, social and health education, and religious education. In geography, pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9 and good progress in Years 10 and 11, where the Certificate of Achievement course provides more structure to their learning. In information and communication technology, progress is good in Years 7 to 9, but very good in Years 10 and 11. Again, the accredited course is leading to higher standards. Occasionally, pupils make such good progress that they are able to attend lessons at mainstream schools. One Year 11 pupil is currently spending part of the week attending GCSE classes in a local school.
4. Students in the sixth form make very good progress and achieve very well in basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy. Lessons are enhanced by regular opportunities for students to apply their learning in other subjects and in real life situations – for example, handling money as part of their enterprise activities. They also do very well in their vocational courses, whether at school or college. They gain certificates but, equally, are prepared very well for making decisions about their future and for coping with the demands of training or the workplace.
5. Pupils are given very good opportunities to practise and apply their literacy and numeracy skills in lessons across the curriculum. As a result, their progress in these basic skills is enhanced. Similar opportunities are not provided consistently for information and communication technology. Pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9, but would benefit from additional chances to improve their skills and find out about the potential of computers to help them learn in other subjects.
6. Sixty of the pupils have speech and language difficulties, although only three require direct support from a speech and language therapist. These pupils are all able to make very good

progress, because the school gives very high priority to the skills of speaking and listening. All staff, whatever their role, take advantage of opportunities to talk to pupils. As a result, they gain confidence and are willing to attempt to communicate. Other pupils are also very supportive and wait patiently when their friends are hesitant or make mistakes. Lessons in English and French make particularly good contributions to pupils' progress. Their success in French is especially beneficial, because it is such a boost to the self-esteem of these pupils, who find expressing themselves so difficult.

7. The 32 pupils who need support because English is an additional language, make very good progress and achieve very well. They receive very high quality support from a specialist teacher. They have support during lessons in English, mathematics and science. A mark of the success of this provision is that all but nine of the pupils concerned are in Years 7 to 9. They make such good progress that they become able to cope without help. In lessons, teachers make sure that pupils get the support they need – for example, by deploying learning support assistants to help them. The very good relationships between pupils are also a factor here. Pupils help to make sure that their friends are involved – for instance, by translating for them or simply by being encouraging.
8. The relatively small number of girls make very good progress, because the school is very successful in promoting equality of opportunity. As a result, teachers plan lessons and activities that appeal to both girls and boys, and activities are open to all. For example, girls are regularly selected to represent the school at football. Similarly, care is taken to meet the needs of the most and least able pupils, so that they can make progress at different but equivalent rates. In many subjects, pupils are grouped into classes according to their ability. This means that teachers can more easily match the content of lessons to the needs of pupils – stretching the higher attainers and taking things at a slower pace with others. In the sixth form, specific lessons are provided to support the students who need help with basic skills such as reading and writing. Teachers respond to pupils' needs and aptitudes when organising accredited courses. For example, this year, a group of Year 10 pupils have embarked on an art GCSE course, because of the talent they display. The school has identified 19 pupils as having autistic spectrum disorders – mostly at the mild end of the spectrum. No specific provision is made for them. However, they make very good progress within the same classes as other pupils, because teachers are very aware of their individual needs.
9. A small number of these pupils are amongst the 23 who exhibit challenging behaviour. Their progress is also very good. The school has very good systems and procedures to support them – for example, the provision of learning mentors, who provide individual guidance. As a result, inappropriate behaviour rarely affects pupils' learning and progress. A very small number of pupils are persistently poor attenders. Naturally, this has an adverse effect on their progress and achievement. For example, one of the two pupils who left school last year with no accreditation had a very poor attendance record.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

10. Pupils' and students' attitudes are very good. The large majority of them enjoy coming to school and joining in activities. Parents responding to the questionnaire were almost unanimous about this. Pupils are especially enthusiastic about residential and recreational activities and there is always a very good attendance at out of hours clubs, such as the art club, Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, football club and music club. Pupils are very proud to tell visitors about their experiences – for example, describing every detail of a Duke of Edinburgh expedition or identifying the pupils in photographs displayed in corridors. In class, they are keen to take part in question and answer sessions. For example, in a careers lesson where Year 8 pupils had to find out about the job of a caretaker, they bombarded their visitor with questions, and could recall most of the answers, when completing the written section of

the lesson. Pupils persevere with activities, even if they are having initial problems. For example, in one lesson, Year 10 pupils had to calculate bus fares, find out about bus fares, plan a route and make a telephone call to the bus station. They kept trying until they got all the elements of the task together and could master making a telephone call and presenting a number of questions to the bus company. Pupils and students respond very well to the demands of work experience placements and make outstanding efforts to fit in, follow instructions and attend on time, benefiting consequently from being in a real work situation. Sixth form students, trialling a range of lunchtime sandwiches for staff, were very particular about production line methods and attention to hygiene. All pupils enjoyed a recent 'Employability Day'. College lecturers who came into the school to demonstrate the use of woodworking tools said, 'Pupils are so keen to work. When a session finished, they did not want the work to stop.' In discussions with a range of pupils and students, all expressed very positive views of the school, could talk about subjects and activities they enjoyed and could describe areas where they had improved.

11. Overall, pupils' behaviour is very good. There were eight fixed-term exclusions in the last year and four permanent exclusions. Most of these resulted from assaults on staff and do not give a fair reflection of the behaviour of the vast majority of pupils and students. Pupils have a very good understanding of the school's procedures for promoting good behaviour. They are pleasant and friendly and do not feel under threat of bullying from other pupils. Sixth form students, who frequently take on responsibility for younger pupils in the playground, demonstrate very mature attitudes to bullying. One commented 'You feel like hitting bullies when you see them. But you can't, because in the real world you can't do that, so you go and see what can be done about it.' Pupils' very good behaviour has a very positive impact on their learning. For example, in a lesson at college, Year 10 pupils were using workshop equipment to construct an A-frame to support the school's big books. They shared equipment, observed safe practice in the workshop and were courteous to each other when gathering round to see the lecturer demonstrate. Pupils appreciate gamesmanship and fair play, and are usually well behaved in the playground and on the sports field.
12. Pupils' personal development is excellent. They rise to the demands made of them by the school, sometimes displaying an exceptional sense of responsibility. During a college visit, one of the students negotiated with her tutor that at a certain time, she would excuse herself from the lesson in order to make her own way back to school to attend a French lesson. Pupils and students accept that it is up to them to control their behaviour, make the most of the learning opportunities open to them, evaluate their performance and set targets for themselves. Members of the school council take their duties very seriously. They said, when discussing how they decide to spend their budget, 'It is very difficult when other pupils put us under pressure. But it is our responsibility to manage the spending of that money and to raise funds if we cannot afford what we decide the school needs.' The school council is one of the ways in which pupils learn about the responsibilities of citizenship. Students frequently show great initiative. For example, one sixth former, acting as receptionist was required to look after a Year 11 pupil who had arrived late and missed his group going out of school on an activity. Acting independently, the student photocopied several pages of sums from her own mathematics book and carefully explained the nature of the task, so that the pupil was not left without work. Sixth form students help to supervise Year 7 pupils at the swimming pool. Others, with a good knowledge of the local area, accompany pupils to work experience placements if they cannot make their own way independently. Pupils are keen to take on jobs in the school. The deputy headteacher's request for 'Litter Busters' met with an overwhelming demand to be included on the team. Pupils and students recognise that they are in a position to help others, and are generous in their support of local, national and international causes. Sixth form students also help to raise funds for their own residential trip to Butlins each year. The very good relationships in school support pupils' personal development. This is very important in sporting events, where pupils frequently referee games and need to make fair judgements that are accepted by their friends. Pupils work well in pairs,

especially where a more able pupil or student supports his or her less able friend. For example, in a road safety lesson, a student who could walk quickly and confidently, held the arm of a slower, more hesitant friend whilst walking along the pavement. The increasing responsibility that pupils take for travelling to school is based firmly on the excellent relationships that they have with the transport guides. As one pupil said of her guide, 'She's like a mum to me'.

13. Attendance is broadly in line with that of secondary mainstream and special schools in the area. It is below that of schools of the same type nationally and is, therefore, unsatisfactory. A few pupils are away each year on extended holidays to the Asian sub-continent and a small number are poor- or non-attenders. The school has seen its attendance rates drop recently because of these pupils. Attendance in the sixth form is good. Most pupils and students are very punctual to school. 43 per cent of pupils make their way independently to school, on public transport. A further 37 per cent also use public transport, but with the assistance of guides. Only 20 per cent travel by local education authority transport or by private car. Many of the pupils and students using public transport face lengthy journeys, frequently on more than one bus, across the city. It is largely due to the efforts of the guides that pupils and students are so successful in getting to school on time, either on their own, or when being accompanied.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

14. The quality of teaching is very good. This represents a very good improvement since the previous inspection. At that time, teaching was satisfactory overall, with one in ten lessons being less than satisfactory. A variety of factors have led to this improvement. Several new teachers have been appointed, strengthening the provision – for example, in English. At the same time, there has been a reduction in the number of teachers involved in teaching English and mathematics. This has led to greater consistency in the approaches to these subjects. High quality, technical support is now provided to back up the work of teachers in science, resistant materials technology and information and communication technology, enabling them to concentrate on their core task of working with pupils. Improvements in the accommodation – for example, in science and information and communication technology – have also helped teachers to provide plenty of practical activities that promote pupils' progress and achievement. The school is very outward-looking and takes advantage of opportunities to learn from the best practice in mainstream schools, so teachers are up-to-date in their subject knowledge. Pupils are often taught in classes made up of pupils of similar ability – for example, in English and mathematics. This means that teachers have to meet a more narrow range of needs and this helps them to pitch the lessons accurately. In a few subjects, teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. This is usually because teachers are benefiting from the structure provided by examination courses – for example, in geography. These ensure that the work pupils do builds systematically upon what they have already learned and challenges them suitably. During the inspection, four temporary teachers were working in the school. This did not affect significantly the overall quality of teaching. However, one teacher's work did not always reach the school's high standards and it was poor on one occasion. The content of a personal, social and health education lesson was unsuitable for the age and ability of the pupils.
15. Teaching is very good in the sixth form. The teachers' expectations are consistently high. There is a shared understanding, achieved through the very strong team approach displayed by the staff. Students are provided with as much support as they need, but they are treated as young adults and with respect. In consequence, they respond extremely well and make very good progress in lessons and courses. The teachers ensure that the work planned is relevant to students' current needs and future lives. For example, in a careers lesson, students learned to use a special directory in order to find out about local training centres. During the lesson, they were reminded about the skills they would need in order to take part

successfully in a course of training – for instance, listening, watching and finding out. Students were given very good opportunities to apply their literacy skills in a very appropriate context – reading questions, researching information from the directory and writing down what they had found out. The teacher used questions and discussion very well, checking each student's understanding of expressions such as 'contact name'. Because relationships were so good, both within the group and with the teacher, students were confident to speak out and to ask questions themselves, supporting their very good learning.

16. Throughout the school, very good relationships are characteristic of most lessons. Teachers use praise and encouragement very effectively and, as a result, pupils try very hard. For example, as part of a vocational course in catering, Year 11 pupils learned how to use a deep fat fryer. The teacher struck a very good balance between setting high standards for pupils to achieve, attending to potential safety issues, and creating an atmosphere in which pupils felt relaxed and comfortable. She had chosen a very suitable context for them to apply what they had learned – making doughnuts. This meant that they were very well motivated and keen to do well, so they listened carefully and followed instructions. They respected the teacher's evident mastery of her subject and valued the praise they received. A digital camera was used to very good effect to record pupils' achievements – their huge smiles indicated how the lesson had boosted their self-esteem. The importance of these positive relationships and the skilled way in which teachers manage pupils is demonstrated by the comparative difficulty that temporary teachers experience on occasions. They do not always have the same easy and confident manner. As a result, in a very small minority of lessons, pupils' behaviour and attitudes are satisfactory but variable – for example, they may shout out or be reluctant to take part in discussions.
17. The quality of teaching is at its best when teachers are working within their specialist subjects. They are able then to make full use of their expertise, by planning exciting lessons that challenge pupils to work hard and produce very high standards. For instance, the lowest attaining Year 8 pupils made very good progress in an English lesson, which provided very good opportunities for all of them to practise speaking and listening, reading and writing. The teacher had planned a variety of tasks that were calculated to interest pupils so that they were prepared to try very hard. She used her detailed knowledge of the pupils and the subject in order to explain the activities very carefully, so they knew exactly what they had to do. For example, they read together a poem – 'My family says...' – supplying endings to the lines so as to create rhymes. All pupils were catered for very well, so that the least able were encouraged to read words that they knew, whereas others tackled unfamiliar ones – such as 'cool'. Pupils learned very well throughout, so that, by the end of the lesson, they were much quicker at supplying words for the poem.
18. In such instances, teachers make sure that pupils are ready to cope with their high demands, by the way in which they structure units of work and lessons. Pupils build up their knowledge and skills systematically, with plenty of reminders and checks on their understanding. Teachers are often very skilled at using questions effectively, in order to find out how well pupils are learning. For example, in an art lesson, Year 7 pupils were learning to mix various shades of grey. During her introduction, the teacher was very careful to make sure that all pupils responded – she asked them by name to answer particular questions, well matched to their needs. Because her manner was so encouraging, pupils were all willing to have a go at answering. Later, when pupils were demonstrating colour mixing to the rest of the class, questions featured again – 'What does he need to do now?' This successfully encouraged pupils to watch carefully and think hard about what was happening. A few pupils were rather reticent, but this approach – demonstration by pupils rather than teacher – gave them confidence. Very rarely, teachers neglect to ensure that all pupils have opportunities to answer questions – they may let the more outgoing ones dominate. A few parents commented on this at the meeting with inspectors – their children had told them that they wished that one or two teachers would be firmer with some pupils. During the inspection,

teachers themselves occasionally talked too much. They didn't allow enough time for pupils to think about the question, decide what they wanted to say, and then speak out.

