

INSPECTION REPORT

PERRY BEECHES SCHOOL

Great Barr

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103492

Headteacher: Mrs I Gallagher

Reporting inspector: Susan Chamberlain
7661

Dates of inspection: 20th – 23rd May 2002

Inspection number: 244876

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of students: 11 - 16

Gender of students: Mixed

School address: Beeches Road
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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs E Morgan

Date of previous inspection: 29 April 1996

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31100	Geoff Hunter	Team inspector	Mathematics	
18453	Colin Lower	Team inspector	Science	
20247	Roger Parry	Team inspector	History Equality of opportunity	Vocational
20497	Vernon Williams	Team inspector	Geography	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
31963	Malcolm Padmore	Team inspector	Design and Technology; Information and communication technology	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Perry Beeches School is a smaller than average comprehensive school for students aged 11 to 16 years. It has 826 students on roll (382 girls, 444 boys). The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is 28.2 per cent which is above average. The school has a large proportion (54 per cent) of students who are from minority ethnic origins; this is very high when compared nationally. Around 28 per cent of students are Asian, 15 per cent are black African Caribbean and 11 per cent are from other groups. The remaining 46 per cent are white. The percentage of students, whose first language at home is not English, is 28 per cent which is very high in national terms. Students who have special educational needs amount to approximately 30 per cent of the school's population. Of these 2.4 per cent have statements. The school faces challenging circumstances and these have been exacerbated by the recent and still current building programme. When students enter the school their attainment levels are well below average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an improving school set amongst challenging circumstances. It is beginning to offer all its students a good standard of education. While the school has been rebuilt, it has had to operate under almost untenable circumstances, which have caused its standards to flounder. Now it is moving into new premises and excellent leadership is ensuring that standards of work, attitudes and behaviour are rising rapidly. The staffing position, after a period of inadequacy, is at last stable and teaching seen during the inspection was predominantly good. The unit cost per student reflects the challenging circumstances and is by no means high. The school provides satisfactory value for money and has an enormous capacity to improve upon this.

What the school does well

- Leadership and management by the headteacher and key staff are excellent.
- Staff and students relate very well and racial harmony is the norm.
- The school cares very well for its students.
- There is an excellent shared commitment to succeed.
- Extra curricular activities are very good and the many innovative initiatives are very effective.
- The provision for students' social development is excellent.

What could be improved

- Attainment across the school is, at best, below average.
- Attendance is unsatisfactory.
- The provision of ICT across the curriculum is unsatisfactory.
- Staff do not fully understand how they could help students with special educational needs achieve their targets included in individual education plans.
- The image of the school in the community is not as favourable as it should be.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

There has been good improvement since the previous inspection in 1996. During these six years there has been considerable disruption from the school rebuild, which has been long-term and ongoing. Not only have students had to use temporary classrooms, they have also had a very poor staffing situation, being taught by many supply teachers. However, during the last 12 months the new accommodation has gradually become available and the position has very much improved. The teaching staff has stabilised now and there is, at least, a satisfactory match of staff to the needs of the curriculum. Teaching has improved

enormously and is very much better than in the recent challenging years; it is also much improved since the previous inspection. Academic standards appear to have declined but on investigation include a number of near misses, which might be expected given the disruption. On the positive side, very good results were achieved by early entry groups in mathematics and English. Strategies for teaching literacy, mentoring of students, Out Of Hours Learning and the Artsite have all improved the students' experience at school.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved at the end of Year 11 based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	E	E	E	D

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

When students enter the school, they have levels of attainment that are well below average. This has remained the case as students move through the school but, by the end of Year 11, students have learned a great deal even if they have not improved upon their ranking in national terms.

At the end of Year 9, students' attainment in statutory tests in 2001 was well below average and was not high enough. The trend in the school's average National Curriculum point score was broadly in line with the national trend. When compared with similar schools, standards were below average. Previous published results do not take into account the extreme difficulties under which the school has been working. In the work seen standards were below average but better than national comparisons would suggest. Students' achievements were overall satisfactory.

By the end of Year 11, standards were well below the national average for students gaining 5 A* to C grades in 2001 and very low when based on averages over the last three years. They were not high enough. There were a large number of D grades at GCSE. Given decent facilities and appropriate staffing these may have been C grades. The proportion of students obtaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to G, was below the national average, both in 2001 and over the last three years. In this school, however, nearly all students gain at least one GCSE pass. Predicted grades for 2002 indicate better results are on the way for, at least, both the current Year 11 and the up-and-coming Year 10. In the work seen, standards were below average and students' achievements were satisfactory overall. However, in several subjects achievements were good. Although these judgements do not reflect recent examination results, they do reflect the impact of an improved teaching force and improved working/learning conditions. The examination results reflect the school's challenging circumstances and promise to be much improved even in 2002.

In this school the many different groups achieve at a satisfactory level. However, there are clear differences in the attainment of certain groups for example Asian students generally do well, whereas the attainment of White and African-Caribbean boys is well below average. Girls perform better than boys overall. Gifted and talented students do well. Those students for whom English is an additional language make good progress. Students with special educational needs also make good progress.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students have good attitudes to school and enjoy the wide range of activities provided for them
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Most students behave well in lessons and around the school and are responding well to the good behaviour management strategies and as a result exclusions are reducing.
Personal development and relationships	Students are making very good progress in their personal development. They are learning to value and respect others ideas and beliefs. They have excellent relationships with one another and with staff. The school is an inclusive and happy community.
Attendance	In spite of good attendance procedures, students' attendance is unsatisfactory as it remains below the national average and a minority of students have poor attendance and punctuality.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11
Quality of teaching	Good	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.

In lessons seen, teaching and learning are good, overall. They have improved since the previous inspection when nearly a fifth of lessons were unsatisfactory. Only a small number of lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory during this inspection. This marked progress reflects the school's decision to focus on teaching and learning as its number one priority. In nearly three quarters of lessons, teaching was good or better. Learning matches teaching with predominantly good learning taking place. However, it is important not to forget that the school has only recently achieved a stable teaching force and the situation during inspection week was considerably improved on that of a year ago when it was very precarious. Fortunately, good teaching is now impacting positively on learning and, consequently, achievement and this was evident in the lessons observed.

Strengths in teaching include the very good structuring of lessons and the good subject knowledge of teachers. Learning is strong because students have many opportunities to work practically as in design and technology where they learn through making and following the design process and in science, when students try solving practical problems using their own apparatus. Teaching in English, mathematics and science is good. Strategies to teach literacy are very effective and those to teach numeracy are satisfactory. The teaching of students with special educational needs is, at least, good. Students have high levels of very effective support. Occasionally learning support assistants are effective when they help out by teaching lessons. Students with English as an additional language are well taught as are those who are either gifted or talented.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good: The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the range of needs of all students well. Extra-curricular, community, careers and vocational education provision are very good. The school does not have a daily collective act of worship.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. Students with special needs make good progress. Learning support assistants make a good contribution to students' learning. Students benefit fully from the wide range of opportunities provided by the school.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Good. Support for these students is sufficient. Those who need help with English are provided for well.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall. Personal, social, and health education is satisfactory but needs developing further. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory, for cultural and moral development very good and for social development excellent.
How well the school cares for its students	The school cares very well for its students and has very good procedures for ensuring their health, safety and welfare. Staff know students very well and offer them very good educational and personal support and guidance. The monitoring of students' academic progress is satisfactory.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership and management of the headteacher and key staff are excellent. All have worked very hard to guide the school successfully through hard times.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	There is a well led governing body which fulfils its responsibilities properly. It knows well the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school is monitoring and evaluating its performance very effectively. Overall the management of monitoring of teaching, performance management, induction and staff development is very good
The strategic use of resources	Resources are used very well when taking into account the difficulties the school has encountered over recent years. A diminished budget for 2001/2002 is restrictive. The school always seeks best value.

Overall staffing is satisfactory and has improved significantly this academic year. After major upheaval, the school now has good (and still improving) accommodation which is having a good impact on students' attitudes, behaviour and attendance and on staff morale. The school is still incomplete which is having an impact on some areas of the curriculum such as physical education and design and technology. Building works continue to cause disruption to the school. Resources are unsatisfactory overall. The extensive building programme has drawn money away from the resources budget and subject capitation has been restricted. The new library is under-stocked and there are shortages of text and reference books in several departments.

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 are making good progress in school• The school expects their children to work hard and achieve their best.• Their children like school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The school working closer with parents• Parents kept better informed about how their child are getting on.• The school providing an interesting range of activities outside lessons.

There was only a low response to the Ofsted questionnaire. The school is developing good plans for further improving its effective links with parents although not all parents are actively involved in children's learning and in school life. Parents receive good quality information through written reports and regular opportunities to meet teachers to discuss children's progress. The prospectus is due for updating in order to meet statutory requirements, particularly in explaining the school's provision for students with special educational needs. Inspectors agree with the positive views of the parents. They believe extra-curricular provision is very good.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. The school has struggled for some time with difficulties in staffing and a re-building programme. This has taken its toll on examination results which were not high enough, particularly in 2001 when some examinations had to be moved last minute because of severe disruption. It could be said that the school is not the same school as it was. From changed management, improved accommodation and a strong teaching force combined with more local students, a new school has evolved where a history of disruption, a poor match of teachers to the curriculum and low standards no longer have a place. When students enter the school, they have levels of attainment that are well below average. However, students in Year 7 indicate higher levels of attainment than previous years. Although over time, standards have not improved in national terms, improvement over the last year has been very significant and bodes well for the future.

2. At the end of Year 9, students' attainment in statutory tests in 2001 was well below average. The trend in the school's average National Curriculum point score was broadly in line with the national trend. When compared with similar schools, standards were below average. Previous published results do not take into account the extreme difficulties under which the school has been working. In the work seen standards were below average rather than well below and students' achievements satisfactory.

3. By the end of Year 11, standards were well below the national average for students gaining 5 A* to C grades in 2001 and very low when based on averages over the last three years. They were not high enough. There were a large number of D grades at GCSE. Given decent facilities and appropriate staffing these may have been C grades. The proportion of students obtaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to G, was below the national average, both in 2001 and over the last three years. In this school, however, nearly all students gain at least one GCSE pass. Predicted grades for 2002 indicate better results are on the way for, at least, both the current Year 11 and the up-and-coming Year 10. In the work seen, standards were below average as opposed to well below average. Students' achievements were satisfactory overall and in some subjects, they were good, indicative of the considerably improved effectiveness of teaching and, consequently, learning. The results reflect the school's challenging circumstances and promise to be much improved even in 2002. Very good results were gained by early entry groups in Year 10. These were not eligible to be counted in the 2001 results but will enhance those for 2002.