19. Support staff – for example, technicians and learning support assistants – make very good contributions to the quality of teaching. The partnership between them and teachers is of a very high order. They are well informed about their role and are supportive to teachers and pupils, in an unobtrusive way. For example, in a Year 10 science lesson, a few of the lower attaining pupils were very anxious about lighting a Bunsen burner. The technician was very alert and sensitive to their fears and gave them confidence, enabling them to carry out their task. Similarly, in resistant materials technology, the technician goes beyond preparing resources and maintaining equipment. For example, in one lesson, he helped two pupils in Year 11 to measure and mark out lengths of timber, using questions very effectively to test their understanding and ability to estimate. Support staff often work with particular groups of pupils. A childcare lesson, with Year 12 and 13 students, ran very smoothly, because the support assistant was given significant responsibility. She worked with the older students, helping them to record what they had learned about immunisation, from a visit by the school nurse. This enabled the teacher to lead the Year 12 students in an investigation of home safety products. This lesson demonstrated another strength of teaching – the very effective use of learning resources. Students explored a home safety 'starter pack'. They were unfamiliar with many of the items – for example, a fridge lock and an electric socket cover. By handling these devices and trying them out, students were able to make very good progress in their knowledge.
20. During the inspection, teachers failed to make enough use of computers to help pupils to learn, other than in French. They need to be more demanding in this respect. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on first aid, part of the Youth Award Scheme, the single pupil present was given the choice of writing up his work by hand or using the computer. He chose to hand write, so missing a valuable opportunity to practise and improve his word processing skills.
21. Most teachers pack a great deal into each lesson, and this is one reason why pupils do so well. This is very important, because single lessons are short – generally 35 minutes in length. This quite often means that the ends of lessons are rushed. In spite of this, teachers usually manage to bring the lesson to a suitable conclusion, reminding pupils what they have learned and setting the scene for the next lesson. Occasionally, lessons end abruptly, either because time has run out or because the teacher has not planned for a review.
22. Parents are concerned about the provision of homework. The amount and type of homework is good. Teachers and pupils value it as an extension to what is done in school. In some subjects – for example, art in Years 10 and 11 – the teacher prints out a copy of pupils' tasks for them and sticks this into their books. At other times, homework is set, but pupils do not have time to make a note of it. A few parents commented on this problem, which worries them and their children.

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

23. A good quality curriculum is provided for pupils aged 11 to 16. The post-16 curriculum is very effective. The curriculum has improved substantially since the last inspection and provides very good opportunities for all pupils to participate and make very good progress. It meets all statutory requirements. The curriculum and equal opportunity policies require updating. They do not do justice to the richness of learning opportunities provided to meet the wide range of pupils' and students' learning needs.
24. In Years 7 to 9, planning for most subjects is good. In mathematics, design and technology, and French the quality of planning is very good. Planning in geography and history is less

well developed than in other subjects. There is not enough time to teach all aspects of art and religious education in any depth. Very effective arrangements are in place to transfer primary pupils into Year 7. Their achievements in English and mathematics are carefully assessed and this information is used very effectively to organise them into classes according to their ability and needs. Consequently, the curriculum is well matched to the needs of higher, average and lower attaining pupils.

25. The curriculum for pupils in Year 10 and Year 11 is different from that for the younger pupils but is equally effective. It remains broad, with a very relevant emphasis on English and mathematics, and has an excellent careers and vocational education programme. In addition there are 'options', as found in mainstream schools. These options provide good opportunities for pupils to follow their interests and talents and make choices. In Year 10, for example, all pupils study a broad, basic curriculum, and then express a preference for two other subjects. A list of subjects is compiled to reflect these choices. This year, this comprises art, resistant materials technology, geography, physical education and the Youth Award Scheme. Planning for the Year 10 and 11 curriculum is good in most subjects. It is very effective in many – for example, mathematics, design and technology, information and communication technology (as a taught subject), French, and careers education and guidance. Curriculum planning for geography and history is more effective in Years 10 and 11 than for the younger pupils because examination syllabuses provide a secure framework for teaching these subjects.
26. A very wide range of accreditation is available to Year 10 and 11 pupils. The mathematics department has been especially successful in developing courses and providing access to examinations that are very well matched to pupils' learning needs. In the Youth Award Scheme, however, the subject co-ordinator has a low expectation of pupils' success in the Bronze Award, but no alternative courses or accreditation have been considered in this subject to allow the lowest attaining pupils to experience success in public examinations. The time for art and religious education is too low. Pupils are not able to study enough of the syllabus to attempt examinations in religious education. In art, only by providing additional teaching after school do pupils have a realistic opportunity to be successful in the GCSE examination.
27. The post-16 curriculum is very effective. Students follow a wide range of courses that lead to accreditation, with a very strong and appropriate emphasis on the development of vocational skills. Students build on their work experience from Years 10 and 11 by attending a further work placement in Year 13. Students who have the greatest learning needs receive good quality and very caring additional support, enabling them to make the same very good progress as their peers. The curriculum is very successful in helping students to realise their high aspirations.
28. An 'out of hours' learning programme provides an excellent extension to the curriculum. There are clubs for football, netball, basketball, dance, computers, art, Duke of Edinburgh Award, and circus skills, for example. Residential opportunities include a visit to France. Through participation in these activities, pupils develop not only the specific knowledge and skills of the activity, but also more general personal and social skills. They learn, for example, to be team members and the importance of working together in competitive sports.
29. A very strong partnership between the school and the local careers service has led to excellent provision for careers and vocational education throughout the school. The school has achieved the Quality Award Stage 2 for Careers Education and Guidance in recognition of the very high standard of its provision. The opportunities to learn about the world of work are very well matched to pupils' ages and stage of development, beginning in Year 7. The statutory requirement for careers education and guidance from Year 9 is well established.

30. The school's links with the local community are diverse and rich and a very good resource for the curriculum. The school benefits from the commitment of many outside agencies. Close links to many established and committed employers ensure that each year, pupils and students can benefit from work experience placements that have been matched to their needs. The planning of placements is excellent, giving a wider range of opportunities to more pupils than was reported at the previous inspection. The school makes extensive use of the area around the school for travel and independence training and visits to local shops enable pupils and students to improve their social skills and accustom themselves to making choices and purchases. Sports coaches visit the school on a regular basis to train pupils and a national bank provides a regular savings scheme each week. The school also acts as venue three times a year for a very popular car boot sale, which is supported by the whole community and makes a very significant contribution to the Parent, Teacher and Friends Association funds. A useful publication for school leavers in the area has been compiled in part by the head of sixth form. This is of particular help to students with special needs in the community, allowing them to make an informed choice on their next place of education when leaving school. Many visits are made to theatres, galleries and museums in the city and, for example, a visit to Birmingham's Memory Hall, provided a powerful reinforcement of Remembrance Sunday.
31. Very good links have been established with local colleges. These enable pupils in Years 10 and 11, and students post-16, to experience college life and its approaches to teaching and learning. The school is very successful in meeting the needs of pupils who visit from other mainstream and special schools for some lessons, and who might otherwise have dropped out of education. In spite of its good efforts, however, the school has been less successful in giving its own pupils experience of learning in mainstream schools.
32. The curriculum for personal, social and health education is very well planned and contains a wide range of relevant topics including sex and drugs education. The subject makes a good contribution to the excellent progress that pupils make in their personal development.
33. Teachers plan well for the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, not only in English and mathematics lessons but also through the teaching of other subjects. For example, the use of 'big books' and flash cards which display the key words for topics in religious education, and key word displays in science, are effective methods for promoting the technical vocabulary of subjects. Opportunities to learn information and communication technology are well established in lessons timetabled for this subject. In most other subjects, however, the use of computers to support subject learning is not well planned.
34. The school is not making good use of the annual review of pupils' statement of special educational need to identify, plan for, and review, new learning targets for individuals. This is a significant weakness in curriculum planning that makes it difficult for teachers to check the progress of individual pupils. The school is aware of these deficiencies in its procedures and some very good work has been done on the development of a completely new system of individual education plans to be introduced in the coming term. There is a clear recognition of what needs to be done to improve the usefulness of individual plans and to link them more effectively with annual reviews and annual reports on pupils.
35. Opportunities for pupils to develop spiritually are satisfactory. They are encouraged to think about how situations affect other people. For example, during the Ramadan period, whilst a number of Muslim pupils were fasting, pupils were asked to respect this fact and to reflect on why the fast was taking place. Achievements are celebrated in assembly, and pupils are encouraged to appreciate and rejoice in the work and success of school teams, individuals and groups of pupils, with rousing renditions of 'We are the champions.' In some lessons, pupils have opportunities to experience spiritual moments. For example, in a science lesson, after a number of pupils had taken considerable time and effort to light a Bunsen burner and

heat magnesium ribbon, the yellow and blue light generated a sense of awe and pupils stared in amazement. A 'memory corner' in the classroom of the religious education co-ordinator offers pupils the opportunity to think about losing a relative or friend, and some have put together a booklet of their thoughts about the death of a former pupil.

36. The provision for moral development is very good. Assemblies are used to emphasise the right decision to make when faced with a difficult moral problem – for example, about litter. Religious education lessons make a very good contribution to moral development, by encouraging pupils to think hard about difficult issues. For example, pupils across the school focused on the death of one four year-old child on September 11th in the World Trade Centre. They were asked to judge 'Who deserved to die?' during that day, from among the thousands of other four year-olds in the world. In history, pupils imagined themselves as slaves, and discussed the moral issues of selling people and treating others cruelly. Teachers act as very good role models for pupils and the learning mentor is a pivotal figure in reinforcing moral values, making her own award for the Student of the Week. The house system provides pupils with an important team ethos and the school council offers pupils and students the opportunity not only to manage a budget, but also to make important decisions about school resources.
37. The school makes excellent provision for the social development of pupils. Residential visits and activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme emphasise the need for pupils to work together and help each other. The residential visit for Year 7 pupils, who have come from different primary schools across the city, is an important conclusion to their first year in secondary school. Pupils are encouraged to help others in a variety of ways. For example, in art, Year 9 pupils are creating a book – on Monsters and Pigeons – for children in a local primary school. Personal, social and health education provision provides good opportunities for pupils to make choices, consider others and prepare for life out of and after school. Whenever possible, pupils and students are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves. For example, sixth form students have to clock in and out of their building. There is an enormous and well co-ordinated emphasis on pupils learning to travel independently. This is critical in allowing them to take advantage of other opportunities – for example, after-hours clubs or work experience placements.
38. The provision for cultural development is very good. Religious education lessons emphasise the variety of faiths in the community and pupils have opportunities to visit their places of worship. They are encouraged to celebrate the culture of the area and there are visits by local historians. In an English lesson, pupils observed the reactions of an Indian grandparent's visit to England, and could make comparisons over the meeting of two cultures. Pupils are aware of a wide range of European cultures, through modern foreign language lessons, and residential visits to France and Spain. Many visitors to the school are from abroad, and give pupils an opportunity to become aware of the world outside of Birmingham. Famous musicians and artists are celebrated through the curriculum. For example in a design and technology lesson, pupils used machine embroidery to convey the colours and shapes in a Monet painting.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

39. Health and safety procedures are very good and well established. The school has met the requirements for whole school risk assessment audits identified in the previous report. All staff have received training in making risk assessments, and identify safe practice in their curriculum policies. First aid and accident procedures are recorded accurately, and the school has a first aid base and trained staff. The school doctor and nurse regularly carry out clinics in the school and the nurse makes a very effective contribution to the curriculum and sixth form vocational courses. Fire drills are held regularly and annual checks are made on fire fighting,

physical education equipment and electrical appliances. The procedures for child protection are satisfactory and have improved since the previous inspection. Records are now confidential and the school has a designated person for child protection, who works closely with the local area child protection committee when there are concerns. However, not all staff are aware of the identity of the designated person and they have not received up-to-date training on referral procedures and statutory requirements.

40. The school has very good procedures to monitor and guide pupils' personal development. Each pupil is both a member of a house and a tutor group and has access to personal and group tutorial time. The learning mentors' office is sited centrally in the school and pupils are encouraged to make contact and seek advice and support whenever they feel it is necessary. There is effective communication and liaison between the staff involved with each pupil, through the formal meetings of the pastoral management groups, and the very good knowledge that staff have of each pupil and student. Pupils and students have open access to senior staff. At break times, these staff are often besieged by pupils wanting recognition for good behaviour or work completed, or just to say 'Hello'. Careers guidance makes an outstanding contribution to monitoring and guiding pupils' personal development and impacts significantly on their behaviour, attendance, appearance and attitudes.
41. The school is extremely vigilant and active in its monitoring and promoting of attendance. Staff have an excellent knowledge of the backgrounds and likely reason for absence of all pupils and students. Computerised registration systems enable attendance information to be obtained quickly. This provides the data for the school's weekly 'Roll Of Honour' for good attendance and certificates for pupils with an annual 100 per cent attendance. The registration records also provide information for the weekly meetings between a senior teacher and the educational welfare service. They monitor records of attendance and identify concerns – such as when pupils are absent or late to school. The school uses a wide range of strategies to promote attendance. For example, teambuilding projects support disaffected pupils, and funds are available to reward pupils whose attendance has improved with a trip out to a restaurant. There are excellent internal referral procedures within the school. For example, staff can verify with the school medical service if a pupil has a medical reason for not attending. The school's ethnic minority support teacher may be asked to carry out a home visit to find out if there is a cultural or religious reason for absence, or the learning mentor to investigate a pupil's reluctance to attend lessons. The very good relationships between staff and the transport guides help to check on and promote attendance. The guides bring in information from pupils' homes if they are absent, and they respond effectively to any public transport problems, in order to ensure pupils' safe arrival at school. The commitment and organisation behind the work of the transport guides makes sure that many pupils and students learn, within a secure structure, to use public transport safely to get to school and college on time. The school's target is that by the time a pupil is in Year 10, if it is possible, they should be coming to school independently on public transport. This is usually achieved. Careers lessons also place a strong emphasis on the importance of punctuality and regular attendance at a place of work, and the necessity for the same values to apply to school and college attendance.
42. The school has very good procedures in place to monitor behaviour and ensure discipline and excellent procedures for eliminating bullying and racism. Surveys conducted by the school indicate that pupils perceive that bullying has decreased. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and know whom they could go and speak to if they were bullied. Referral systems for bullying and causes for concern are well known to the staff. For example, whilst out on the playground, one pupil came up to a classroom assistant to tell her that one of the younger pupils was being harassed. She quickly and sensitively made arrangements for him to see the learning mentor to sort things out. The school's breakfast and lunchtime clubs provide safe havens for pupils who may not relish the more boisterous atmosphere of the playground, and are especially valued by some of the youngest pupils. Staggered lunchtimes for upper

and lower school also ensure that opportunities for bullying are reduced. The school has very clear procedures set out in the pupil management policy. Transport guides and lunchtime supervisors each have their own reward and disciplinary card system. The learning mentor monitors pupils' behaviour very effectively and liaises with the educational psychologist when referrals are judged appropriate.

43. All pupils have statements for moderate learning difficulties but a significant number also have some additional special educational needs. These difficulties do not consistently appear in the pupils' statements and are rarely highlighted in their annual reviews or individual education plans. Some good work has been done, however, on developing provision for several of these groups. The school recognises, for example, that the number of pupils with more severe learning difficulties is likely to continue to increase. The appropriate support service of the local education authority has already worked with the school in producing more detailed assessments of and planning for a Year 7 class that contains a significant number of such pupils. There is also effective collaboration with the speech and language therapy service in identifying pupils who require extra support, but more needs to be done on agreeing the different levels of speech and language needs and priorities for provision among these pupils. Physiotherapy and support for pupils with sensory impairment are efficiently managed and delivered but, as yet, there is no established system to plan consistent, specialist help for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties or with those described as being on the autistic spectrum.
44. The arrangements for assessing and recording pupils' achievements have improved since the previous inspection. They are very good in mathematics and in the sixth form and good in English, design and technology and information and communication technology. However, there is room for improvement in science, geography, history, French, physical education and religious education. The assessment co-ordinator, has only been in place since September and although a new, whole school system has been introduced, it is not yet understood by all the staff. Procedures in mathematics are precise, so that the pupils' progress can be measured accurately. The targets set for personal and social development are shared very effectively with the pupils, who thus have the opportunity to assess their own personal progress.
45. There are weaknesses in the school's procedures for the statutory annual review of pupils' statements. A significant proportion of the parents who completed the questionnaire expressed some degree of dissatisfaction with the quality of the information provided about the progress made by their children. An examination of a sample of annual review documents, annual reports and individual education plans provides support for this view. In none of these is there sufficient emphasis on the progress which pupils have made since any previous review or report. Annual reviews do not set or refer to specific, measurable targets and do not, therefore, provide a clear picture of progress since the previous year. Annual reports concentrate mainly on the course followed by the pupil in each subject, with general comments on their attainment and attitudes. Some improvements have been achieved. There is a better system for requesting the contribution of external agencies to annual reviews, for example, and the very good response of the careers service is particularly noteworthy in this respect. In general, however, the rate of improvement has been unsatisfactory and much remains to be done to establish effective procedures which will ensure good quality information for both parents and school on the progress of individual pupils.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

46. The school's partnership with parents is very effective and parents have very positive views of the school. Close links are established through telephone calls, letters, home visits, newsletters and messages passed on via transport guides or, occasionally, in homework

diaries. Both the main school and the sixth form building have parents' waiting rooms. During the inspection, parents collected their children from after-school clubs and one came to watch his son play football. Parents are generous and active supporters of the Parents, Teachers and Friends Association, especially through the successful car boot sales. The proceeds of these have contributed many resources – such as blinds, litter bins, digital cameras, pin boards, and televisions – as well as subsidising outings and visits. The governing body attaches great importance to the views and support of parents and values the contributions of the parent governors. There are no regular parent helpers in the school but a number of the transport guides are parents, and a few of them stay to help in college classes after they have accompanied pupils and students to their courses. Parents are impressed that the school listens to them and takes action when they have made suggestions – for example, in establishing the breakfast club, making arrangements for them to meet the learning mentor, and organising activities during holiday periods. They are pleased that the school seeks out their opinion – for example, on the school improvement plan – and that 'drop-in' days give them opportunities to go into lessons and see what their children are learning.

47. Parents especially appreciate the school's efforts to encourage their children's independent travel on public transport. A small number of parents acknowledged initial anxieties over these transport arrangements, but now recognise that being able to safely use public transport has been a major contribution to their child's independence. A number of parents have concerns about the amount of homework that their children are given and how they can be involved in helping their child at home. This is linked to the fact that they see few entries in their children's homework diaries. Pupils spoken to confirmed that they are rarely asked to note homework down in these diaries and are often expected to remember what they have to do or take their homework back on a piece of paper or worksheet. Pupils frequently lose letters or forget to tell their parents about a forthcoming event. As a result, a number of parents feel they have not had information on, for example, the Christmas concert or school discos, even though the school has sent this information home. The ethnic minority support teacher plays a very important role in fostering links between home and school. It is very beneficial that the teacher makes home visits to talk to parents to explain information from the school. For instance, this is valuable in ensuring that parents and carers have full opportunities to contribute to the annual review of their children's progress. The teacher makes very good arrangements to help parents understand how to help pupils with homework.
48. Parents are pleased with the school's response to issues of inclusion and the range of accreditation now open to their children. They praise the support given to pupils to help them decide the way ahead when they leave school or the sixth form. One parent said, 'The careers advice was very helpful and helped my son choose the right placement for him. Now he is very happy at college and has been able to keep friends from school. This has been very important to him and helped him to settle.'

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

49. The headteacher provides a very clear sense of direction for the school. This is based firmly on his conviction that Queensbury should feel and operate like a 'small, successful mainstream secondary school.' Developments are planned with this in mind, trying to ensure that pupils are denied no opportunities by attending a special school. The headteacher and deputy headteacher attend meetings with mainstream colleagues, in order to keep informed and to raise the profile of the school. Staff are actively encouraged to do the same. As a result, the school benefits from its involvement in a wide range of local initiatives, such as Excellence in Cities. A very strong feature of the headteacher's leadership is the very effective way in which responsibilities are delegated to other staff. He and the deputy headteacher work in close partnership, but the latter has well-defined and significant roles, including oversight of staff development and performance management and managing the

budget. Similarly, other senior staff have important responsibilities – for example, for the curriculum or managing the sixth form – and they too provide very able and strong support. The headteacher maintains successfully his overview of the work of the school by a variety of informal and formal methods. For instance, he attends meetings of the curriculum development and pastoral teams, and is regularly out and about in the school, visiting lessons and talking to staff, pupils and parents.

50. There are very well thought out and effective systems for identifying priorities and planning the necessary action. These involve closely all staff with management responsibilities – for example, subject leaders – so that they have opportunities to develop their leadership skills and are clear about how they contribute to the school's key intentions. All the subject improvement plans are related to the impact they are expected to have on teaching and learning. However, these plans vary in the degree of insight they demonstrate and in their usefulness. Some – for example, those for English, French and physical education – are very thoughtful and perceptive. Others – such as music and geography – are comparatively superficial. A particular strength of improvement planning is the way in which the procedures for performance management and staff training needs are incorporated into the overall plan, so all the targets support the school's priorities as well as the staff's own development. Professionals such as the careers adviser, education welfare officer and doctor are invited to contribute to the process of planning, in addition to governors, all staff groups, parents and pupils. Additionally, local and national issues – for example, the National Numeracy Strategy – influence the emphasis placed on different subjects and areas. Because of this collaborative approach, combined with the firm steer provided by the headteacher and senior staff, the school's values and aims can be clearly identified in its work. Both pupils and staff are supported effectively but are encouraged to take on responsibilities and use their initiative.
51. The headteacher and deputy headteacher take the lead in checking on the quality of teaching and helping staff to improve when necessary. Other staff are also involved, by special arrangement. For example, this term, the head of mathematics has been allocated time to visit lessons taught by each member of the department. These procedures are effective for the most part, but the arrangements for checking the quality of the work of temporary teachers are not rigorous enough. Methods to check and compare the progress of groups of pupils – for example, boys and girls or pupils from different ethnic groups – have not been developed. This is an area for improvement, to support the school's evaluation of its own performance.
52. The governing body is very well informed and committed to the school. Governors carry out their responsibilities conscientiously. The chair is very experienced and consciously seeks to recruit governors who can offer particular strengths and expertise – for example, in finance, education or health. He is quite clear that the governors' role is to support the school in helping the pupils to develop into responsible adults, and this is at the forefront of their work. Governors appreciate the regular presentations made to them by staff, keeping them informed about policies and developments and helping them to influence both. For example, they recently heard about a teacher's visit to the concentration camp at Auschwitz. As a result, and from a knowledgeable position, governors endorsed the proposal to teach pupils about the Holocaust.
53. Both senior managers and governors are very keen to develop positive links with mainstream schools. To this end, funding has been sought and won, in order to appoint a teacher to promote inclusion. However, the school is also concerned not to dilute what it already offers pupils or to disrupt their learning with too much to-ing and fro-ing.
54. The sixth form is very well led and managed and maintains a distinct presence in the school. Students are dealt with as young adults, with very high expectations for their work, behaviour

and attitudes. There are very clear plans to develop the provision further, underlining the management's high standards and goals.