4. The inclusive nature of the school enables students of all races and other groupings to achieve at a satisfactory level. There are differences in the attainment of certain groups. The school analyses examination results by gender and ethnicity. As there are students of at least sixteen different ethnic origins, comparisons in performance are complicated. However, it is true to say that Asian students generally do well, whereas the attainment of White and African-Caribbean boys is well below average and, despite considerable support and focus, some underachieve. Girls perform better than boys overall.

5. In English, the levels at entry are well below average. Good achievement is gained with confidence by the end of Year 9. Progress continues to the end of Year 11. Writing weaknesses continue to reduce the attainment of most students.

6. Standards of literacy are below average. They are well below average when students enter the school. The significant progress results from the special provisions made for those with the most severe problems of reading and writing and for students with restricted opportunities to develop their language skills at home. Students are withdrawn from lessons to improve their skills either working in groups or using the integrated learning system. The school promotes the development of literacy skills for students at all levels of attainment by, for example, the provision of opportunities to join out of normal hours' classes and a wide range of other activities. For example, there are opportunities for groups to support other students, to join in activities including some to develop thinking skills and to work with a local newspaper to publish students' writing. Students can attend the "Young Peoples' Parliament" in Birmingham and a university course on conflict resolution on which they base a performance for a local primary school. The range and quality of this provision is very good and contributes to the good improvement students make. The range and quality of books currently in the newly opened resource centre is inadequate to encourage reading for information or for pleasure.

7. Attainment in mathematics is below average in all years and reflects staffing problems that have now been resolved. The students are in general, best at handling data and dealing with algebra. Achievement in mathematics is now satisfactory for all students but was not so until recently. Improvements have taken place because of both better teaching and departmental leadership and management.

8. Although numerical skills are below the national average, students demonstrate sufficiently satisfactory use of these skills in their work across the curriculum to enable them to progress. In design and technology, measuring and weighing skills are satisfactory and students show that they can apply spatial ideas through drawing in two dimensions. In information and communication technology (ICT), students show that they can draw line graphs. There is, therefore, no evidence to suggest that students are denied access to any element of curriculum in spite of numerical skills which are overall below average.

9. In science, attainment based upon national tests and public examinations was well below average at the end of both Years 9 and 11. The attainment of students seen in books and lessons is in line with national expectations at the end of both Years 9 and 11. Students achieve well.

10. By the end of Year 9, attainment in art in the work seen is below average. This represents good achievement from a well below average standard on entry. Standards of attainment by the end of Year 11 remained below average overall representing satisfactory achievement in the GCSE years. Around one-third of students attain the national average at GCSE exhibiting strengths in painting and drawing. In music, students are consistently encouraged and assessed as they work. Particularly good use of praise encourages students to volunteer performances and answers with the added incentive of having their name added to the "star of the week chart". In previous years, standards have been well below average and many students enter the school with limited practical experience of music. Standards seen in the inspection, while still below national average, show definite signs of improvement and achievement and progress across the age range is now good.

11. Attainment in design and technology is below expectation by the end of Years 9 and 11. Due to the disruption of buildings and staffing in the past, the achievement of students is only satisfactory. Attainment in ICT is below average at the end of Years 9 and 11. The discrete courses at the end of Year 9, for all ICT students, promote satisfactory achievement. At the end of Year 11 the poor provision for cross curricular ICT for the students, who do not take an accredited course, has led to unsatisfactory achievement.

12. Standards of work seen in geography are well below the national average at the end of Year 9, although in some lessons they are higher. Students' achievement in relation to standards at entry in Year 7, that are also well below nationally expected levels, is satisfactory. Standards of work of the end of Year 11 are well below the national average, although a small number of students, mainly girls, reach higher levels. Achievement over Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall. The proportion of students who reached expected standards in history at the end of both Year 9 and Year 11 are well below average. Students who do not reach the standards are restricted by weaknesses in written expression, together with recall and the ability to structure information. In history students learn to use evidence from documents to understand past events. In religious education, standards in lessons and books seen are average in Years 7 to 11. Students' achievements are good by age fourteen and satisfactory by age sixteen.

13. Attainment in French and Spanish is below average at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11. Students achieve well in lessons, but many find it difficult to retain knowledge, so progress for most students, unless they have been disapplied, is satisfactory.

14. Attainment in physical education is below average on entry to the school but average by ages 14 and 16. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 and is satisfactory in Years 10 to 11. Students make good progress in Years 9 because they are well taught and have positive attitudes. In Years 10 and 11, students struggle with the theoretical aspect of the GCSE course.

15. Students, who have special educational needs, make good progress and gain better results in national examinations and tests than might be reasonably expected by comparison with their assessed attainment at the time of entry. Those who are gifted and talented and those, for whom English is an additional language, make good progress.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

16. Students have maintained the good attitudes and behaviour reported at the last inspection. The relationships that students have with each other and with staff are excellent. The harmonious and inclusive atmosphere is a significant strength of the school and makes a very strong contribution to students' personal development. Most parents say that their children like coming to school. Some feel that students' behaviour is not as good as it could be.

17. The attendance of students remains just below the national average. However, there has been some improvement recently because there are good procedures to monitor and improve attendance levels and because the school is becoming more settled. A few students still have poor attendance and punctuality and require close support from learning mentors and staff in liaison with the educational social worker. Many students have good attendance records but the overall unsatisfactory level of attendance, combined with some persistent unpunctuality, has a negative impact on students' attainment and the continuity of their learning. Good supervision and high expectations by staff mean that students move quickly between lessons, which maximises the amount of teaching time available.

18. Students enjoy their lessons and the wide range of activities provided for them. In lessons, when teaching is of high quality, they are attentive and work with good concentration. They answer questions enthusiastically and with confidence. They are motivated to work hard and behave well because they are stimulated and interested in the tasks set for them. Students enjoy volunteering information in discussions. They listen carefully to the teacher and to others and work responsibly in groups and pairs. Overall, students' interest and attention in nearly all lessons is at least good or better. There are

some instances where students do not have such positive attitudes. Sometimes they are slow to settle and become restless when the work set for them is too long. Some boys, particularly in Years 7 and 9, have a poor level of commitment to their learning. They are inattentive, talk while the teacher is introducing the lesson, and are sometimes deliberately disobedient. These examples are not widespread, however, and overall, the positive attitudes of students make a good contribution to their learning.

19. Students' behaviour is good. Most students are aware of the school's rules and are aware of the standards expected of them. Students have suffered considerable disruption and change as a result of the building works and are good natured and accepting of reminders from staff about rules and expectations of behaviour as the school tries to settle down into normal routines. In lessons, for example, they try hard to ignore significant noise from drilling going on in adjacent classrooms. They behave well as they move around the school and queue in an orderly fashion when moving to the dining hall. Outside, students behave well as they arrive and leave the school and when taking part in lessons, such as athletics. Students are pleased with their new school and treat it with respect. The school has had a high incidence of exclusions, which is now reducing. It has used these appropriately to emphasise its expected standards of behaviour. Students in Year 11 say that this has had a significant impact on all students' behaviour which they say has improved considerably in the past year. Students report that bullying is at a low level and that staff deal well with any incidents.

20. Students' personal development is very good. There is a very good atmosphere in the school in which all students, regardless of ethnic origin or gender, get on very well with each other. Students and staff have excellent relationships with one another. Students are learning to be independent, to understand and help others and to play a part in the school community with responsibilities such as head boy and girl and their deputies, house captains and prefects or when working with younger students through the Peer Tutor and Valued Youth Tutor schemes. In lessons, students make good progress in developing their collaborative skills and their ability to listen to and value others' ideas. Through discussions with tutors and when discussing their progress as 'students in focus', students are developing a good understanding of their own achievement and what they need to do next to improve. In discussion with students, they say that they are learning well, that they get on well with others and that they enjoy the wide range of activities that the school offers. They are very positive and proud of the improved school environment and facilities.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

21. The school has only recently achieved a stable teaching force and the situation during inspection week was considerably improved on that of a year ago. In the lessons seen, teaching and learning were good, overall. They have improved since the previous inspection when nearly a fifth of lessons were unsatisfactory. Only a small number of lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory during this inspection. Such marked progress reflects the school's decision to focus on teaching and learning as its number one priority. In nearly three quarters of lessons, teaching was good or better. Learning matches teaching with predominantly good learning taking place. Improved teaching and learning have impacted positively on students' attainment and their achievements this year but this has yet to be proven by raised examination performances. Teaching in English, mathematics and science is good. Strategies to teach literacy are very effective and those to teach numeracy are satisfactory.

22. Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects. For example, in English teachers have a very high level of expertise. They actively engage students and expect very good learning by all. In mathematics, for example, precise steps are spelled out as to how to do

simultaneous equations. Students respond well by gaining a clear understanding of the topic. In science, very good teaching is demonstrated in a Year 10 lesson when students have to design their own procedures for carrying out an investigation into the rate of reaction between magnesium and hydrochloric acid. The teacher first ensured that students were aware of the problems surrounding the accuracy of the experiment by practical demonstration. The students then found a solution to these problems by trying out different methods for themselves with their own apparatus. The combination of stimulated thought coupled with interaction with the actual experimental equipment resulted in very good learning and some well thought out solutions.

23. On occasions, teachers' expectations are too high and misguided. In ICT, although well intended, teachers occasionally offer too much challenge by offering students inappropriate tasks. In history, however, students are well challenged when they learn to use evidence from documents to understand past events. For example, students in Year 9 analysed key statements from "Mein Kampf" in order to see why Hitler's views might be supported by Germans in the 1930's. In a Year 9 Spanish class the students read dialogue about shopping and translated it. The teacher's strategy to then remove the dialogue from the overhead projector was effective as students had to write it out from memory. Students are consistently encouraged and assessed as they work. In music, particularly good use of praise encouraged students to volunteer performances and answers with the added incentive of having their name added to the "star of the week chart". Teachers encouraged and motivated students to do their best in a Year 9 volleyball lesson when students learned well skills of ball handling and responded very well to enthusiastic and challenging teaching. Highly directive teaching was successfully administered in a GNVQ ICT lesson and consequently students made good progress. Students learn well when they follow the design process as in design and technology. However, when teachers do not give good, clear direction students' progress is limited.

24. The content of most lessons is placed in the context of previous study. A strength directly attributable to the school's focus on teaching is the very good structuring of lessons. Teachers ensure that students know the objectives of the lesson. They usually write these clearly on the board. Lessons are divided into appropriate sections and proceed logically, taking account of necessary diversions. In a Year 10 mathematics lesson, a starter activity, which challenged the students' thinking and required them to indicate their chosen answer, was used to excellent effect and produced an intense and excited atmosphere. Such good structuring of lessons is preceded by, at least, very good planning. This is evident across most subjects. In business education, planning involves not only very good pre-lesson notes but very good organisational tactics including the division of the room into seven workstations. Once again the successful use of a starter activity to sort groups ensures that students' thinking is challenged at an appropriate level, the broad range of ability spanning from five gifted and talented students to five with learning difficulties. Good plenary sessions occur in most lessons and encourage students to consolidate their learning. In art, a very good plenary session firmly reinforced relevant vocabulary and concepts encouraging students to use a specific language in their evaluation of their own and others' work.