55. Financial planning is very good and linked well to the school improvement plan and priorities. This represents a good improvement since the previous inspection. The chair of governors, finance committee and the deputy headteacher work closely and effectively together to set and manage the annual budget, whilst the headteacher maintains an oversight of the whole process. Governors are well involved in the strategic development of the school and in ensuring that sufficient funds are available for its priorities. Routine administration is very effective in ensuring that the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. This is important, as it allows teachers to concentrate on teaching. The auditor's latest report recommended minor improvements to financial procedures. These have been implemented fully. The administrative and secretarial staff are welcoming, efficient and professional.
56. Very good use is made of specific grants – for instance, funds from the Excellence in Cities and Out of Hours Learning initiatives. As a result, pupils benefit from, for example, professional sports coaches, a daily breakfast club, holiday play schemes and after school clubs. The school uses Ethnic Minority Action Grant money very effectively. This ensures high quality support for home-school liaison and work with families. Specific grant funds support the provision of learning mentors, whose work enhances pupils' progress – for example, increasing the attendance of pupils at risk of disaffection from school.
57. Information and communication technology is used particularly well in the preparation of financial accounts, presented to the finance committee on a regular basis. The governors appreciate the way in which the accounts and information are up-to-date and presented in an understandable way. The school uses the Internet well to support its management – for example, by downloading documents and as an efficient means of communication between the headteacher and chair of governors. Resources such as overhead projectors, computers and digital cameras are used well by staff for preparing work sheets and presenting work to pupils.
58. The school understands and applies the principles of best value very effectively. For instance, when developing a new science preparation room, the school involved the local education authority's science adviser in the initial planning. Visits were made to other schools, to see developments and standards of work. After scrutinising three quotations, an informed decision was made. Governors decided not to go for the cheapest option, but the one that would meet the needs of the school to have the work completed during school holidays and give the highest quality outcome.
59. The staffing represents a good balance of subject expertise and knowledge of special educational needs. The school also has good quality support staff, who are well integrated into the life of the school and play a significant role in helping to extend pupils' learning opportunities. Non-teaching and technical support is now provided in science, design and technology and information and communication technology, which is an improvement since the previous inspection. There is a comprehensive in-service training programme open to all staff and this is linked well to the school's performance management scheme. It enables many staff to develop additional skills in meeting aspects of the particular special educational needs reflected in the present pupil population. Very good and supportive induction procedures are in place for all new staff.
60. The quality of the teaching accommodation is satisfactory overall. The premises staff ensure that the buildings are kept in good order and are very clean. The main building is adequate; it has been adapted since the previous inspection to make more effective use of the variety of teaching areas available. In particular, there are now good teaching facilities for science, textiles and information and communication technology. However, these improvements

leave the school reliant on additional temporary classrooms to accommodate the present number of pupils on roll in Years 7 to 11. The accommodation for religious education in one of these classrooms is good but that for music is unsatisfactory and storage space for instruments is inadequate. The school hall provides the only indoor space for physical education and there are no shower facilities for pupils or students, which is unsatisfactory.

61. There is separate teaching accommodation for post-16 students in the sixth form block but not all the classrooms are large enough for the numbers of students taught. There are now significantly fewer pupils under 16 being taught regularly in this block, which has reduced overcrowding and is an improvement since the previous inspection. Nevertheless, the food technology area for all pupils and students is still on the second floor of the sixth form block and it remains unsatisfactory. In particular, the kitchen is too small for full classes to cook in and this has a significant impact on pupils' learning. There are inadequate library, private study and research facilities for the school as a whole and in the sixth form. There is also a concern about the lack of access for the disabled to the permanent buildings on the site. The school should consider ways in which this might be addressed in the future to meet the needs of visitors as well as potential pupils and students.
62. Resources for teaching and learning are good in many subjects and are very good for information and communication technology, modern foreign languages, music, personal and social education and religious education. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection. However, there are insufficient cookers and other large items of domestic equipment as basic resources for food technology, because of lack of space in the unsatisfactory teaching accommodation.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

63. In order to raise standards further, the headteacher, staff and governors should:
 - I. to work to improve the attendance of pupils in Years 7 to 11.(paragraph 13)
 - II. Increase the use made of computers to help pupils learn in all subjects. (paragraphs 5,20,72,80,124)
 - III. Improve the quality of information provided in annual reviews and annual reports by ensuring that:
 - Annual reviews set clear targets for pupils to achieve, which enable their progress to be measured at the following review; (paragraphs 34,45)
 - Annual reports inform parents what pupils have learned, rather than what teachers have taught. (paragraph 45)
 - IV. Continue to work with the local education authority to improve the accommodation, particularly:
 - The siting of the library;
 - The rooms for food technology and music;
 - The provision of showers for pupils to use after physical education lessons. (paragraphs 5,60,61)

In addition, the following issues should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- Increase the time allowed for art in Years 7 to 9 and for religious education in Years 7 to 11.(paragraph 24,93,146)

- Set up procedures to measure and compare the progress made by different groups of pupils – for example, those with English as an additional language or autistic spectrum disorders. (paragraph 51)

- Ensure that in all subjects:
 - The arrangements for assessing pupils' achievements and progress provide teachers with useful information;
 - Teachers make use of this when planning lessons, units of work and courses.(paragraph 44)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	139
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	70

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	2	42	77	17	0	1	0
Percentage	1.4	30.2	55.4	12.2	0	0.7	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	236
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	101

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	39

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	2
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	8

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	11	School data	3

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	20
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	7
Pakistani	31
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	0
White	168
Any other minority ethnic group	8

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	4	1
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	1	1
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	3	2
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 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	25.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	9.3
Average class size	13.1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	20
Total aggregate hours worked per week	476

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000-2001
	£
Total income	1501266
Total expenditure	1383165
Expenditure per pupil	5812
Balance brought forward from previous year	77,834
Balance carried forward to next year	118101

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	3
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	4.6
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1.6
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1.6
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out Number of questionnaires returned	236
	128

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	60	38	0	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	38	45	4	2	10
Behaviour in the school is good.	39	41	5	1	10
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	22	46	17	9	6
The teaching is good.	53	38	2	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	45	34	12	5	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	63	30	2	2	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	59	34	2	1	4
The school works closely with parents.	45	40	6	5	4
The school is well led and managed.	48	38	4	2	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	44	46	3	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	37	40	5	2	15

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

ENGLISH

64. Pupils throughout the school achieve very well. The quality of teaching is very good and pupils work very hard to make very good progress. In the past year, half the Year 11 pupils achieved passes in Certificates of Achievement and nearly a quarter passed GCSEs. This represents good progress since the previous inspection.
65. Key strengths
- Pupils throughout the school achieve very well in speaking and listening, reading and writing.
 - Teachers have high expectations for pupils to achieve.
 - Teachers plan challenging and exciting lessons that enthuse pupils.
 - Pupils have very good attitudes to learning. They are very interested in literature, poems and plays.
 - The subject is very well managed and this has led to good improvements since the previous inspection.
66. Areas for improvement
- Pupils do not have access to a suitable library area in which to browse or sit quietly and read for pleasure or information.
 - Pupils do not have consistent opportunities to use computers to help them with their work.
67. The youngest pupils enjoy lessons and improve their reading and writing as they develop an interest in literature and poetry. Through very good oral introductions to lessons, they become confident to tackle challenging work. They were very interested in the topic of dragons and participated enthusiastically to help the teacher to highlight important words in a lesson to draw 'Doris the Dragon' from a written description. This lesson provided a good example of the positive effect of the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy – pupils learned to scan the text to find important words for themselves. They made very good progress, recognising phrases such as 'five toes', 'floral handbag' and 'seven scales on its tail' in order to draw very good representations of the dragon based on the words they had located. Teachers have very high expectations for all pupils to learn and they plan systematically for them to make progress. There is a very good emphasis upon improving pupils' reading and spelling. For instance, lower attaining pupils are proud of the wall charts that display their success in beginning to read and spell a growing number of the fifty most commonly used words. There is effective planning to provide sufficient support to enable everyone to contribute during lessons. Consequently, pupils whose first language is not English and those who have additional special education needs are fully included in lessons and are able to make the same very good progress as others in the class.
68. The high quality of relationships in lessons is a very important factor in the progress that pupils make. Pupils in Year 9 willingly read aloud their lines from 'Romeo and Juliet', showing great patience when others stumbled and required help. They were very interested in the play and showed a very good knowledge of the background to it – for example, the customs of the time. They were able to discuss their views – for instance, about the rivalry between families – because they have had plenty of previous opportunities to talk about the subject. Pupils enjoy learning and work very hard during lessons, reflecting the way that teachers have engendered their interest in literature and poetry. A very good example of the very good explanations provided by teachers was in a poetry lesson, looking at personification in poems. A pupil immediately understood and provided the next line for the poem – 'The rock is acting hard'. Lower attaining pupils worked equally hard in a lesson to select articles from

newspapers to produce their own publication. They developed a greater understanding of vocabulary – such as ‘political stories’ – enabling them to select an article about the Prime Minister. Pupils achieved so well because the teacher and support assistant guided them very effectively. They explained the different categories of stories very carefully and questioned pupils skilfully to ensure that they had understood.

69. Teachers have high expectations for pupils to develop an interest in a wide range of literature. However, they are realistic and ensure that pupils understand by preparing plenty of back-up materials – such as videos, pictures and modified textbooks – to ensure success. Pupils in Year 10 made very good progress in studying William Golding’s ‘Lord of the Flies’. They watched a video of the film version of the book and this provided inspiration for them to discuss their ideas about what the stranded children should do. Expectations were very high for each pupil to contribute ideas and this enabled them to learn from each other’s observations. Planning was very effective for pupils to discuss their ideas in small groups and to reach a consensus about what the castaways should do. They shared ideas – for instance, some said that there was a need for the boys to look for food and others suggested that they needed to create order. The effective discussion to establish the background helped pupils to understand the story and consequently to achieve very well as they read from the book and later wrote about it.
70. Staff are very committed to promoting pupils’ learning through a wide range of exciting topics and creating interest in literature, poetry and plays. Their enthusiasm is infectious and pupils approach lessons eagerly, enjoying their success in completing challenging work. Year 11 pupils enjoy their work, confident and pleased to share their thoughts with each other. For instance, they discussed the importance of locations and characters in several of the popular ‘soaps’ on television. Through the teacher’s effective questioning, they understood that a location such as a pub provides the opportunity for the director to arrange a number of scenes as the camera operators focus on different characters in turn. Pupils also showed a growing understanding that scriptwriters introduce a range of interesting characters – such as a rogue – to make the story endure over a long period. Since the teacher prepared pupils so well to investigate a programme such as ‘Eastenders’, they were able subsequently to select important similarities in the most popular ‘soap’ programmes on television. Pupils are taught in classes according to their ability and this enables teachers to plan effectively to address their needs. For instance, pupils of the same age, but lower ability, require more support to learn important words. They regularly learn words at home to prepare for their spelling tests in school. Through consistent practice, their reading and writing is improving. Through good support to learn basic skills in literacy they show a growing understanding of how to use their new words in sentences and how to find words such as ‘single’, ‘sure’ and ‘several’ in the dictionary. This very good planning to direct support to meet pupils’ needs ensures that they make very good progress in their accredited courses.
71. Pupils make good use of their literacy skills in other subjects. In French, for instance, pupils learn to look for similarities and differences between French and English words and this improves their skills in both languages. The English co-ordinator has already taken very good steps to improve on the good progress that pupils make in other lessons during the day. This includes raising teachers’ awareness of how to help pupils who have difficulty reading and writing. Consequently, teachers often ensure that pupils learn important words for instance, to describe variations in temperature in science. The recently introduced dictionaries for pupils to record all their new words are further steps to improving their vocabulary. Plans are in hand to introduce better targets for pupils to improve their language skills and to measure their progress more accurately.
72. The co-ordinator manages the subject very well and this has led to good improvements since the previous inspection. There are a smaller number of teachers responsible for teaching lessons and they have better information to help them to plan. There are now very good

opportunities for pupils to gain accreditation through Certificates of Achievement and a good number of pupils achieve GCSE qualifications. However, the library remains unsatisfactory and does not provide a location where pupils can learn to select from a sufficiently wide range of books to help them with their work. There are satisfactory examples where pupils use computers to produce a finished example of their work. For instance, pupils in Year 7 type out their impressive poems about leisure time and older pupils re-draft their written assignments for accreditation. However, there is scope for pupils to use computers more regularly to help them with their work.