25. Students are stimulated and interested by a variety of tasks and consequently motivated to work and behave well. In drama, the teacher had strictly defined activities to which she adhered, whilst ensuring that for each activity students knew what outcomes were expected. Built into the planning was time for discussion about the safety whilst acting. Students contributed well suggesting that, for example, running around the room was not advisable. They learn to work in groups. The clear message of "behaviour and responsibility" permeated the lesson and basic class rules were established. As a consequence teamwork was positive and simple performance skills were understood well.

26. Concentration was developed and competitive strategies introduced. Students were continually encouraged to evaluate their work.

27. Students are encouraged to recognise their own part in learning and are discouraged from thinking the lesson is something done to them. They are becoming less dependent on the teacher for instruction and are increasingly aware of their own progress in learning particularly in GNVQ IT lessons.

28. In physical education, there are good examples of starter activities, where students take responsibility for their warm-up routines. Learning opportunities are maximised and students learn correct techniques which, enhance their physical prowess. However, more working together and evaluation of each other's performance would be beneficial. Lively and good humoured teaching in music enables very good learning, for example, when a well chosen modern drumbeat caught the attention of students initially and the lesson proceeded at a brisk pace. Students then constructed their own songs to which they then added their own musical composition.

29. Homework is set regularly but is not always completed. In a Year 7 science lesson, for example, only half of the group gave in their homework and some of this was incomplete much to the teacher's displeasure.

30. Good learning is exemplified by the students' full and knowledgeable answers, the consolidation of their main gains in the form of notes and their very good use of sources to find answers. In most lessons there is no difference noted in the skills of girls and boys. In some lessons, certain minority ethnic groups are more involved in discussion, for example, African Caribbean students are very willing to contribute whereas, sometimes, Asian students are less so. In written work, this observation is sometimes reversed. Occasionally poor learning results when teachers begin by setting the lesson in the context of the previous lesson by involving students in a question-and-answer session but do not consolidate this learning in a visual form on a white board. This disadvantages all students, especially those who preferred learning style is visual.

31. The teaching of students with special educational needs is at least good. Students have high levels of very effective support. Occasionally learning support assistants are particularly effective when they teach lessons. Students with English as an additional language are taught well. Those who may not speak English at home learn well. In English, even in Year 7, they offer clear, fluent contributions in the main. Gifted and talented students are offered extension activities and can join early entry groups in mathematics and English where they are taught very well.

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

32. The curriculum is good overall. It is managed well by the deputy headteacher who has this responsibility. It is regularly and thoroughly reviewed through the curriculum board and annual subject evaluations.

33. Statutory requirements are met in all subjects in Years 7 to 9. The curriculum has good breadth and balance and has improved since the previous inspection. Subjects such as design and technology, art, music and ICT are not now taught on a rotational basis. Students with special educational needs no longer systematically miss geography, history and art lessons in order to receive extra support for reading. Drama is taught within English and as a discrete subject and dance is taught within the physical education course. Religious education and personal, social and health education (PSHE) are taught weekly

and ICT is taught as a separate subject of the curriculum. A limitation of the course is that there is only one modern foreign language offered with a choice of French or Spanish in most years. A modular course has been established in Years 7 to 9 that gives additional support to literacy and numeracy and thinking skills in an attempt to raise standards. It is working well overall and is valuable in developing literacy and thinking skills for students. However, the course has some practical shortcomings in numeracy where the thematic approach used does not deal sufficiently with specific numerical concepts. The provision for literacy across the curriculum is generally good and that for numeracy is satisfactory.

34. The school needs to raise standards of literacy further by extending current good practice throughout the curriculum. Opportunities should be increased for students to develop and discuss their ideas and opinions in lessons. Strategies should be implemented to improve the organisation, clarity and accuracy of students' writing so that more of them can more successfully communicate how much they know and understand.

35. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is good, although not all statutory requirements are met in ICT. The school has a major building programme in progress that when completed will provide the necessary resources to ensure that students have adequate access to all aspects of the subject. The school has made every effort to meet statutory requirements in modern foreign languages but due to staffing problems has needed to disapply all students in Year 10 except those taking Punjabi and many students in Year 11. A wide range of GCSE subjects is offered within a broad and balanced core and options provision. A distance learning ICT is taught at the school as a double option GNVQ choice. Currently there are no other GNVQ courses offered to students, which is a clear limitation given the nature of the intake. However, vocational GCSE courses are being offered in leisure and tourism and manufacturing in partnership with the North Birmingham College next session. A modular programme in Years 10 and 11 provides useful additional support in careers, ICT and in thinking Skills. Gifted and talented students are entered in Year 10 for GCSE's in mathematics and English literature and then study statistics and media studies in Year 11. The curriculum provides flexible, varied and relevant programmes of study across the ability range particularly for low attainers through the ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) Youth Awards Scheme and the Complementary Curriculum in applied practical courses run in partnership with numerous local providers.

36. The school has satisfactory strategies in place for teaching numerical skills. The mathematics department follows the National Numeracy Policy. The school has a draft numeracy policy. An audit of numeracy usage in each department has been completed. These have been used as the basis for numeracy policies in some, but not all, departments.

37. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) provision is satisfactory overall. The PSHE course is taught to all students by the form teacher and specialist teachers under the supervision of the year tutor. Staff with specialist knowledge of such topics as careers, sex and drugs education from within and from outside the school deliver these aspects of the programme. There has been noticeable improvement this year in the planning and monitoring of the course by the assistant headteacher who now has oversight of the PSHE programme. No PSHE teaching was timetabled during the inspection. A recent audit of the PSHE programme shows that some teachers are far less confident of their ability to teach the subjects than others and indicated that further training is needed. Displays on PSHE topics are not sufficiently developed around the school.

38. There is very good extra-curricular provision. It is particularly good in the arts and sport. An extensive and high quality enrichment programme is provided through school productions by the choir, orchestra, dance and drama clubs as well as the community Arts projects linked to the schools Artsite status. These include; the Birmingham Symphony

Orchestra; the Motionhouse Dance Company; the Caliche' South American Music group and the Maestro Steel Band. There are many supplement performances with student workshops. There is a good range of sports available for students particularly within the schools inter-house competitions. There are excellent facilities available for homework, catch-up, course work clinics and revision classes that take place before school, lunchtimes, after school and during holidays in a wide range of subject areas as well as many activities with the University of the First Age. There are also many other enrichment opportunities, including visits to theatres, museums, fieldwork trips and visits to France and Spain in modern foreign languages. The school has good links with partner institutions. Links with feeder primary schools are well developed. In subjects such as science, physical education, design and technology, ICT and English there are many activity workshops and summer holiday clubs. The school works effectively to ensure a smooth transition for students from primary to secondary education through the pastoral transfer liaison arrangements that include an induction and open day. Links with North Birmingham College are well established and are developing progressively with joint teaching arrangements on partnership courses. There are good opportunities for students to continue and progress their studies in a range of Further Education Colleges. Initial teacher training links with the University of Wolverhampton provides for a good professional partnership.

39. The provision for careers education and vocational education is very good. A well considered and comprehensive programme exists in Years 9 to 11 partly provided through the PSHE programme and partly through the modular programme. The careers coordinator provides very good leadership and ensures, through careful monitoring, that all students have knowledge and understanding of relevant careers opportunities and are well prepared for entering the world of work. The guided choice programme in Year 9, involving students and their parents with the school in deciding on options for Year 10, is especially good. The careers co-coordinator works very closely in partnership with the local Careers Education and Business Partnership Service careers advisor, who provides very valuable professional guidance and advice on careers through individual and group interviews. All students undertake a very well organised and valuable two weeks work experience in the local community in Year 10. The school has yet to develop a careers library and resource base that meets students needs although it is at an advanced planning stage.

40. Provision for students' personal development including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Since the previous inspection opportunities for students to develop spiritually have improved and are now satisfactory. Although the legal requirement to hold a daily Act of Collective Worship is still not being fully met, in assemblies students have opportunities for reflection on their own values and beliefs as well as increasing their awareness of the values and beliefs of others. Although there is no Thought for the Day or Week to help form tutors in registration time, many examples of students gaining an insight into the constraints some people have in living their lives were seen. For example, in one Year 9 registration class students learned about the drought and famine in some African countries and reflected on the contrast with the availability of food and medicine in their own lives. Several subjects make a valuable contribution to developing students' sensitivity to the feelings and emotions of themselves and others. In religious education, for example, students consider life's fundamental questions including concepts such as suffering and tolerance. In music, students are encouraged to appreciate different moods and styles of music and are beginning to develop an understanding of the emotional effects music can have. However, there is no whole-school plan to co-ordinate the contributions subjects make to students' spiritual development.

41. Provision for moral development is very good. The school provides a clear moral code as a basis for behaviour which it promotes consistently through all aspects of the school, for example, in physical education where students are taught to respect the rules of

competitions and accept the decisions of umpires and referees. There is a behaviour code in every classroom. Respect and tolerance for others are constantly reinforced by teachers, both in and out of the classroom. Students are encouraged to take a stance and debate whether actions are right or wrong. In PSHE, for example, students learn about aspects of the criminal justice system and debate the role of criminal law in society. Year 11 students have participated in a Young Peoples' Parliament initiative. There are a huge number of awards for students across most areas of school life, rewarding students for attendance, effort, good behaviour, achievement and their positive contributions to the work of the school. The school's values are reinforced through the positive displays in corridors and classrooms which give examples of students' successes and encourage students to believe that they can succeed.

42. Students' social development is excellent. Students are encouraged to exercise leadership, take responsibility, show initiative and develop an understanding of living in a community in a wide variety of ways such as involvement in the school council, prefectorial system, peer tutor scheme or as monitors or librarians. They participate in the life of the local community through involvement in the Hamstead Housebound Project and working in local primary schools. Through social skills days, industry days and business partnerships they learn to work successfully as members of a team and are introduced to the world of work and the wider community. The Year 7 residential helps students learn that the group ethic is of greater value than the "Me First" ethos. Through student questionnaires the school monitors the success of what it provides. Extra-curricular opportunities for students to work and play together are very good and students learn to appreciate the enormous amount of time that teachers are prepared to give outside of normal lesson times. In most lessons there are good opportunities for students to develop social skills through group work, where they learn essential skills of cooperation and collaboration.