MATHEMATICS

73. The provision for mathematics, including the quality of teaching and learning is very good. As a result, pupils make very good progress and achieve very well. This is a good improvement since the previous inspection.
74. Key strengths
- Pupils across the school make very good progress and achieve very well.
 - Teachers have very high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour.
 - Pupils' behaviour is very good, and their attitudes towards mathematics are very positive.
 - Pupils work towards a good range of externally accredited courses.
 - Mathematics is very well led and organised.
75. Area for improvement
- There is insufficient use of computers to help pupils learn in mathematics.
76. During Years 7 to 9, pupils receive a very good grounding in mathematics, developing a good understanding of a wide range of concepts. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject. This is seen in their very effective explanations of new work and their enthusiasm and confidence. They make learning fun and, as a result, pupils respond very well and try hard. For example, in one lesson, average attaining Year 7 pupils understood from the outset what they were to learn – to create pictograms. They very much enjoyed coming out to the front of the class, to draw smiley faces on the board, constructing a group pictogram. The teacher gave them plenty of praise and encouragement and pupils were consequently very keen to be involved. Later, they developed their own pictograms. They took great pride in their work and supported each other as they applied their new knowledge.
77. Pupils of all abilities make equally good progress, because teachers match tasks very well to their individual needs. They use their assessments of pupils' achievements in order to plan lessons that move pupils on and build securely on what they have already learned. This means that pupils are successful and their self-esteem is boosted. Because they bring these very positive attitudes to mathematics lessons, pupils make the most of their opportunities to learn. For example, lower attaining Year 9 pupils responded very well to the teacher's high expectations, as they sorted two- and three-dimensional shapes according to their characteristics. They tried very hard to pronounce and remember unfamiliar words – such as 'sphere', 'cylinder' and 'cuboid', following the teacher's example. She was very patient and used questions skilfully, prompting pupils who hesitated, so they were able to play a full part in the lesson. A particular strength was the way in which pupils were given opportunities to apply their knowledge to practical tasks. For example, they enjoyed matching shapes to everyday objects – a cylinder to a tube of sweets and a cuboid to a cereal packet. Teachers use resources consistently well. Other Year 9 pupils – this time, the higher attainers – were very well motivated by using wipe-clean boards. They displayed their answers to questions about standard units of measurement – such as millimetres, centimetres and kilometres – and held them up at the same time, for the teacher to see. This also enabled the teacher to check

quickly how pupils were coping with this new work and to provide additional support for any that were struggling.

78. Their accurate assessments of pupils' achievements enable teachers to gauge the most appropriate accreditation for each pupil to work towards. For example, higher attainers are given an opportunity to sit the Certificate of Achievement examination at the end of Year 9. This allows them two years in which to complete a GCSE course. All pupils have very good opportunities to have their work externally accredited. Again, courses are matched very accurately to their needs. In the group of most able Year 10 pupils, some are working towards Foundation Level GCSE and others to the higher Intermediate Level. During one lesson, the teacher had planned very effectively to meet their different needs, by providing more challenging calculations in order to extend the higher attainers. This lesson demonstrated a great strength of mathematics teaching throughout the school – the very effective use made of mental warm-up sessions at the start of lessons. These get pupils learning at a cracking pace, as soon as they enter the room. In this instance, pupils responded very positively to questions to check their understanding of 'mean', 'median' and 'average'. These were targeted carefully at particular pupils. Again, they stretched the most able pupils, but made sure that although they needed to think hard, all could achieve success. In a class for lower attaining Year 11 pupils, they were working towards the Certificate of Achievement. These pupils are still learning very basic skills. The teacher made sure that they maintained their interest, by judging accurately when to change activities. As a result, pupils concentrated hard and made good progress in subtraction. After gaining confidence by practising familiar skills – for example, subtracting 28 from 49 – they moved on to more difficult calculations – 42 minus 28. The teacher's very good specialist knowledge enabled him to explain very clearly what they needed to do, so pupils were all able to enjoy success.
79. Mathematics is very well co-ordinated and led. The co-ordinator has done much preparation and effectively introduced the National Numeracy Strategy in Year 7. A comprehensive policy and relevant scheme of work ensure the practical use and application of mathematics across the curriculum. For example, in design and technology, pupils estimate, measure and weigh and in physical education, they time and measure events, count the number of passes in basketball, and describe symmetrical and asymmetrical positions of body shapes. They create mirror images in pairs. Literacy skills are used well in mathematics. Key words are identified and displayed on the board. This reinforces mathematical language and illustrates new vocabulary as it is introduced. It allows pupils to consolidate their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills very well.
80. Although computers are networked across classrooms, there is little use of them in lessons. Overhead projectors were used very effectively to present work to classes. In one class of Year 11 pupils, a computer program on scale was used very effectively and this motivated and enthused pupils. Overall, however, there is insufficient use of information and communication technology in mathematics. The school has recently acquired a computerised mathematics scheme and the co-ordinators for mathematics and information and communication technology are working closely together to ensure that this program is available across the school in the near future.

SCIENCE

81. The quality of provision is good and has improved since the time of the previous inspection. Pupils make good progress to reach the standard required for the Certificate of Achievement in Year 11. Pupils achieve well in all years because they have a very positive attitude to learning, and they respond very well to the high quality teaching and support provided.

82. Key strengths

- Pupils make good progress and achieve well, especially in developing their practical skills and the safe use of equipment.
- Pupils have a very positive attitude to learning science and through their mature participation in practical work they grow in confidence and self-esteem and learn to work together and co-operate.
- The quality of teaching in the science team is good.
- Pupils' progress is enhanced by strong leadership in the science department, good team work, and very effective support from the science technician.

83. Areas for improvement

- Assessment procedures are unsatisfactory and National Curriculum attainment levels are not used effectively to monitor and report on progress.
- Pupils rarely use information and communication technology to support their learning in science.
- Better use could be made of questions in order to help pupils to learn.

84. Higher, average and lower attaining pupils make good progress in science, and in the development of the literacy and numeracy skills needed to support their science work, because they are consistently well taught. Pupils across the years very much enjoy the opportunity to work individually and in pairs to carry out investigations, using delicate equipment and Bunsen burners. They use graphs and bar charts to record the results of their experiments, learn to measure and to read scales accurately, and understand magnification when using microscopes. Pupils work with extreme care and maturity, and teachers and support staff manage the classes very well. These opportunities to do experiments improve not only pupils' science skills but, very importantly, their personal confidence, self-esteem and social development. The lowest attaining pupils across the school make particularly good progress in overcoming their anxieties, co-ordinating their actions, and working safely, to light a Bunsen burner with a safety flame, for example, then using a hotter flame to heat water. Staff are very aware of pupils' individual learning needs and anxieties, and provide very sensitive and caring support. Teachers have a good understanding of the science curriculum, and they make very good use of time, resources and support staff to give pupils plenty of active involvement in lessons. Three aspects of teaching and learning are not so well developed. Homework is used to consolidate learning, but not consistently by all teachers. Pupils have very few opportunities to use computers in lessons. During whole class teaching, all pupils are frequently asked the same question irrespective of their different stages of development. This may prevent pupils with the greatest learning needs from answering, and may not challenge sufficiently the higher attaining pupils.

85. Opportunities for pupils to practise their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in science lessons are good. In Year 7, higher attaining pupils write independently, accurately and legibly about their methods and results when investigating, for example, how to lower temperature in order to make ice-lollipops. In contrast, the lower attaining Year 7 pupils have very low standards of reading and spelling. In a lesson about heating liquids and reading thermometer scales, pupils do not recognise opposites like 'hot and cold', and 'cool and warm'; and they struggle to spell these words. The science teacher takes the necessary time to help them over these difficulties, without detriment to their progress in science. Pupils learn to use scientific vocabulary very well. Higher and average attaining pupils in Year 8, for example, have a very secure understanding of how mixtures can be separated, correctly using words like 'magnetism', 'filtration' and 'evaporation'. They enjoyed the opportunity to say 'potassium permanganate' when looking at crystals with a microscope. A pupil with speaking difficulties in Year 8 was given plenty of time to pronounce the word 'filtering' when giving his answer to the class; a second pupil, lacking in confidence, was encouraged by his partner to say 'crystal'. In Year 9, higher and lower attaining groups are very well taught and learn very well how to use terms like 'acid', 'alkali' and 'neutral'. Each group receives support

well matched to their stages of development. In this way, higher and lower attaining pupils learn to apply their knowledge of acids and alkalis to explain which of the toothpastes they investigate is the most alkaline.

86. By Year 11, higher attaining pupils are starting to apply their learning to communicate their understanding of how the environment is affected by pollution. They are beginning to appreciate which materials are biodegradable and which are not. The Year 11 lower attaining pupils have greater difficulty communicating their knowledge of science, but watch in awe as they burn magnesium ribbon, and learn to recognise which changes to materials are reversible and which are not. Standards are set to rise this year because all Year 11 pupils now have opportunity to study the Certificate of Achievement (science having been an option taken only by a few pupils in previous years). A small number of Year 11 pupils are working well towards distinction in the examination, and the rest are working towards merit and pass levels.
87. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Major developments in the science department over the last two years result from the strong leadership of the new co-ordinator and good quality teamwork. A major strength in the department is the improved provision for practical work. This has been possible because the accommodation has been refurbished to a good standard, the quantity and range of resources has improved, and the technician makes a very effective contribution to the good progress that pupils make in practical science. The health and safety policy is well written but new, and although during the inspection staff were meticulous in their attention to health and safety, risk assessments have still to be written formally into schemes of work and lessons plans.
88. Assessment, recording and reporting procedures are unsatisfactory. Teachers are very aware of this weakness and know that, having improved the curriculum, assessment is the next stage in developing the science provision. Assessment procedures are in place for end of topic tests and for coursework assessment for the Certificate of Achievement. Staff are, however, unsure how to link accurately their assessments to National Curriculum attainment levels – for reporting to parents, for example. No use is made of Year 6 National Curriculum assessment information, or other assessment information, as a basis for planning the next steps or taking remedial action when individual pupils experience difficulty in understanding a topic or idea. The science department does not have the necessary assessment information to judge whether a pupil's progress each year is as good as can be expected.

ART AND DESIGN

89. The provision, including the quality of teaching, is good. As a result, pupils make good progress and achieve well.
90. Key strengths
- Pupils often make very good progress in lessons.
 - The higher attaining Year 10 pupils are making very good progress.
 - Teachers have high expectations for pupils to achieve.
 - Pupils are often asked to pass on what they have learned to others.
91. Areas for improvement
- Pupils are not given enough planned opportunities to use computers to help them learn.
 - Not enough time is available for pupils to cover all aspects of the subject in the same depth.
92. During Years 7 to 9, all pupils have lessons in art and design. They learn a suitable range of skills and these are taught systematically. As a result, pupils become increasingly competent and aware of the possibilities of different techniques. For example, during one very good

lesson, pupils in Year 8 were in the early stages of a printing project. They had looked at illustrations of decorative, heavily patterned numbers. From this starting point, they drew four designs, based on numbers. Their drawing ability varied, but several were confident and produced fluid lines – for example, as they represented the numeral ‘2’ as a snake, with overlapping shapes in the background. They chose the design they liked best and transferred it to a polystyrene tile, going over the lines again in order to produce a more definite image. When a couple of pupils were at this stage, the teacher worked with them to lead them through the process of applying ink and pressing the tile onto paper. She paid close attention to detail, so the pupils learned very well. Nothing was left to chance: the very precise instructions included where to set down the roller after using it. The teacher then asked these pupils to explain and demonstrate to others. This strategy, of pupils teaching others, was very successful. It freed the teacher to work with any pupils experiencing difficulty, reinforced pupils’ learning and boosted their self-esteem. It also meant that pupils were vigilant in spotting when pupils they had taught made mistakes – for example, using the wrong roller – and they jumped in to help them. The pupils receiving this support accepted advice and were happy to ask questions – ‘Which way do you roll it?’ Pupils produced good quality outcomes, of which they were clearly proud. At the same time, they were able to evaluate their results – red or blue ink would have been a better choice than white on the yellow paper; this print is the best, because more ink was used so the image is sharper. At the end of the lesson, a brief discussion left pupils aware of what they had achieved and how next week’s lesson – about overprinting, using a second colour – would build on this.

93. At the end of Year 9, pupils decide whether or not to follow a course of art and design in Years 10 and 11. In the current year 10, two groups are operating – one working towards Certificate of Achievement, the other with its sights set on GCSE. Both groups are doing well, but the higher attaining group is making particularly good progress, because skilled teaching is complemented by the pupils’ own excellent attitudes. In one lesson, their concentration was intense, as pupils focused on drawing an arrangement of kitchen objects – such as egg shells, a whisk, dishes and a teatowel. Pupils were making very good progress in their pencil control and observational skills. As a result, they became increasingly able to record accurately what they could see – for example, shapes and their relationship to each other. The teacher gave very good advice; such as not to draw too much before flicking up the eyes and confirming what they had seen. The teacher or learning support assistant gave each pupil individual support, so they were quite clear about what they needed to do in order to improve. They responded very well to the teacher’s high expectations – they accepted constructive criticism and tried to apply the advice. These pupils’ dedication to their work was seen during the after-school art club. Half of the GCSE class had given up their time to work on their homework tasks – for example, isolating, enlarging and developing an area of a photograph, or learning to use coloured inks. This additional time is helping pupils to make progress and is important because too little time is allocated to art, particularly in Years 7 to 9. This observation was also made in the previous report. Pupils are tackling their accredited courses having had a very restricted grounding in the subject. The oldest pupils, in Year 11, are mostly making good progress and achieving well in their Certificate of Achievement course. However, the progress of a minority is affected by their poor attendance.
94. Art and design is well led and managed. Since the previous inspection, the subject has made a satisfactory improvement. Pupils continue to make good progress and their achievements are now recognised through external accreditation. The art room has been refurbished and is a good resource. Computers do not play sufficient part in pupils’ learning. They are sometimes given opportunities to use them, but these need to be more structured and planned into lessons.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

95. The provision is very good. Teaching is good – often very good – and a generous amount of time is available during Years 7 to 9. Pupils make very good progress and achieve very well.
96. Key strengths
- Pupils' achievement and progress are particularly good in Years 10 and 11.
 - Pupils benefit greatly from teachers' specialist knowledge and expertise.
 - All pupils are offered a very good range of practical learning activities.
 - Pupils become increasingly independent in their use of tools and equipment.
97. Areas for improvement
- Progress is slower in food technology, because the accommodation is unsatisfactory.
 - Not enough use is made of computers to support pupils' learning.
 - Teachers in the three areas do not have procedures for agreeing common approaches to the subject as a whole.
98. During Years 7 to 9, pupils have very good opportunities to learn about resistant materials, textiles and food technology. Each aspect is taught separately by their co-ordinator. A generous amount of time is allowed for the subject. Teachers enable pupils to learn well and apply the skills of designing and making in different settings, using the appropriate tools and equipment for the purpose. They regularly create opportunities for pupils to learn by making choices for themselves. For example, in one textiles lesson in Year 9, very good teaching resulted in very good learning and creative effort by pupils to make fabric pictures based on Impressionist paintings. One pupil used a sewing machine very well and largely independently to oversee his intricate design inspired by the work of Van Gogh. He had chosen pieces of fabric very carefully, to closely match the different shades and textures of a sunflower head. He machined round each piece very accurately, introducing additional pattern, colour and texture through the stitching.
99. In food technology, pupils plan and prepare a variety of simple dishes. They learn food preparation skills well because the teacher establishes clearly understood and well observed routines for basic hygiene and safety in the kitchen. However, opportunities for independent practical work are restricted by the unsatisfactory accommodation. Pupils learn to think more deeply about the nature and qualities of the ingredients they select. For example, they consider and give their views on aspects such as taste, texture, colour and nutritional value. In a lesson in Year 8, the teacher worked well with half the class as they made fruit salad. She showed very good awareness of pupils' individual needs, demonstrating techniques well to lower attaining pupils in the group who found physical co-ordination in tasks such as peeling an orange difficult. The pupils then worked carefully, safely and precisely to practise them, in line with the teacher's clearly stated explanations and expectations. The rest of the class were well supervised and encouraged by a learning support assistant in tasting and commenting on a variety of fruits.
100. In resistant materials technology, pupils follow design briefs to make products – for example, from wood and metal – which are both functional and decorative. They learn how to incorporate simple mechanical movements into their designs to achieve a specific purpose. For example, during a lesson with Year 9 pupils, the teacher initiated a project to construct a simple device to separate ferrous from non-ferrous metals for recycling purposes. At the start of the lesson, the teacher combined well prepared demonstrations with good questioning to challenge pupils to predict accurately the effect of a magnet on different metals and the transmission of hydraulic pressure to raise and lower a strip of wood. Again, the emphasis is on pupils learning skills and knowledge and then gaining confidence to make use of these. Another group of Year 9 pupils discovered that their original designs for pencil holders had

been ambitious and now required steps they had not foreseen to be completed as they wished. The teacher offered very clear advice and guidance in choosing how to proceed, so pupils learned more about the properties of wood and how they affect both designing and making.

101. In Years 10 and 11, pupils work on specified units of study on courses leading to the award of Certificates of Achievement. These are offered in all three aspects of the subject, although there are no food or textiles groups in the current Year 10. The introduction of these opportunities since the last inspection has made a significant contribution to the raising of standards for older pupils. The most recent results available from summer 2001 show that pupils performed well overall, several gaining the equivalent of Merit or Distinction. Pupils are taught very effectively to become more independent in their learning. For example, at the start of a resistant materials technology lesson in Year 10, the teacher used questioning very effectively to review with the pupils their previous knowledge of the properties of metals. This led into a very good demonstration comparing the appearance and properties of aluminium, brass and steel rods. As a result, pupils were then able to identify different metals correctly for themselves by applying three tests, of magnetism, colour and weight. In another lesson with Year 11, the teacher made very good use of the opportunity arising from one pupil's work in wood to test and extend the abilities of the whole group to solve practical problems. The teacher and pupil agreed that two screw holes had been drilled too close together and were likely to collapse into one another. By skilful questioning around this problem, the teacher drew from other pupils the solution of filling one of the holes with a dowel rod of matching diameter and depth.
102. Design and technology, food technology and textiles are well managed as individual aspects of the subject. However, there is a need to consider ways of integrating these three aspects more closely in future. For example, agreed, common approaches to teaching planning or evaluating are not in place. Closer collaboration would assist teachers to assess in more detail the contribution each aspect makes to pupils' progress overall and to measure the combined impact of teaching in design and technology from year to year. During the inspection, the direct use of computers to support pupils' learning in any aspect of design and technology was observed only once. This was when a pupil used the computer in the workshop, to begin word-processing a record of a completed design brief. The teaching accommodation in the sixth form block for food technology is unsatisfactory. The classroom is small and overcrowded when a whole group of pupils is present. The adjoining kitchen is also small and only houses two cookers and one sink. This limits practical teaching to half-groups of pupils, and consequently slows down pupils' learning in food technology.

GEOGRAPHY

103. The provision for geography is satisfactory. Teaching is consistently at least satisfactory. Over time, pupils' achievement and progression are satisfactory and they are occasionally good in individual lessons.
104. Key strengths
- In years 10 and 11, pupils make good progress working towards the Certificate of Achievement.
 - In lessons, most of the pupils have good attitudes to learning.
105. Areas for improvement
- Assessment and planning procedures need to be improved for pupils in Years 7 to 9, so that work can be more closely matched to pupils' needs.
 - Greater use could be made of computers to aid pupils' learning and progress.
 - An extended range of field trips would enhance and enrich pupils' learning.

106. During Years 7 to 9, pupils learn a satisfactory range of geography skills and knowledge. For example, they become increasingly able to use maps and photographs in order to find out information. Year 7 pupils enjoyed finding out about aerial views, because the teacher provided a variety of suitable activities – for example, identifying features in a photograph of the seaside, and constructing three-dimensional models of furniture. The teacher created a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, in which pupils felt comfortable to answer questions. By the time they are in Year 9, pupils have built on this early work and are able to recognise major areas of population from a map of the world. During a question and answer session, higher attaining pupils could recall the names of a number of the world's main mountain ranges and rivers. They showed a good understanding of the terms 'dense' and 'sparse', and could use these when referring to maps. At the end of the lesson, the teacher reviewed what pupils had learned, checking their understanding, and setting the scene for the next stage in their learning. Lower attaining pupils, studying the same topic, found it harder to concentrate. Not enough use was made of resources such as books or computer programs to help focus their attention. In this lesson, no time was allowed for a review session, to remind pupils what they had learned. Because procedures for assessing and recording pupils' achievements are unsatisfactory, it is more difficult for the teacher to match accurately the work to pupils' needs. As a result, every class in each year group does similar work, with varying degrees of success.
107. Since the previous inspection, pupils in Years 10 and 11 have been given the opportunity to choose geography as an examination option, following a Certificate of Achievement course. The course provides a clear structure for pupils' learning, and this helps them to make good progress. In Year 10, pupils show an understanding of what is meant by 'conservation' and 'recycling'. In one lesson, the teacher led a good discussion about people and the environment. As a result, pupils learned about the dangers to the environment associated with mining and quarrying, and appreciated how dangerous working in these industries can be. One pupil, who had a relative who had worked in a quarry, was encouraged to share his knowledge. This enhanced the interest and involvement of others. Work in Year 11 builds effectively upon pupils' previous experiences and concentrates on following their coursework requirements. Pupils are able to plot a line on a graph to show how the population of a region has declined over time. They know that a graph can provide more than one way of displaying information and that the use of colour can make a graph easier to read.
108. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. There has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection.

HISTORY

109. The provision for history is good. Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching has improved and overall it is good. As a result, pupils make good progress and achieve well.
110. Key strengths
- Teachers are skilled at using questions to encourage pupils' progress and participation in lessons.
 - Pupils learn that history involves real people and their lives – teachers make the subject interesting and relevant.
 - History supports pupils' moral development, by encouraging them to think hard about issues such as persecution.
111. Areas for improvement
- Procedures for assessing pupils' progress need to be improved.
 - Computers are not used sufficiently to enhance pupils' learning.

112. During Years 7 to 9, pupils learn about a number of periods in history, including why events happened and how they affected the people of the time. For example, Year 7 pupils appreciate that the Bayeux tapestry describes events leading up to and during the battle of Hastings. In the best lessons, teachers use imaginative methods that bring the subject to life and help pupils to appreciate its relevance. For example, in one exciting lesson, lower attaining pupils in Year 8 learned about the Elizabethan period. Four pupils were dressed as
113. courtiers and royalty, to show how clothes can give an impression of power. A tape was played describing an Elizabethan banquet, leading to key words being written on the board and discussed. The teacher's use of 'Elizabethan' language was very good and pupils were very actively involved in their learning. As a result of this very good use of role-play and language, the pupils could understand the meaning of such words as 'cumbersome' and appreciate how difficult it was to move around in heavy clothes.
114. During Year 9, history makes a good contribution to pupils' moral development, as they learn about the slave trade as part of their work on Britain between 1750 and 1900. They know how the slave trade was organised and can show the direction of slave migration on a map, naming countries from which slaves were taken and those where they were sold. They understand a few of the reasons why some people treated others so badly. Teachers make very good use of question and answer sessions to draw out pupils' previous knowledge and to present new information. However, more use could be made of computer software and reference books to enable pupils to find out information for themselves. In one good lesson, the teacher gave sensitive answers to lower attaining pupils' questions on why the slaves did not wear clothes, and she emphasised respect for other peoples' cultures. A question about how people who were chained could go to the toilet was answered openly and the pupils were given a full description of the awful conditions aboard a windjammer. This was reinforced with carefully selected video clips from the film 'Amistad'.
115. Currently, there is no Year 10 history group, as not enough pupils opted for the subject. The Year 11 group are working towards the Certificate of Achievement. During a good lesson, based upon the teacher's personal recollections of a visit to a concentration camp, the pupils could give at least three reasons why Hitler and the Nazis persecuted the Jews and why they were able to do this. They were also able to demonstrate knowledge of the main features of the Holocaust. The teacher made good use of photographic evidence of the concentration camp and from this, pupils were able to follow how the victims of the camp were processed and often told lies about what was going to happen to them. The pupils were able to relate to the feelings of the young people being sent to the camp – 'How could people do that to another person?' Again, history supported effectively pupils' moral development.
116. History is well led and organised. The co-ordinator is well aware of the areas for improvement – for example, the procedures for measuring how well pupils make progress and for taking this into account when planning lessons and units of work.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

117. The provision, including the quality of teaching, is good. As a result, pupils make good progress and achieve well. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection, when progress was unsatisfactory.
118. Key strengths
- Achievement and progress are very good in Years 10 and 11, with the opportunity for pupils to gain a Certificate of Achievement.
 - Pupils benefit from the specialist teacher's knowledge and expertise.
 - Pupils in Years 7 to 9 have good opportunities to practise and improve their computer skills and learn new ones.

119. Area for improvement

- Insufficient use is made of computers to help pupils learn in other subjects.

120. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 make good progress in the necessary range of work, becoming increasingly confident and competent. They learn effectively because the teacher knows their individual needs well and takes them into account in preparing lessons and providing supporting resources. He uses his specialist subject knowledge and technical expertise to good effect, ensuring pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are repeatedly tested and extended.
121. For example, in a good lesson in Year 7, pupils first had the task of using word-processing software to copy-type a description of a mermaid. The teacher anticipated the pupils' needs well. He provided them with copies of the text in various formats, according to their individual levels of literacy, using different font sizes and letter cases. After practising a skill they had already learned, pupils moved on to new work. They learned to open a clipart program, to find and import pictures relevant to the text they had word-processed. Higher attaining pupils could do this successfully with little assistance, using the mouse to drag the picture around the screen and shrinking or enlarging it to fit the page. However, the teacher ensured that every pupil ended the lesson knowing that they had made progress. He offered individual help when required and increased the level of challenge when suitable. All the pupils were able to send their work to print so they could finish the lesson with hard copies to show what they had achieved.
122. In another good lesson, this time in Year 9, pupils made good progress in learning about spreadsheets – how to enter data in cells and use formulae to calculate totals automatically. Lower attaining pupils learned how to move the cursor from cell to cell, using either the arrow keys on the keyboard or the mouse, so they could enter figures in different columns. Several higher attaining pupils who completed their spreadsheets more quickly searched for relevant clipart images and imported them to illustrate their work. For instance, one pupil showed determination in searching for and eventually finding a picture of a hen sitting on eggs, to illustrate a table of a café's daily sales. A few showed a higher degree of independent thought and learning by locating and opening another program and using it successfully to convert their data into block graphs.
123. In Years 10 and 11, very good teaching results in very good progress. Pupils work on the National Skills Profile course, leading to the award of a Certificate of Achievement. The introduction of this opportunity since the previous inspection has made a significant contribution to the raising of standards for older pupils. The teacher uses the clear framework of this course's units of study very effectively. This enables him to support pupils' growing independence in their learning and increasing confidence and competence across a range of key skills. For example, in a very good lesson seen in Year 11, pupils worked very well to complete aspects of their individual coursework. A few entered data on spreadsheets but most followed word-processing assignments, based on texts they composed themselves. The teacher's high expectations of their ability to succeed were reflected in the concentration and effort shown by all the pupils. He very carefully observed and checked pupils' progress and made very good use of learning points arising from individual pupils' work for the benefit of the whole group. One pupil, for instance, typed his text entirely in capital letters. The teacher asked all the pupils to watch while he demonstrated how to highlight the text and use the Format menu to change the case. He then tested the pupil's understanding very well by reversing these operations and challenging him to repeat them unaided. The pupil was able to follow the teacher's clear explanation correctly and improved the quality of his work as a result of this new learning.
124. Teaching in information and communication technology also makes a good contribution to developing pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Pupils gain additional practice in

spelling and writing – for example, by developing their keyboarding skills and by word-processing both copied and original texts. Pupils' work with numbers and handling data is extended through the use of spreadsheets, formulae and graphical software. A weekly computer club run by the co-ordinator encourages wider out-of-hours learning and is popular with pupils of all ages. However, on the evidence of lessons seen, there is a need for teachers of other subjects to plan for the regular use of information and communication technology in order to provide more opportunities for pupils to practise their skills on a regular basis.

125. Information and communication technology is well managed as an individual subject by the co-ordinator, with growing links to other subjects – for example, mathematics. There is a very good and detailed programme of work setting out the topics pupils are to cover from year to year and it is well linked to an equally detailed scheme for tracking pupils' individual progress. Resources, in terms of both hardware and software, are good overall. The accommodation for the subject has been significantly improved since the last inspection, by the good specialist adaptation of a classroom in the main school building. It is well equipped with workstations and the networking of colour printing facilities to a customised photocopier enables pupils to have access to high quality hard copies of their work.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

126. The provision, including the quality of teaching, is very good. As a result, pupils make very good progress and achieve very well. The subject makes a very positive contribution to the development of pupils' communication skills, to their cultural development and to their self-esteem. There has been good progress since the previous inspection.
127. Key strengths
- Lower-school pupils make particularly rapid progress after starting the subject in Year 7.
 - By the time they are in Year 11, pupils display very good levels of achievement in their understanding of spoken French.
 - Pupils of all ages show great confidence in speaking the language.
 - Very good teaching makes French lessons very lively and enjoyable occasions.
 - Lower-attaining pupils, in particular, get a lot out of the subject.
128. Area for improvement
- Procedures to measure pupils' progress are in need of development.
129. Year 7 pupils respond very well to the teacher's very high expectations of their understanding of French – for example, when used for classroom instructions. They listen intently to the teacher and to each other, quickly develop a useful vocabulary of words and short phrases and rapidly learn to use context very effectively to guess the meaning of new words. For these beginners, as for all pupils, the use of French in the classroom becomes increasingly natural. Their confidence blooms. In a lesson for a low-attaining Year 7 class, for example, pupils began using French as soon as they entered the classroom, in response to the teacher's greetings. Although they have difficulty communicating in English, pupils happily took part in dialogues, using fluently vocabulary and sentences they had memorised – 'Bonjour!', 'Je m'appelle...'. They were delighted by their own success and that of others. They were speaking French! The teacher provides a very good model and pupils imitate, repeat, chant and sing French words with enthusiasm. By the time they are in Year 9, pupils are using a much wider range of vocabulary, phrases and sentences to take part in their oral work. Higher-attaining pupils, for example, were ordering food and drinks of many different kinds in an imaginary café. Lessons move on very quickly. There is great variety in the

activities provided and resources used – for example, games, cassettes and role-play – so that pupils are very successfully stimulated and involved throughout lessons. Interactive computer software is used very effectively to reinforce pupils' vocabulary and pronunciation.

130. By the time they reach Year 11, pupils achieve very well in the speaking and listening tasks that form part of their Certificate of Achievement course. The higher-attaining pupils use sentences to express their likes and dislikes and can substitute words in memorised phrases to vary their meaning. They also understand language spoken at normal speed – or at faster than normal speed when their teacher becomes particularly enthusiastic! Results in the Certificate of Achievement contain a majority above the basic pass level, although surprisingly few at the higher 'merit' or 'distinction' levels. Several factors may account for this. Relatively little time is allowed for the subject. There is a consequent, very appropriate, emphasis on speaking and listening skills at the expense of reading and writing. Assessment procedures lack detailed and explicit reference to National Curriculum levels, particularly in the areas of the pupils' strengths of listening and responding. This makes it more difficult to plan for individual pupils to reach higher standards.
131. Some outstanding teaching of French was observed during the inspection week, together with some very good support from the subject's learning support assistant, who was 'volunteered' as a guinea pig for a variety of demanding tasks and demonstration dialogues with the teacher. Since the previous inspection, there has been further improvement in standards, resources have been developed well and external accreditation has been introduced. Assessment, however, is still in need of development to verify and do justice to the very good progress made by pupils.

MUSIC

132. The provision, including the quality of teaching, is good. As a result, pupils in Years 7 to 9 make good progress and achieve well. Music is not taught in Years 10 and 11.
133. Key strengths
- Progress is particularly good in composing, playing instruments and listening to music.
 - The specialist teacher uses skilled questioning to promote pupils' thinking and ensure their understanding.
 - Very good use is made of the high quality resources.
 - Good improvement has been made since the previous inspection.
134. Areas for improvement
- Pupils do not always pay full attention to the teacher's instructions.
 - The accommodation for music is unsatisfactory.
 - Computers are not used sufficiently to help pupils learn.
135. Pupils develop their ability to compose music and perform it – for example, using tuned and untuned percussion instruments, keyboards or recorders. In one lesson, Year 7 pupils investigated percussion instruments, working together in small groups to demonstrate their instrument to each other and create a rhythm using two notes. The teacher achieved a positive working atmosphere, so pupils enjoyed the lesson and worked hard. As a result of their good attitudes, pupils learned that a pause or silence is an important element in music. At times, pupils are so involved in what they are doing that they are reluctant to stop. This means that time is lost, because they miss the teacher's instructions. They build on this early work and, by the time they are in Year 9, pupils make very effective use of their skills. During one lesson, they took an imaginary trip to three planets. The teacher gave an exciting introduction, establishing the features of each – for example, 'Aeroph', characterised by high winds. The pupils matched their knowledge of instruments, and the sounds they make, to

particular planets, working in groups to compose short sequences of sounds. For instance, metal instruments, such as glockenspiels, triangles and cymbals represented one planet. Pupils very much enjoyed their work and tried very hard to stretch their imagination and make music together. The teacher has high expectations. As a result, lower attaining pupils looked for ways to improve their performance. More able pupils are beginning to use simple notation to record their compositions.

136. Pupils make good progress in their awareness of different types of music and the work of a variety of composers. For example, 'Danse Macabre' by Saint-Saens was the starting point for a series of lessons in Year 8, on making music to illustrate a storm. The teacher uses questions effectively to encourage pupils to express their ideas. As a result, they improve their answers from one or two words to longer phrases or full sentences, with more detailed explanations. Pupils benefit from visits to concerts – for example at the Birmingham Symphony Hall – and from musicians' visits to the school.
137. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection. Resources have improved dramatically. Some information and communication technology is used well – for example, electronic keyboards. However, computer software could be used more frequently and effectively to help pupils learn. The accommodation is unsatisfactory. It is difficult for pupils to move around the room and time is lost when resources are distributed – pupils cannot reach them easily. Music makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

138. The provision, including the quality of teaching, is good. As a result, pupils make good progress and achieve well. They develop very good attitudes to sport and an appreciation of the benefits of regular exercise.
139. Key strengths
- The control and organisation of pupils in physical activities is consistently good.
 - Pupils at all levels of attainment work very hard to improve their performance.
 - Very good opportunities are provided for pupils to compete in a variety of sporting events outside the school.
 - Teaching benefits from good levels of specialist knowledge in all of the activities taught.
 - The co-ordinator pays very good attention to ensuring that all pupils have equal opportunities to take part in activities.
140. Area for improvement
- Procedures for assessing how well pupils have learned are not precise enough.
 - Pupils would benefit from more time to consider their own performance and how they might improve.
141. Year 7 pupils adapt quickly to the discipline required for physical activity. In one lesson, the whole year group went to a local sports centre for swimming. They were quickly organised into four groups, according to their abilities. In conditions that were noisy and, for two of the groups, rather crowded, they co-operated very well with staff. The 'absolute beginners' in particular tried very hard in activities designed to boost their confidence – for example, moving through the water, with the help of armbands. All pupils clearly made steady progress towards the various certificates offered for each level of attainment. Staffing levels were such, however, that the two or three most able swimmers were not able to work separately on tasks which would provide a more appropriate challenge for them. They coped easily with the 'Advanced' group's activity – diving through hoops.

142. By the time they are in Year 9, pupils have clearly raised their levels of performance by thinking about how they can improve and by using more advanced techniques to put their ideas into practice. For example, in a gymnastics lesson, they were creating symmetrical and asymmetrical shapes. Pupils came up with some very imaginative positions and responded very well to the high expectations of the teacher in the presentation and finish of their movements. They were reminded how proudly Olympic gymnasts hold themselves, and pupils responded with straightened backs.
143. Lessons are very busy and purposeful. They move on quickly, with lots of encouragement and praise from the teacher. At times, activities would benefit from more time for the pupils to reflect on, talk about and evaluate their work. Although their work is reviewed and pupils are asked for comments, these sessions are very much led by the teacher and support assistant. Pupils need to be encouraged to use physical education vocabulary and link criticisms to their own work. Year 10 pupils, however, showed in their theory lesson, part of their work towards the Certificate of Achievement, that they have developed the ability to analyse the application and development of their skills – in this case, in football. This was a good example of the effectiveness of teaching in promoting a mature and thoughtful approach among pupils to their sporting activities. This is particularly evident in their performance in team games, in their sportsmanship and in their ability to take on the role of referee. The very successful participation of girls in football, including their selection in a team to represent the school in a five-a-side tournament, is another very positive outcome of the subject's strength and popularity in the school.
144. There is abundant evidence of high levels of involvement of pupils in a wide range of sporting activities, both in and out of school, including outdoor pursuits, athletics and other activities to which clubs in the community and individual coaches provide a very valuable input. For example, during the inspection, three coaches from Aston Villa Football Club led all the Year 8 pupils in a well-managed session – part of a series aimed at improving their skills. The department's planning and organisation of these many activities are outstanding and the number of trophies and other forms of recognition achieved by school teams and individuals amply demonstrate their success.
145. Improvement in physical education since the last inspection has been good. Pupils' progress was described then as satisfactory and it is now good and provision for equal opportunities has clearly developed very well. External accreditation has been introduced and good results achieved. Assessment in the subject, however, is in need of development. Some good work has been done by the subject co-ordinator on extending the range of performance which is assessed. However, pupils' progress in specific skills is still not identified precisely enough to enable teachers to make full use of the information collected.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

146. Pupils make good progress and achieve well in the time available for religious education. They benefit from good quality teaching. No examinations are taken in religious education because the subject cannot be studied in sufficient depth in one thirty-five minute lesson a week.
147. Key strengths
- Pupils make good progress and achieve a good understanding about different religious faiths - their people, ceremonies, artefacts and traditions.
 - Pupils think about and discuss their personal response to moral and religious issues.
 - Good quality teaching throughout the school is based on the principle that everyone has a right to their own faith and to be respected for it.
 - Learning is enhanced by very good use of artefacts and resources.