43. Provision for students' cultural development is very good and is enhanced by the Artsite facility. In a number of subjects students are given the opportunity to study their own cultural inheritance and to learn about other cultural traditions. For example, in food technology students learn about the different foods of world cultures and the importance of these, for example, to Jews and Muslims. In textiles they are influenced by different world cultures in their design of garments. In religious education lessons students develop an appreciation of religious beliefs and values of cultures other than their own, such as Hindu culture and Muslim culture. Students have a very positive approach to artistic and cultural enterprises. There are regular trips to local theatres and museums and students have worked with local actors and artists. There are residential visits to France and Spain and links with the University of the First Age. Through posters and displays the school reinforces its cultural values of diversity and equality. Students are very well prepared for life in a culturally diverse society.

44. The school makes good provision for students with special needs and for those for whom English is an additional language.

45. Good provision is made for students with special needs. Withdrawal to improve basic skills of literacy and numeracy by working in very small groups or using a computerised system is effective and is well organised so that students' progress in subjects from which they are withdrawn is not unnecessarily disrupted. The opportunities to learn of those with the most severe problems are increased by the good quality of help provided by the learning support assistants. A range of additional support is provided by opportunities to receive additional help outside normal lesson times. In Years 10 and 11, students are able to take a reduced number of subjects to GCSE together with courses to assist their personal development and to experience work related courses provided at a local college.

46. The school ensures that all its students including those with special needs, those with English as an additional language and members of other groups who could be disadvantaged are so well supported that they have equal access to the opportunities it offers.

47. The school makes additional provision for 225 students for whom English is an additional language. These include 3 who arrived from abroad speaking very little or no English and students with very low test scores and from homes where there are few opportunities to use English although almost all were born in this country. Methods of supporting these students are very similar to those for students with other forms of special needs. Provision is good and students make good progress so that they achieve standards that are good and sometimes are very good.

48. Overall the contribution of the community to students learning is very good. The school has an extremely effective partnership with the community and local businesses. It is well exemplified in the range of "Artsite" activities that occur on a regular basis and the range of summer schools offered. Links with local industry include the EDS/Rolls Royce support on Industry Day, work experience placements, key skills support in Year 9 and the Education and Business Partnership help to enrich the curriculum offered. Members of local business and the community and voluntary groups act as mentors for a number of students within the school and generally provide helpful and valued support. The University of the First Age promotes learning through study support and enrichment activities using multiple intelligences and accelerated learning techniques and the annual social skills days enhance important study skills very well. The school has also developed very good links with a range of ethnic groups within the community, the local ward committee, local churches, the Young Peoples Parliament and Millennium Point.

49. All students receive very good opportunities to benefit from the school's provision for their education and personal development. An assistant head teacher is delegated by the headteacher to oversee this aspect of school life. There are regular meetings with senior staff with key responsibilities in this area, the assistant head (Pastoral), the assistant head (Inclusion), the special educational needs coordinator and the student support coordinator. They monitor students who, for various reasons, are not well integrated in the school so that support can be offered. These senior staff and others work with a number of support agencies, including the school nurse and ethnic minority organisations, to include all students in curricular and extra-curricular activities. The assistant head teachers have an excellent overview of equal opportunities. This extends to planning for the integration of a school for visually impaired students within the school buildings and sharing its facilities. Very thorough analysis of attainment data is used to monitor the performance of different groups according to gender and ethnicity. Senior teachers use this data to support groups who are underachieving. Teachers are alert to changes in language and gestures that may cause offence, especially between different groups of students, and successfully diffuse difficulties by discussion. Inspectors were impressed by the overall excellent relationships of the students. The school believes it could do more to meet with parents of students who are not benefiting fully from its provision. In a school with a complex mix of student backgrounds the school does well to maintain a balanced representation from students. It is conscious of its need to do so.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

50. Since the last inspection, the school has strengthened the provision that it makes for students' care and welfare and this is now very good. Overall, the school provides students with good quality educational and personal support and guidance. Staff know all students very well. There is a supportive and caring atmosphere in which students from all

backgrounds are valued equally and in which students and staff get on very well with each other. This helps students to feel safe and secure and has a good impact on their learning and personal development.

51. The school has very good procedures for ensuring the care and welfare of all groups of students, including any who are in public care. There is good awareness of child protection procedures and staff follow the guidelines correctly when reporting concerns. The school has very good links with a range of outside support agencies and uses these effectively to provide support for students and families who are experiencing difficulties. The home-school liaison worker and learning mentors are having a very good impact on the development of positive links and support for students and their carers.

52. Within its current responsibilities, the school makes good provision for health and safety. It has been under some duress during the building works and has had to regularly review and update policies and procedures to ensure the safety and security of students and staff. There are very good arrangements for the care and support of students who are taken ill at school, including very good first aid, medical care and support from the school nurse.

53. The school has developed good systematic procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance and has very good support from the educational social worker when working with students who have significantly low attendance patterns. While attendance patterns are currently just below average, the school has identified an increasing improvement as a result of its more stringent procedures to follow up absence; for example, a policy of first day calling has given parents a clear message that the school places importance on regular attendance.

54. There are good procedures for monitoring and promoting students' behaviour and for dealing with any anti-social behaviour, such as bullying. Rules are clearly stated and reinforced consistently by staff. Students say that this discipline has had a very good impact and that behaviour has improved. Staff set high expectations that students will be in clean, tidy uniform and be properly equipped for lessons and activities. This gives a clear, business-like message to students to which they respond well. There are good procedures for supporting students with significant behaviour problems. Mentoring programmes and regular reviews are having a good impact on reducing the numbers of incidents and supporting those students who have been re-integrated following exclusion.

55. The school has good procedures for monitoring and promoting students' personal development. There is a strong system of pastoral support which ensures that all students' progress and development is monitored from form and year group tutors through to senior teachers responsible for students' welfare. Morning tutorials are mostly used well to form positive relationships with students, discuss their achievements and targets and whole school issues such as bullying. The use of end of afternoon tutorial time, however, is less consistent. In the best examples, tutors review the positive aspects of the day, reinforce expectations for behaviour and ensure that students are clear about homework. Others, however, are used solely for marking registers and there is little positive interaction. There are good systems of reward and commendation for achievement and improvement in attendance, behaviour and work which are highly valued by students and which encourage them to make improvement. The school has made significant investment in systems for peer support, additional study support programmes, clubs and activities to promote social skills and widen students' experiences. These are helping students to gain in independence, confidence and maturity.

56. The monitoring of students' academic performance is satisfactory. This reflects a marked improvement upon the position at the time of the last inspection. The good procedures now in place have, however, been recently introduced and so have not yet had time to impact upon the students' performance. Departments now have and use a common system for marking the students' work. Most departments make at least satisfactory use of data arising from national curriculum test results for eleven year olds and from standardised test scores. Students' work is, in general, well marked and the use of self evaluation sheets is particularly effective in music and English. In these subjects particularly, students are very well aware of the level at which they are working. Subject departments make satisfactory use of the information at their disposal to guide curriculum planning and to allocate students into teaching groups appropriate to their ability.

57. Students with special needs are fully integrated into the life of the school and are valued equally with all other students. The school has made good progress towards implementing the recommendations and requirements of the new Code of Practice for the identification and assessment of students with special needs.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

58. The school continues to develop its good links with parents in order to involve them more fully in their children's learning. Many parents respond well to this although there are some who are not as involved in their children's education and school life as they might be. The school's image in the community is not viewed as favourably as it deserves to be and needs to be marketed more effectively.

59. The small minority of parents who gave their views to the inspection team were mostly positive about the school. They are pleased with the school's expectations of their children and feel that, as a result, their children make good progress. A minority have concerns about students' behaviour, the way in which the school works closely with them and keeps them informed about their children's progress and the amount of homework that their children receive. Some say that the long-term building works have affected their children's well being.

60. Inspectors agree with parents positive views of the school but feel that the school does work closely with parents. It provides good quality information through reports and meetings and is developing a good range of opportunities for parents to come into school more often and to learn about the curriculum. Inspectors find that students' behaviour is well managed and has shown recent improvement. They acknowledge, as does the school, that the difficulties caused by building works has had a negative impact on students' behaviour, attendance and welfare but that these are now improving as the school settles down. The homework provided is satisfactory and is being further developed to more effectively support students' learning at home. Inspectors find that there is an excellent range of extra-curricular activities even though some parents do not think that this is the case.

61. The school provides parents with a good range of information and encourages them to discuss their children's progress at regular intervals. It has put in place good systems for informing parents about students' progress through interim reports, target-setting meetings and parents' evenings. These meetings are well attended by parents. End-of-year reports give parents good information about students' progress and help them to understand the levels at which their children are working and the predictions for GCSE grades. Newsletters are well presented and inform parents about the school's organisation and activities. The governing body's annual report to parents gives detailed information about the development of the school. The school is aware that the current prospectus does not give parents

sufficient information about the provision for students with special educational needs and is updating it to ensure it meets statutory requirements.

62. Parents make a sound contribution to their children's learning at school and home. Many sign homework planners as an indication that they are monitoring their children's work, although not all take this opportunity; the school has identified this as an area for further development. Good emphasis is placed on developing communication and support for parents and carers through the work of the home-school liaison worker and the learning mentors. There are good opportunities for parents to support events such as plays, concerts and sports matches and these are well attended. The school has begun to take parents' views into account and acts positively on the results of parental questionnaires. Parent governors play an active role on the governing body and provide a good link between home and school. The school recognises the need to involve parents more fully in the curriculum and is developing curriculum workshops for parents to help them understand how their children are taught and the opportunities that are available. Although few parents are actively involved in the curriculum, the school is developing more opportunities for them to support students' learning at school; for example through involvement in an orchestra as part of the Artsite activities.

63. The school ensures that parents know what extra provisions are provided for their children. Parents are invited to participate in reviews of progress and, where appropriate, are offered advice on how they may help their children.

64. The school has very effective working relationships with a wide range of professional support agencies including LEA advisory staff, educational psychologists and the Connexions service.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

65. Inspirational, excellent and creative describes the relatively new headteacher's leadership and management of the school. She has a very exciting vision which she pursues very effectively to bring about a very clear direction, which is understood by, not only, her leadership team but by all staff and students. The principle focus is on teaching and learning; there is no tolerance of poor teaching and when and where necessary staff are well supported. Such leadership is very effective.

66. The two deputies offer constancy, hard work, stability and are very good role models. Four assistant heads are conscientious in their roles and are very supportive. They enable the headteacher to delegate important responsibilities in the knowledge that the tasks will be carried out properly. Middle managers are very effective in their posts and are moving the school forward very quickly by raising standards, both academic and attitudinal.

67. The governing body has dedicated members, who have considerable expertise, particularly within the fields of education and finance. It is well led and the group knows the strengths and weaknesses of the school. It fulfils its statutory duties in the main but there are still some breeches in statutory requirements within ICT in Years 10 and 11.

68. Since the time of the last report, the organisation of responsibilities for special educational needs has been clarified and strengthened. Leadership and management are now good. The quality of students' individual education plans, criticised in the last report, now has some significant strengths. The plans inform teachers of each student's needs. They suggest strategies for improvement and indicate relevant targets to be worked towards. The quality of target-setting is very good. Class teachers, however, are unsure of how they are expected to help students achieve their targets. As recommended by the new

Code of Practice, the school aims to reduce the intervals between reviews of the progress and needs of each student. It recognises that the monitoring of progress towards the attainment of short- term targets will require increased involvement of more staff.

69. The school is committed to equality of opportunity. This is evident in the outstanding way that students, teachers and senior staff relate and the racial harmony that exists within a school that is truly multicultural.

70. All share a commitment to improvement. Loyalty is a strength and with this comes commitment, conscientiousness and improving standards.

71. Appropriate targets have been set for 2002. They are realistic but not especially challenging. The disruption with accommodation has been so severe and although improved is not over yet. Consequently senior managers have erred on the side of caution. It is optimistic, but not impossible, that 2002 results for five A* to C grades may increase twofold on those for 2001.

72. Financial control is very good. The deputy head, who oversees the budget, has very effective systems in place and is ably supported by the school's bursar, who has grown into the post and is well acquainted with the financial needs of the school. Both are competent with the required use of the ICT involved in day to day and year on year financial management. The school uses grants for their intended and specific purpose. Clear records are kept of such expenditures. The most recent audit occurred in 2001. Issues raised have been, in the main, dealt with effectively.

73. Departmental capitation (70 per cent of allocation) is distributed equitably. This is ensured by use of a carefully designed formulae. Other monies (30 per cent of allocation) are available using a bidding process. All areas are allowed to bid but are only successful if the money is available and if the development is linked tightly to the school development plan.

74. The governing body operates with a financial and general purposes subcommittee. This meets on a regular basis when it receives detailed financial reports. On this committee, there is a great deal of financial expertise.

75. Unlike most schools, Perry Beeches has been involved in a rebuild under Public Private Partnership (PPP) funding. Although disruption has been the main negative, the benefits to the school are proving to be enormous. However, these have not been without cost to the school budget in terms of increased maintenance costs. It is of some concern that the Local Education Authority's budget retention for expected maintenance costs appear to have risen nearly twofold for the coming year and this has meant that, instead of being in a strong financial position, in new well-equipped buildings, the school's budget is extremely tight. This blow is softened, to some extent, by the contractual obligations of the main parties involved, to leave the building in an as new condition, which includes replacing carpets that have been damaged during building and internal work and also the replacement of much of the furniture, which is, at best, unfit for purpose and, at worst, totally inappropriate for all but the most gentle, inactive, small student. In order that the school has the best possible start in its new premises, it is inappropriate to allow it to be so financially constrained as to inhibit the educational developments necessary to enable real progress.

76. The school is vigilant in seeking best value and has taken advice from the Schools' Audit Commission. It uses Corporate Procurement Services to advantage, for example, when purchasing audio-visual equipment.

77. The school's accommodation is now good. Since the last inspection, the school has undergone an extensive re-building programme. This is finally reaching completion after a long period of considerable disturbance, discomfort and difficulty for both staff and students. The school now provides bright and spacious accommodation which benefits many areas of the curriculum and which is having a very positive impact on students' attitudes and behaviour and on staff morale. There are good specialist areas for physical education, science and ICT. Classrooms are of a good size for teaching all curriculum subjects. Internal areas are well laid out and provide additional spaces for performances and meetings. Good quality displays of students' work in classrooms and public areas considerably enhance the school and make it welcoming to students and visitors. Apart from some snagging problems, the accommodation is in very good condition. The very good appearance is marred, however, because carpets are subject to heavy soiling when people unavoidably tread in oil and mud from the dirty building site outside.

78. Some areas of the school are still to be developed. The learning resource centre has only recently opened to students and, although accessible to students, is not yet fully in use to support students' independent learning skills. Students have not had access to specialist technology facilities for some time and, at the time of the inspection, these were still to be finished. This has had a negative impact on students' learning in design and technology. Some classrooms are still housed in temporary accommodation and the school continues to suffer from disruption as a result of the building works. Planned developments for the outside area, such as the all-weather playing surfaces and separate playgrounds have still to take place. This is currently restricting teaching of physical education and students' recreational facilities.

79. Although the school has experienced difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff in recent years, particularly in English, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages and design and technology, these problems have been resolved for all subjects at present except for design and technology and modern foreign languages. The school will be fully staffed for next term except for a teacher to take responsibility for food and child development. Overall the provision of qualified staff is satisfactory. The induction of staff new to the school is good. Regular induction seminars are timetabled for new staff every fortnight after school and a mentor is employed specifically to support teachers in training one afternoon per week for general issues. Teachers in training and newly qualified teachers also receive support from their subject mentors. The monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching is very good and is carried out within a clear management framework. A very effective system of performance management compliments the school's emphasis on developing and maintaining high standards of teaching. Staff development strongly supports the school development plan in raising standards and recent recognition as an Investor in People acknowledges that managers are supportive of staff development.

80. Overall resources are unsatisfactory. The extensive building programme has drawn money away from the resources budget and subject capitation has been restricted. The student to computer ratio is below average at 9.7:1 though the number of computers in school has increased over recent years from a low base. There are now two suites of 25 new computers but subjects find these difficult to access since they are almost fully booked for discrete ICT lessons. The older computers have been distributed to subject departments but there are shortages in some areas including geography and art where there are insufficient computers to effectively teach and develop skills. The school has a small number of lap-top computers that are loaned to students. More resources are needed for music to deliver the technology strand of the music National Curriculum and to support the development of composing skills across the age range. The lack of these resources is adversely affecting standards in music. Although opportunities for using ICT are listed in the scheme of work for modern foreign languages, access to the computers is unsatisfactory.

There is a need for more subject specific software in modern foreign languages, history and art. The new library and resource centre is currently under-stocked having recently cleared out a large number of out of date books and is identified as a key area for development. Within departments resources are good in the core subjects and physical education, unsatisfactory in ICT, modern foreign languages and music, and satisfactory elsewhere. There are shortages of text and reference books in English, science, art, geography and modern foreign languages. Resources for students with special educational needs include book boxes to support the paired reading scheme and the Success maker programme. The school is creative in accessing resources from other providers including the City Learning Centre and sharing resources with a local college.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

81. In order to improve further the standards achieved by students, governors, the headteacher and staff should seek to:

- 1 Improve attainment across the school by:
 - raising standards of numeracy for all students (Paragraph 8)
 - improving standards of information and communication technology for all students (Paragraph 11)
 - building on the good practice of assessment evident in English to ensure that all students know what they need to do to make progress (Paragraph 56)
 - raising standards of literacy by further implementing the good strategies already underway (Paragraph 91)
 - focussing on the achievements of White and African Caribbean boys (Paragraph 4)
- 2 Improve attendance by:
 - being vigilant in the pursuit of unauthorised absence (Paragraph 17)
 - pursuing strategies to ensure that students travelling to school by bus are able to get to school punctually (Paragraph 17)
 - exploring strategies to welcome students who are encountering problems of split loyalty either from home or with their peers (Paragraph 53)
 - exploring electronic registration systems and implementing one that meets the needs of the school (Paragraph 53)
- 3 Improve standards in information and communication technology by:
 - auditing existing provision (Paragraph 163)
 - mapping the use of ICT across the subjects so that each area at least consolidates work learnt in specific ICT lessons (Paragraph 163)
 - ensuring that National Curriculum requirements for ICT are met for each subject in which it is specified (Paragraph 163)
 - provide a whole school programme for ICT (Paragraph 163)
- 4 Improve provision for students with special educational needs by ensuring that all staff understand how they should help students to achieve targets included in their individual education plans (Paragraph 68)
- 5 Take steps to market the school by:
 - ensuring that the local community is aware of the improved accommodation and resources (Paragraphs 77, 78)
 - ensuring that the very good relationships and racial harmony that exists in the school are understood by the local community (Paragraph 16)
 - ensuring that the many improvements in standards in lessons and in extra curricular activities are made known to the local community (Paragraphs 2, 3 and 38)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	121
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	78

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	3	29	53	33	3	0	0
Percentage	2	24	44	28	2	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. [When the total number is substantially less than 100, add] Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than one [two, three, etc] percentage point[s]. [Where the total is close to or greater than 100, use only the first sentence.]

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of students on the school's roll	826
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	236

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	20
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	202

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	235

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	18
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	54

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	10.2
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	2.9
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	81	83	164

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	24	40	31
	Girls	47	30	34
	Total	71	70	65
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	43 (70)	43 (49)	40 (44)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	16 (23)	21 (23)	14 (11)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	44	42	13
	Girls	58	33	21
	Total	102	75	34
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	62 (55)	45 (55)	21 (45)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	16 (21)	20 (28)	1 (12)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001	86	70	156

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	11	73	78
	Girls	13	63	68
	Total	24	136	146
Percentage of students achieving The standard specified	School	15 (17)	87 (90)	94 (94)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	27.2
	National	39.0

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and The percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	0	n/a
	National	n/a	n/a

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	131
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	3
Indian	136
Pakistani	57
Bangladeshi	23
Chinese	3
White	387
Any other minority ethnic group	92

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	103	3
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian	18	
Pakistani	9	1
Bangladeshi	1	
Chinese		
White	98	5
Other minority ethnic groups	29	2

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	51.2
Number of students per qualified teacher	16.3

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	20
Total aggregate hours worked per week	571

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	65.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.1
Key Stage 4	22.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001
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	£
Total income	2,473,662
Total expenditure	2,441,678
Expenditure per student	2,900
Balance brought forward from previous year	39,472
Balance carried forward to next year	91,926

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	28
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	29

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	5.2
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	5.2
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

826

Number of questionnaires returned

38

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	40	47	5	3	5
My child is making good progress in school.	45	50	5	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	37	39	16	3	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	45	24	5	2
The teaching is good.	13	55	21	0	11
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	29	39	24	5	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	32	40	18	8	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	55	37	5	3	0
The school works closely with parents.	24	42	21	11	2
The school is well led and managed.	24	50	13	8	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	34	45	13	3	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	24	39	21	8	8

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

ENGLISH

82. Overall, the quality of provision in English is **good**.

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- There are good relationships between students and teachers.
- Standards of attainment are improving.
- Leadership and management of the department are good.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of attainment, particularly of boys, are below average.
- Levels of literacy are below average.