148. Areas for improvement

- Assessment and record keeping procedures are unsatisfactory. There is no formal use of assessment information to plan the next steps in learning or check how well pupils are progressing.
- Pupils rarely use computers in religious education lessons.
- Pupils' progress is held back by the small amount of time allocated for religious education, and by the lack of learning support assistance in lessons.

149. Pupils make good progress and achieve well, particularly as they only have one lesson a week. They meet people from different faiths in the local community, visit different places of worship, and they share stories about the traditions, ceremonies and artefacts of different religions. In this way pupils learn about the many approaches to life and faith. During the inspection, all classes were learning about Islam. The youngest pupils, in Year 7, learn well by listening, repeating key words about Islam, watching video clips, and drawing pictures of a Muslim family opening the daily fast during Ramadan. As pupils get older, they engage in more discussion about religions and, through this, they reflect on their personal responses to moral and religious life. This can lead to heated debate. In Year 10, for example, pupils reflected on the self-discipline required by Muslims to fast during Ramadan. This discussion about self-discipline led to wider debate, and very diverse views, on the meaning of honesty. In Year 11 there has been extensive discussion about the terrorist attack in America on 11th September 2001. These pupils have also considered the differing treatment of men and women in the marriage traditions of different religions.

150. There is good development of pupils' listening, speaking, and reading skills during lessons. The specific vocabulary of different religions is promoted very well. Each lesson begins with a review and consolidation of key words associated with the religion being studied. These weekly reviews make an important contribution to learning because lower attaining pupils, especially, have difficulty recalling previous work when they only have one lesson a week. Methods adapted from the National Literacy Strategy are used effectively to promote learning in religious education. The teacher reads to the whole class from well illustrated 'big books'. Worksheets, however, are occasionally too difficult for pupils to read with any understanding. Rarely do pupils have the opportunity to use computers to support their learning in lessons.

151. The quality of teaching is good because the teacher has a genuine interest and wide knowledge of the subject and in turn enthuses the pupils. She has a good understanding of the Locally Agreed Syllabus which has been adapted appropriately to meet the learning needs of pupils. One of the most successful aspects of the teaching is the creation of a learning environment in which teacher and pupils are confident to share the beliefs, ceremonies and traditions of their different faiths – for example, Christians, Muslims and Sikhs. Learning takes place in an environment of mutual respect, only occasionally spoilt by silly behaviour, from a very small minority of boys, for example. In most lessons there is no additional support to help the teacher manage the more difficult behaviours of this minority of pupils. Teaching is well balanced between the study of religions and provision, through discussion, for pupils' personal and moral development. Just occasionally, enthusiastic teaching results in rather too much of teacher talking, with not enough questions to check how well individual pupils are learning.

152. Improvement in the provision since the last inspection has been good. There is now only one teacher in the department, and good quality teaching is in place across the school. The progress pupils make has improved. The quality, quantity and range of resources have also improved; and resources and classroom displays are used to very good effect to enhance learning. A remembrance area in the religious education classroom, for example, is used very sensitively to give pupils chance to reflect on the lives of school friends and relatives who have died. The curriculum plan has improved to provide extensive coverage of a number of religions. The plans, however, do not yet show sufficiently how pupils will reach a deeper

understanding of religions from year to year, and how as they get older they will develop further their personal responses to moral and religious life. Formal assessment and recording procedures are not well developed, although it is clear from the annual reports to parents that the teacher has a good awareness of pupils' progress. There are no procedures in place to assess whether the progress of individual pupils is as good as can be expected.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION

153. The provision for personal, social and health education is good. Pupils make good progress and achieve well, because teaching is good overall. The provision is enhanced by the excellent programme of careers education and guidance, which is often very well taught.

154. Key strengths

- Very good planning and co-ordination provide a broad and balanced coverage of all aspects of the subject.
- Pupils' ability to recognise their responsibilities, both in the school and in the wider community and their understanding of how they can make their own contribution to their future educational and work prospects, develop particularly well.
- The subject makes a positive contribution to the very good attitudes, values and personal development which pupils display.
- There is an excellent programme of careers education and guidance.

155. Area for improvement

- The quality of teaching is not checked sufficiently. As a result, lessons are not always pitched at the right levels.

156. All pupils have one period per week in personal, health and social education plus tutorials in which they have time to work on their Records of Achievement folders. In the lessons observed, pupils showed satisfactory progress in their understanding of issues such as personal hygiene, safety and relationships. In Years 7 to 9, teachers were not always successful in finding the right level to match the limited ability of the lower-attaining pupils. For example, in one lesson, Year 7 pupils could not understand the concepts involved and the vocabulary used during a discussion about drugs. In the more effective lessons, however, pupils were able to extend their knowledge of how to use the emergency services or to talk about relationships, during a discussion about how their feelings could be affected by other people. Written work by Year 8 pupils shows thoughtful consideration of topics such as school rules and decision-making in family life. By the time they are in Year 11, pupils have had the opportunity to revisit many of these topics and their ability to respond with greater confidence and maturity is apparent. Their Records of Achievement folders reveal good levels of awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses.

157. Very good planning, including the development of work on citizenship, and a very good set of learning resources for the subject are strengths of the provision. Eight teachers are involved in the subject. The co-ordinator has not had sufficient opportunities to check the work of all teachers, especially those who are temporary. Teachers' confidence and expertise are variable, particularly in the difficult task of finding the right level of approach to areas such as drugs education and the discussion of personal relationships.

158. There is an excellent programme of careers education and guidance. Some very successful lessons for Year 8 and 9 pupils were observed on finding out about a variety of jobs and looking at the similarities and differences between them. Teaching is very effective because it presents information in a way that relates closely to pupils' own interests and their growing curiosity about the world of work. Vocational education for the upper-school pupils, and a very well-organised programme of work-experience, provide very good opportunities for pupils to get out of the school and see for themselves. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their

work-placements and are clearly making very good progress in their understanding of the options available to them after school and in the confidence with which they face the future. The careers advisory service provides very high quality support to the school. Excellent liaison and joint planning produces an outstanding programme of advice, practical help, for example, in interview technique and in collecting information, and work-related experiences and opportunities for pupils of all levels of attainment.

159. The high standards in both personal, health and social education and in careers education and guidance which were noted in the last inspection have been maintained. In several respects – for example, in the availability of the careers programme to all pupils – they have been enhanced.

POST-SIXTEEN EDUCATION

160. The provision for students over the age of sixteen is very good. It offers a very relevant curriculum that matches students' needs very well. This is a good improvement since the previous inspection. Students have a very positive view of the provision they receive and the way that it prepares them for life beyond the school. The quality of teaching and the guidance that students receive is very good. Consequently they make very good progress and achieve very well. Because students who have additional learning difficulties or for whom English is an additional language receive such effective consideration and help, they make the same very good progress as other students.

161. Key strengths

- Students achieve very well – for example, in basic skills and in vocational courses.
- Teachers meet students' needs very effectively.
- Students develop self-confidence and very good social skills, through very good support and guidance.
- The curriculum is very good. It prepares students very well for their future life and enables their achievements to be recognised through a range of accreditation.
- The department is managed very effectively and responds very well to students' needs.

162. Area for improvement

- The department lacks a library and an area for private study using books and computers.

163. All students follow courses to improve their speaking and listening, reading and writing. In addition to these regular literacy lessons, there is effective planning for them to improve further their communication skills. For instance, they take turns to act as receptionists for the department, take part in regular interviews with staff, and are involved in a wide variety of relevant activities – such as attending student council meetings. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are promoted well. For example, students follow carefully graded exercises to improve their punctuation. Through effective questions, the teachers continually check to ensure that they understand the task, being reassured when – for example, a student can explain where capital letters appear in a sentence. Students receive good support to help them to improve their reading and writing skills. This happens during literacy lessons and in the well-planned opportunities for students to develop literacy skills in most other subjects. This means that they achieve very well overall. For instance, they learn to read fire exit notices and evacuation procedures during lessons to introduce them to working in an office. During 'communications studies' they learn how to make telephone calls, so that they can explain their difficulties if they have to make an emergency call. Students who require more help with language receive specific lessons to help them to develop their basic skills. Through effective teaching, where the work matches each pupil's needs, they are making small but significant steps towards letter and word recognition.

164. When teachers plan to promote basic skills, they also ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for students to put their skills into practice. The tasks are often practical, providing useful information and experiences to help students in later life. They learn how to recognise and handle money during lessons for accreditation of their skills in number – for instance, to recognise coins and complete calculations. Students apply their number skills well during other lessons, interpreting timetables during lessons to promote independent travel on public transport. There are very good opportunities for students to use their skills practically when they operate their car washing business. They develop a very good understanding of the need to take account of the cost of materials when they set their charges. The teacher skilfully reviews the performance of the company with the students, encouraging them to give their own ideas – such as checking the standard of finish and undertaking new tasks, like cleaning car interiors, to make more money. They develop a good understanding of the need to maximise the number of cars that they can clean in the time, but to be aware of quality control so that customers will be pleased with the service. Students develop a mature view of the difficulties of running a business. A strength of the course is the real life experience students obtain. For instance, the manager defined his role as being ‘the person who has to deal with complaints, to please the customer’.
165. As pupils progress through the main school they receive very good support and guidance to make choices about their future career – for instance, to choose between attending local colleges or joining the school’s post-16 provision. Prospective students spend time in the department before they join, so that they understand the distinctive change of emphasis and the way that they will spend their days. Consequently, they have a clear understanding of the courses available. There is a strong emphasis upon students developing independence. During lessons to promote their personal development, they learn about local training centres and the skills that they might gain there. Teaching is skilled to enable pupils to use directories of training centres to choose potential courses that will help them in their future career. The teacher places a very strong emphasis upon individual responsibility, indicated by the way that students evaluate and mark their own answers to questions about what different centres provide. This both raises students’ self-esteem and makes them more independent. In discussion, it is evident that students are clear that they have choices for the future and are developing very good skills for making the choice themselves.
166. The department is managed very effectively to provide a rich and improving range of courses for students to follow. Relationships with local colleges are very impressive and enable students to gain opportunities to try courses ranging from building to computers. Teachers plan very well for students to evaluate their experiences after they have attended ‘taster’ courses at colleges and training centres. Students collaborated very well when relating their experiences of the previous week. They took turns to tell each other what they thought of their opportunities – for example, to try being a chef or joining courses in retail or first aid. They remembered significant information – such as wearing blue plasters on cuts when cooking. The teacher organised the evaluation so effectively, that students will be able to build on their experiences during future visits, trying new courses with confidence.
167. A strength of the provision is the promotion of pupils’ social development. There is a very strong emphasis upon developing independence. For instance, many of the students make their way to and from school each day using public transport. Teachers plan very well to build on these skills by arranging for them to travel to colleges and to unfamiliar places, in order to increase their independence. This makes a very good contribution to promoting students’ confidence, enabling them to decide to attend a particular college because they feel confident crossing roads and using public transport. Teachers promote students’ health and personal development very well – for instance, when they study childcare. The teacher is very knowledgeable and is able to ensure that students understand important facts about bringing up a baby. For instance, students have formulated their own views about the importance of immunisation. Lessons make effective use of the community. A visit to a retail outlet enabled

students to identify useful devices to make homes safe for babies and young children. Students are encouraged to help other pupils in the school. For instance, they help with swimming or food technology lessons and join in lessons in physical education. This provides very valuable experience for them in their aspirations – for example, to move on to training as sports leaders. Students relish responsibility, such as organising ingredients to run a sandwich service for staff.

168. Students have access to excellent careers guidance. It is evident from discussions with them that they are well prepared for life after school. Nearly all students are already clear about their career choices for the future. They have the opportunity to take part in a wide range of vocational courses – for example, in retail or construction. Students have made their choices between college courses and applying for jobs, on the basis of very good advice and experiences at school and at college. They achieve very well in lessons to promote the skills that are necessary in the workplace – for instance, to read signs and notices in order to find their way around. Regular opportunities to undertake work experience are a very valuable part of the sixth form. They choose jobs that they feel they would like to do in the future - such as working in the retail industry. One student was extremely pleased with the opportunity to try different jobs. This enabled her to be sure that she wanted to pursue a career with children, because of the positive experiences of working in a local nursery.
169. There are limitations in the accommodation but the strength is that it provides a place where students feel that they are having a discrete education and are treated in a more adult way. They value small privileges, such as having a common room that enables them to spend breaks as they wish. However, students do not have access to a suitable library area to provide better opportunities for private study, using books and computers.