83. Attainment in national tests and examinations for students aged 14 and 16 in 2001 was adversely affected by severe staffing problems which disrupted the learning of many students. The attainment of students aged 14 was well below the national average and below the average of similar schools. The attainment of boys was below that of girls by a wider margin than is found nationally. The trend of improvement in the school's results in recent years broadly matches the national trend but the gap between the two has not narrowed. Results in English at GCSE were well below average for the proportion gaining grades A*-C. The results of girls were better than those of boys. Most students gained better results in English and also in English literature than they did in other subjects in which they were examined. Results in English literature were well below the national average. A class of students in Year 10, who took GCSE early, gained a better proportion of grades A*-C in English literature than the national figure for students in Year 11.

84. Evidence of the inspection confirms that the attainment of students aged 14 is below average but has improved from the time of their entry to the school. Progress is particularly evident in the work of students who entered the school with limited experience of English, although very few were at the beginner stage. Good progress is made by these students and by those with special needs within lessons and when withdrawn for help with basic skills.

85. Students listen attentively to teachers and usually with quick understanding. When working in pairs and small groups they listen to each other. In full class discussions some students speak too quietly and cannot be heard by others. Speaking, however, is usually clear and confident and is the means by which most pupils develop their language skills and show how much they know and understand. The higher attainers write effectively, using language appropriately for different purposes. They use wide vocabularies, a good range of sentence patterns and achieve high levels of accuracy. The majority write in recognisable sentences and paragraphs. They communicate the main sense and many show that they know how to make their work interesting to the reader. Some are ambitious in their choice of words but most lack the vocabulary needed to express their ideas and opinions clearly. The quality of writing, including that of some otherwise capable students, is reduced by the frequency of errors in spelling words in everyday use. Many make mistakes of elementary grammar such as faulty agreement between subject and verb, the inappropriate use of tenses, and in the use of full stops and capital letters. The limited stock of books in the new library limits opportunities to extend reading skills. Most students at all levels of attainment

welcome opportunities to read aloud and do so with good levels of accuracy. Reading with understanding develops well from the time of entry to the school through the use of techniques such as highlighting and annotation. A Year 9 class worked in groups with shrewd perception and confidence in analysing extracts from 'Great Expectations.' However, the majority of students continue to rely upon teachers' guidance to gain adequate levels of understanding. Students enjoy reading and talking about literature and other forms of writing and this contributes to their progress.

86. Attainment in Years 10 and 11 is closer to, but still below, average. Students work well in groups and as full classes. Because relationships with teachers and classmates are positive, they are confident in suggesting answers and expressing opinions, knowing that their contributions will be valued. A group of Year 11 students interviewed after taking an examination showed similarly high levels of fluency and clarity of expression as had been noted in their writing. Reading with understanding is improved but texts are more challenging and many students continue to depend upon teachers for help with understanding and, in the case of lower attainers, for frequent reassurance and approval of their work. The quality of writing has generally improved. The writing of highly talented students, including some published pieces, is often ambitious, mature and shows sophistication in the choice of words and expertise in using them to very good effect. More students now understand how to recognise what a task requires of them and can organise relevant material to satisfactory effect. Many continue to depend upon advice on selection and organisation of material usually because they lack confidence or because of insecurities in their learning which developed in earlier years. The continuing frequency of the same kind of errors as noted in the work of younger students reduces the effectiveness of the writing of many students so that they cannot demonstrate clearly and accurately how much they know and understand.

87. Achievement is good. Pupils make good progress by comparison with earlier learning because they are well motivated and well behaved. Examples of very good progress based upon very positive attitudes to work were noted in each year group and included a class of high attainers in Year 10 discussing aspects of 'Of Mice and Men' and a small group in Year 7 working on basic spelling. Only rarely does the misbehaviour of a few affect progress by reducing the quality of teaching and learning. Teaching rooms are pleasant and, together with attractive displays including samples of students' writing, have a positive effect upon learning. Increasingly, students are helped by teachers to understand their strengths and what they need to do to improve. This has a positive effect upon achievement. It is evident in the usually good quality of marking of students' work and was also seen in a Year 7 lesson where students practised 'turning a level 3 sentence into a level 4 sentence'. A Year 8 class spent part of a lesson setting targets for themselves to move from their identified level of attainment towards the next level. The extra provisions made for some students for whom English is an additional language and for all those with special needs assist progress. These include the effective involvement of specialists and learning support assistants. The progress of all students, including the highest attainers, is assisted by the additional provision of opportunities to develop their skills outside lessons including classes which meet on Saturdays and during holiday times.

88. The quality of teaching and learning is good. It is sometimes very good, occasionally excellent, and never less than satisfactory. Lessons are well planned so that they are linked to previous and future work and include a variety of activities. These features help pupils to understand the relevance of what they are doing and help them maintain their concentration. Teachers have high expectations of students' effort, behaviour and achievement. Teachers expect pupils to think for themselves and express their own ideas so that they are fully engaged in their learning. Most are skilful in using questions not only to confirm but also to extend students' understanding. This leads students to realise that their opinions and

judgements need to be supported by reasons and evidence. Although girls heavily outnumber boys in the highest attaining classes in Years 10 and 11, the balance of boys and girls is much more even in the earlier years. Factors contributing to the improvement in the learning of boys in particular are the use of seating plans, changes to teaching and learning strategies and the development of structured schemes of work. Teaching is occasionally less effective when teachers attempt too much because they have not clearly identified the main learning targets for their lessons. In large classes especially of lower attainers, teachers sometimes are unable to provide sufficient help for individuals without loss of pace. Frequent absence affects the achievement of a significant minority. Although teachers know the learning difficulties of students with special needs, they do not fully understand how they might help them achieve the targets set for them in their individual education plans.

89. After a period of severe disruption, the department now has good leadership and management and is well placed to raise levels of attainment. The support and consultative group involving expertise from outside the school as well as within succeeded in reducing the consequences for students and have contributed to the promise of a better future. The acting head of department has produced clear and effective guidelines for colleagues and good schemes of work for students aged 11 to 14. He has a strong commitment to the raising of standards, is very supportive of colleagues and they respond well to his leadership. Increased and necessary delegation of responsibilities is planned for next year. The curriculum has a good balance of activities to develop students' skills including the use of drama techniques and consideration of features of the media.

90. There has been good improvement since the time of the previous report. The department has clear documentation helpful to its members and successful schemes of work are being introduced. Teaching and learning are better and no unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Students are now expected to contribute to their learning rather than simply listen to teachers. Assessment is emerging as a strength involving both teachers and students. Access to computers has been improved but the provision of planned opportunities for students to develop skills such as desk top publishing needs to be extended. The quality and range of books in the library are unsatisfactory as they were at the time of the last inspection but there is a clear intention to fully equip the newly opened resource centre. Efforts are being made to improve the performance of boys at GCSE and also in earlier years and evidence of some success is noted in this report.

91. The development of literacy skills in other subjects is less effective although there are several significant strengths. There is a lack of an implemented and shared understanding of how improvement can be consistently encouraged. Almost all departments ensure that pupils understand, use and correctly spell words needed for the work they do. Reading with understanding is encouraged by using strategies such as note-making, highlighting and techniques of diagrammatic representation in history and religious studies. Opportunities for encouraging pupils to formulate and express opinions, criticised as too few in the previous report, are now provided in art, history, mathematics, religious studies and science but often pupils are required to provide only short answers to teachers' questions. Writing at length with appropriate guidance on selection of content and organisation of material was noted in design technology, history where there is some good creative writing, religious studies and science.

DRAMA

92. Drama is only taught in Years 7 to 9 at present. Techniques of drama are used by teachers of other subjects, especially English, to explore situations and relationships in the work they are doing. The appointment of a drama specialist now enables all students to

learn the essential skills of the subject. Drama is to be introduced as a subject at GCSE level at the start of next school year.

93. In the small sample of lessons observed, attainment matched expectation for students' ages and experience. Students work together positively in groups and have good understanding of basic skills of performance. They are learning to evaluate their work and that of others and to make judgements about how performances can be improved. Students enjoy their work and make good progress.

94. The quality of teaching is good and sometimes is very good. The teacher has clearly identified learning aims for students and conducts lessons at a brisk pace to achieve them. Students learn well because they respond positively to their teacher's high expectations of their effort, behaviour and achievement.

MATHEMATICS

95. Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **good**

Strengths

- Teaching is now good.
- The department now has a full complement of teachers and is very well led.
- Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of students' attainment are below the national average.
- Students are not yet sufficiently involved in the assessment of their own work.

96. The current academic year is the first for some considerable time in which the department has been fully staffed. There has been a shortfall of the equivalent of at least two full time teachers for each of the previous years 1999 to 2000 and 2000 to 2001. This has inevitably impacted adversely on standards so that the substantial improvements that have taken place in organisation and teaching during the last year have not had the opportunity as yet to be reflected in the students' examination results.

97. Results in the National Curriculum tests for fourteen year olds in the year 2001 were well below both national average and those obtained by students from similar schools. Over time results have also been well below showing improvement below the national trend. Girls achieved less well than boys in the years 2000 and 2001 but performed better previously. There are no significant differences in performance for students from the different parts of the schools' culturally diverse community.

98. Up to the age of 14, students' mathematical skills show satisfactory improvement. Students' attainment upon entry to the school is well below average. At the end of Year 9, it is below average. Higher attaining students in Year 9 can find the n th term of a sequence using first differences but not necessarily second differences. Middle attainers sometimes choose inappropriate scales for axes when drawing graphs. Lower attaining students often fail to see the relationship between simple decimal and vulgar fractions such as three quarters and 0.75. Numerical work is below average but improving with greater emphasis on number stemming from the application of the national strategy for numeracy.

99. GCSE results in 2001 were well below those nationally and for similar schools. Results between A* and C showed below average improvement for the students from their results in national tests two years earlier. Boys performed markedly less well than girls in the examination so that mathematics overall compares unfavourably with some other

subjects in the school. Over recent years improvement in examination results in GCSE has been lower than that seen nationally.

100. Year 11 students were studying at home immediately prior to the 2002 GCSE examinations during the time of this inspection so that lesson observation was restricted to those in Year 10. Nevertheless, typical examples of work and assessment records were available for all students. From this it could be seen that the standard of work for students aged between fourteen and sixteen is well below that attained nationally. Some three quarters of students in the highest ability set have already obtained the highest grades of A*, A, B or C at GCSE at the end of Year 10. These are on course to add a GCSE in statistics at a higher grade to their qualifications. Overall, including the results already obtained by these students about one in four of the candidates for GCSE are at a standard equivalent to a grade C or higher. This compares favourably with a figure of one in five for previous years. Progress over the last year has been good at all levels but because of difficulties previously referred to the students' achievement over a longer period of time is satisfactory at best.

101. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Good support from keen and well qualified learning support assistants contributes to the progress that is made. The school has students from a wide range of cultural and religious backgrounds. All make similar progress to their peers. No students were seen for whom lack of language skills was a significant barrier to progress.

102. Improvement since the last inspection, most particularly over the last year, in the mathematics department has been good. All areas of concern have been addressed and improvements made. Teaching is much improved. The lack of schemes of work has now been remedied. The joint approach to planning adopted by the department ensures that there is a focus on improving teaching and learning. Numeracy standards are still too low but the head of department has been established as coordinator for numeracy across the curriculum and has development plans in place. The resources available to the teachers are much better.

103. The teaching observed during the inspection was good in all years. Teachers know their subject well and use that knowledge to effect in well organised lessons in which the students are well managed so that they work hard and effectively. In the best lessons seen the enthusiasm of the teachers was a feature, as were the use of humour and the very good relationships that exist between teacher and students. In an excellent lesson for a Year 10 class students began with a quick mind stretching exercise of three puzzles which made them think and prepared them to work. They then recalled key vocabulary from previous lessons. The teacher referred to important new words such as credit, withdrawal and overdraft. During the rest of the lesson they learned how to use the mathematics related to positive and negative numbers to keep a check on how much money they would have in a bank account. The teacher displayed excellent knowledge of what the students could do and what they would find difficult and had organised work accordingly to suit the students' needs. He was well supported by a teaching assistant who helped the students through any difficulties they encountered. Because the teacher was very well organised with the outline of the lesson already on the board for the students to see and because the students knew exactly what they were to do and why, they made excellent progress. The amount that they had learned and understood was clear from the level of understanding showed in the summary discussion at the end of the lesson. Students demonstrated, for example, a clear understanding of "credit", "balance" and that "difference" means "you have to subtract".

104. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen but satisfactory lessons would have been made better if more thought had been given to what the students could already do, and what they

might find difficult or too easy. In these lessons opportunities for the students to reflect on their work and, where appropriate, discuss their thoughts were less evident. Levels of expectation, in other respects, were almost universally good or better. Most teachers plan lessons effectively and manage the students well so that no time is wasted. Almost all lessons begin with a short related activity that enables the students to settle quickly into their work. The plenary sessions at the end of lessons were effective in some cases but less so in others, particularly where timing of the lesson has gone somewhat adrift.

105. The department recognises the need to encourage students to reflect on their mathematics and play a bigger part in setting their own targets for improvement. Good initiatives, already in place, include the arrangements for target setting for Year 11 students for instance. As yet it is, however, still not made clear enough to students what, in simple terms, they can do to improve their performance. Some students have not yet accepted this responsibility. This is reflected by their not correcting their work as the teacher goes through things they have got wrong in lessons. The use of corrections to encourage students to review and rethink areas of weakness in their understanding is underdeveloped in the department.

106. Teachers mark the students' work carefully. There is some good practice within the department in this respect. In addition to indicating whether the work is right or not some teachers comment fully on how it might be improved. Regular sharing of good practice in departmental meetings assists with maintaining these good standards. Monitoring arrangements which involve each member of the team in rotation looking at the departments work as a whole and reporting with reference to a schedule of agreed standards is a very effective instrument for improvement in this case.

107. Students' behaviour in lessons seen was good. Good and often very good behaviour and attitudes stemmed almost entirely from students responding well to good teaching. Relationships in the classroom are good both between teachers and taught and amongst the students themselves. The quality of these relationships does much to contribute to the students' progress.

108. Good curricular provision includes a successful statistics option for Year 10 students, which they take early at the end of Year 10. Extra curricular enrichment classes for GCSE students after school, on Saturday mornings and during the Easter holiday add to the opportunities available to students. The football fantasy league organised by the department is popular with students not least because their teams normally perform better than those chosen by the staff!

109. Departmental leadership is very good. The head of department is a very skilled teacher. He is extremely well thought of both by colleagues and by students. Departmental meetings focus closely on improving teaching and learning and thereby raising standards. There are effective arrangements for improving teaching performance based on regular performance review. Very good, clear, succinct departmental documentation clarifies what is required of teachers and provides useful guidance. Staffing is now very good. The teachers are well qualified and committed to improving their own performance and the department's work as a whole. Good advice and support given to the newly qualified teachers is effective in improving their performance in the classroom. Resources are good including an interactive whiteboard in one classroom and two data projectors in others.

SCIENCE

110. Overall, the quality of provision in science is **good**

Strengths:

- The teaching is good.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- There are many extra-curricular activities.

Areas for Improvement:

- Homework needs to be set on a more regular basis in both keystages.
- The development of target setting for students at end of Year 9 needs to continue.
- Investigative skills for students at end of Year 9 need to be developed in line with departmental plans.

111. At the end of Year 9, students' performance in the 2001 National Curriculum tests was well below the national average. The proportions of students who obtained level 5 and higher and level 6 and higher were both well below the national average. Girls did better than boys. In comparison with similar schools students' performance was below average. The schools performance in science was similar to that for mathematics and English. Over the last three years results have been similar and have not followed the slight improvement that has taken place nationally.

112. In 2001, the proportion of students who obtained A* to C grades in the GCSE was well below the national average and the proportion gaining A* to G grades was slightly below the national average. The schools' performance in science was slightly better than that for mathematics and below that for English. Girls did slightly better than boys and the results were not as good as those for the previous year.

113. The standard of work seen overall was better than expected and was in line with the national average. This significant improvement in standards over a short period of time has been brought about by the appointment of a very effective head of department, the establishment of a full compliment of well-qualified effective science teachers and technicians and the completion of the new premises. The highest attainers in Year 9 are able to work out the electronic configuration for atoms of the first twenty elements in the periodic table knowing their atomic numbers. Low attainers are able to describe a model of the atom in terms of neutrons, protons and electrons. Although knowledge and understanding is generally average for students at end of Year 9, students' investigative skills are less well developed. In Year 10, the highest attaining students know and understand the ideas of potential and kinetic energy and are able use the appropriate formulae to carry out energy calculations correctly. Lower attaining students are able to identify several factors that affect a chemical reaction but have difficulty in completing line graphs. Practical investigation work at the end of Year 11 is average overall with some very good examples of investigative science. Significant improvement has taken place in Year 10 over previous years. All students progress well regardless of cultural and ethnic background, including those who have special educational needs and the gifted and talented.

114. The quality of teaching seen was good overall. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection. In Years 7, 8 and 9 most of the lessons seen were good or better and a third of the lessons were very good. In Year 10, three quarters of the lessons seen were very good which indicates an improvement since the last inspection. No lessons were seen

in Year 11 due to student study leave. All the lessons seen were well planned and teachers' expectations were high, challenging students to think. The lessons were very good when they were planned to include high levels of motivation for the students. For example, in a Year 8 lesson on breathing, the teacher gave students different breathing tasks, to investigate how their rate of breathing differed before and after exercise. The students were highly motivated by this level of involvement and their thinking was very focused on breathing. Consequently, following a model lung demonstration, students developed a very clear understanding of the breathing process. In a Year 10 lesson on the dangers of smoking, the teacher organised a role-play activity that involved students at a very personal level. Part of the exercise included students having to advise a friend why they should not smoke, giving scientific reasons for their views. Students were highly involved and motivated and concentrated well on the remainder of the lesson. As a result they gained a good understanding of the dangers of smoking together with detailed knowledge and understanding of several lung diseases and their effects. Literacy is addressed well in both key stages with the spellings and meanings of key words being clearly emphasised to the students. Writing frames are used appropriately and students reading skills are developed well. The teaching of numeracy and information communication technology is satisfactory.

115. Exercise books are marked well in all years and contain good comments that help students to improve although grades are not given. Although homework is set, it lacks regularity. The monitoring of students' progress in Year 10 is good with expected grades being used to set subject specific targets. Although a start has been made on similar profiling for Years 7, 8 and 9, a working system of monitoring progress and setting targets for students is not yet in place. Students are cared for well by their teachers as individuals; they are given encouragement and are shown respect. Consequently, students show a lot of respect for their teachers; enjoy science and behave well. Teachers go out of their way to create a safe pleasant environment for their students in all respects. Teachers willingly give of their time to support the many extra-curricular activities that enable students to do well. These include revision sessions at lunchtime, after school, Saturday mornings and during holidays.

116. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The new head of department shares a vision of excellence with his colleagues and this is already beginning to raise standards. He leads a committed team of teachers and technicians who are giving of their best to ensure that students reach nearer their full potential in this subject. The department is managed very well on a day-to-day basis with clear guidelines available to staff in the departmental handbook and schemes of work. Stimulating wall displays have enhanced the newly built laboratories. Examples of good quality students' work, key words and colourful scientific posters characterise the forward thinking culture that has been established by the team.

ART AND DESIGN

117. Overall, the quality of provision in art and design is **good**

Strengths

- The very effective planning for lessons that makes full use of the time available.
- The progress made by higher attaining students in Years 10 and 11.
- The promotion of good relationships in lessons.

Areas for improvement

- Clarifying assessment levels for Years 7 to 9.
- Involving students in assessing their own attainment.
- Developing opportunities for teaching numeracy and ICT through art and design.

118. In the work seen, standards attained in art and design, by the end of Year 9, are below average. This represents good achievement from a well below average standard on entry. Over Years 7 to 9 strengths develop in a graphic style of drawing and lettering which are shown well in the Year 9 Pop Art projects. Skills in observational drawing are seen to develop steadily in the awareness of shape and inclusion of detail but there is insufficient emphasis on the qualities of line and tone. Paintings and drawings are adversely affected by the use of poor quality paper.

119. Standards attained in art and design, by the end of Year 11, are below average overall but with wide variations. This represents satisfactory achievement for the majority of students but some higher attaining students achieve very well over the GCSE course. Strengths in decoration and design are seen in the work of all students. Higher attaining students of this age make very good use of the opportunity to develop personal projects. A collaged graffiti style, working on many layers using poetry, lettering and strong imagery, is put to excellent use in addressing moral issues through personal reflection.

120. Similarly the influence of Manga and fantasy comics provokes a high standard of drawing skills among both boys and girls though these borrowed qualities are rarely transferred to their own drawing. Across the whole range there is little evidence of sustained observational work to develop observing and recording skills and build a visual language.

121. GCSE results in art and design were well below the national average in 2001 with around one out of three students gaining the higher A* to C grades compared to two out of three nationally. Within the school, however, two thirds of the students taking art and design achieved their highest GCSE grade in this subject and the average points score for the subject was the second highest in the school. Attainment in GCSE has been quite consistent over the last 5 years with a rising trend over the last 3. Predicted grades for students in 2002 suggest that the standard will be maintained or slightly improved.

122. Students' attitudes and behaviour are good overall and occasionally very good. The large majority of students work well together, regardless of gender or ethnicity, and have good relationships with their teachers and peers. They show interest in lessons and respond well to the teachers' questions, making good judgements in evaluating their own and others' work. A small minority, usually boys, do not settle well but are generally well managed by the teachers.

123. The quality of teaching and learning is good across the age range. Particular strengths show in the very good planning and organisation of lessons that allows maximum use of the relatively short time available. Lessons are well structured with good confident introductions and an effective use of plenary time to review progress. Students receive good individual support during the lessons with teachers giving particular attention to helping those with special needs. Support teachers, where they are available, make a good contribution to lessons giving specific or general support to individuals or small groups as required. In Years 7 to 9, well structured projects provide good sequences of exercises building upon students' previous experience. While this is very supportive for the high proportion of lower attaining students there are insufficient opportunities for higher attainers to work at a higher level. In Years 10 and 11 these higher attaining students make very good progress due to the smaller groups and increased opportunities for developing their own ideas. Teachers make good use of time limits to maintain a good pace of working across double periods. Literacy is taught well with an emphasis on developing students' art vocabulary. Key words are introduced and stressed throughout lessons and displays of work are used effectively to explain terms such as 'abstraction' and 'composition'. The teaching of numeracy and ICT require further development.

124. Significant improvements have been made to the content and structure of the curriculum. A broad range of two dimensional activities is offered by the department with the intention of re-introducing 3D work in the new art rooms. The curriculum is enriched by activities arranged through “Artsites” including opportunities to work with visiting artists.

125. Procedures for assessing students’ work are satisfactory overall. The marking and verbal assessments of students’ work are satisfactory and students are broadly aware of their strengths and weaknesses, but are unable to relate them to national curriculum levels. The department does not yet have a folio of assessed work to clarify and standardise levels of attainment for Years 7 to 9. Procedures for recording and reporting students’ attainment have recently been reviewed to include national curriculum levels. Assessments of older students’ work against GCSE criteria are secure.

126. Leadership and management of art and design are good. The head of department has made very good progress in reviewing, clarifying and documenting departmental policies and procedures over recent years. Good links are maintained with feeder schools through regular meetings. Targets are very well documented with progress on main issues recorded. At the time of the inspection the rooms for art were adequate but a move was imminent to new rooms providing very good accommodation. Resources are adequate though limited to basic materials and insufficient ICT equipment.

127. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Timetable changes have given better continuity and planning is improved at all levels. The management of the department has been addressed thoroughly and appropriate systems are now in place.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

128. Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Leadership and team work in the department through difficult circumstances
- Lessons are well planned
- The support of technicians

Areas for improvement

- Provision of targeted support and guidance to inform and track progress in all years
- The use of IT in design technology

129. Standards observed during the inspection in design technology in Year 11 were below average overall. This reflects the grades awarded in recent examinations for all four examination courses taught. The evidence offered by teachers’ predictions backed up by the inspector’s scrutiny of examination folders and artefacts produced by students for this year shows some improvement in grades in all subjects though this improvement will still result in below average grades. There is no discernible trend of improvement or decline in results since the last inspection. The department is inclusive in that it offers four examination courses to cater for the interests and aptitudes of the range of students. It is also planning to offer a Systems and Control examination to provide greater challenge for higher attaining students.

130. During the inspection Year 11 students were absent on study leave. The evidence of standards comes from an analysis of a large sample of their examination folders. By Year 11 students are attaining standards that are below national expectations in the range of

subjects. Overall students, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress in their courses. In the Resistant Materials course they are producing a sound range of large artefacts using wood and plastics and utilising a range of joining techniques. The folder work that records the progress of their designs into production does not feature best use of ICT neither in presentational aspects nor in its use for research. Internet searches are not sufficiently discriminating and often produce too much information much of which is redundant. Drawings used to show design ideas are often sound though students could make more use of rough sketching to design. Students have a fair knowledge of industrial production techniques such as batch production. Textiles folders are attractively presented and many make an important contribution to multi-cultural awareness such as those that feature research into Asian wedding garments. Students demonstrate a sound awareness of the characteristics of materials and they produce clear and informative plans for making. Their evaluations are often good and follow the guidelines advised by the teacher. Though there are a number of significant strengths in textiles folders such as the clear way in which candidates argue the reasons for choosing one design over another, survey questions are not well designed and little use is made of ICT to present findings. Food Technologists' folders feature good layout and general presentation, however, there is a general weakness in the analytical skills of students. Students rarely offer clear and convincing analyses of need or persuasive product evaluations. From records it is clear that students enjoy the challenge of producing a good variety of food during their course. Graphics Products students produce a good volume of work and there is evidence of some good use of annotated sketching to explore design ideas. Despite the volume of work this is rarely accompanied by a clear commentary that shows the progress of students' thinking through the design process. There is a need for teachers to intervene more and help students with developing the forms of writing needed to gain the higher marks in examinations.

131. The 2001 teacher assessments of students indicate that standards in design technology in Year 9 are below average. This reflects the situation observed in the workrooms. Year 9 students are generating a sound range of design ideas and are producing drawings that are often labelled to explore ideas. Like the older students they make little use of sketching to design. The research they conduct is often superficial and in need of further guidance from teachers. The evaluations students write vary in standard. The best follow guidelines given by teachers. In this way they cover the relevant areas for consideration. Students in Years 7 to 9 especially have suffered from the lack of specialist accommodation and teaching that has affected resistant materials and food technology in particular. However, they have sound knowledge of the important aspects of health and safety in the workroom. They have a sound understanding too of the design process and apply it with varying degrees of success in their projects.

132. Students' attitudes and behaviour are generally good for all years. Though students have suffered from the problems with accommodation that are soon to be overcome with the imminent move to the new building, they have coped well. In the cramped and poorly resourced food technology temporary classroom they work well in teams, for example, with a few doing practical work while the others take on a quality control role. In some groups where teachers do not give sufficiently clear messages about what is to be done and the time scales involved, students will produce minimal amounts of work. Where teachers are clear about these things the volume of work is good.

133. Teaching is good for students in Years 7 to 9 and students have a clear idea of what they will be doing in lessons as teachers invariably share lesson objectives with them at the start. Little time is lost for learning as teachers are well prepared and make sure that all materials and tools needed are available. This is due to the good use made by teachers of the competent and valuable technicians in the department. Students master techniques well

due to the quality of the expert demonstrations used by teachers to introduce new skills. Though there is the potential for learning to be disrupted by over-lively behaviour, teachers are firm with students and lessons are generally productive. Planning is good in all years and provides a good structure for learning. Planning has been creatively adapted so that non-specialists can teach aspects of knowledge and understanding successfully. Teachers have learnt to cope with new specialisms to make sure that students receive as good a spread of experience of the different materials areas as possible. They have been largely successful in this and folders show that the coverage of the National Curriculum Programmes of Study is satisfactory.

134. Teaching is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. It was not possible to observe Year 11 lessons due to their absence on study leave. However evidence of aspects of teaching was found through discussion with teachers and the analysis of a good sample of folders that record the progress of their work. The better teaching features clear support and guidance for all stages of students' work. Where this was not so evident, students spent too much time and effort on work that contributed little to their progress. Thus many of the surveys conducted by students in all courses were poorly thought out and yielded irrelevant information. A good number of folders featured statements of the problem and specifications for the solution that were not well expressed. The department is considering developing a system of close and regular mentoring of students in order to make sure their efforts are well directed and that progress can be clearly and usefully tracked. Specialist teachers have good subject knowledge and this informs overall planning in the department well. This can now be applied to the development of guidance booklets to make sure students receive the best support and guidance.

135. The department is well led. The school is emerging well from the difficult circumstances that it has faced. Teachers have made the most of what has been a difficult situation with some disruption caused by the loss of specialist teachers and also by the use of unsuitable temporary accommodation. There remains more work to be done to make sure that all teaching matches the best practice in the department and that more use is made of ICT. In the new accommodation the department will have access to a multimedia room housing a good number of computers.

GEOGRAPHY

136. Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teachers are committed, supportive and caring of their students.
- Relationships between students and teachers and their peers are very good.
- Accommodation is excellent and attractive wall displays, particularly of students' work, provide an effective learning environment.

Areas for Improvement

- Standards of work, including in the GCSE examinations, are not high enough.
- Fieldwork needs to be significantly developed particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- More local map work and examples, more practice in the presentation and analyses of statistical data graphically, and more challenge in written work is needed.
- Develop students recall skills and build more on students previous knowledge of topics taught with particular emphases on the visual consolidation of learning.
- Shortfalls in teaching and learning resources need to be addressed.

137. In 2001, standards were well below the national average by the end of Year 9. The achievement of students is broadly satisfactory. Despite entering the school with standards even more well below average students are learning a great deal. In some lessons, especially in Year 9, there was evidence of some students, mainly girls, making good progress. By the end of Year 9 students have a sound basic grounding in geographical skills. Most can use and interpret maps but there is little graphical presentation and analyses of statistical data evident. Students' knowledge of location is satisfactory except for low attainers where it is less secure. Students of all attainment levels have an inadequate understanding of spatial patterns but knowledge of geographical processes is good. By the end of Year 9 there is a noticeable difference between the standards of written work produced by boys and girls. There is, however, no noticeable difference in lessons in the progress in written work made by students of minority ethnic groups other than of that of gender. Students with special educational needs progress satisfactorily and there is good support by assistants. Students with English as a second language also made satisfactory progress.

138. In 2001, standards of work at the end of Year 11 were also well below the national average. However, in lessons a number of students in Year 10 produced standards of work which were much closer to the national expectation. This indicated that there are clear signs that the external examination results should improve. Achievement of most students over Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory but some students, mainly girls, are making good progress.

139. By the end of Year 11, higher attaining students are able to describe and explain a range of physical and human processes quite well. Average attaining students are able to describe the processes and understand the linkages involved satisfactorily. Lower attainers are able to describe some processes but understanding is often insecure. The best individual GCSE project work based on fieldwork is of good quality and most students produce work appropriate to their attainment levels. However, some students, mainly boys, find deadlines difficult to meet and need more rigorous and effective monitoring. Examination results do not reflect the standard of work seen in some lessons indicating that more emphasis needs to be placed on examination and revision skills earlier in the course in Year 10. The high rate of absences in Year 11 also needs to be further addressed by the school as it restricts students' progress and their performance in examinations.

140. Recent GCSE A* to C grade results have been well below the national average, as in 2001. The proportion of students attaining the highest grades is very low but this is partly accounted for by students' low attainment levels on entry to the school. Most years, girls perform far better than boys do and the difference is much greater than that nationally. There is currently no breakdown of ethnic group attainment available in the department. When compared with other GCSE subjects within the school, geography results have been close to the average. Recent GCSE A*-G results have been broadly in line with the national average.

141. Students' attitudes to learning are mostly positive and many display a real interest in their work. Most students are attentive, work conscientiously and are keen to learn. Some students, mainly girls, take pride in the presentation of work although this is an area that generally needs improvement. Students' behaviour is usually good and often very good. Staff are extremely competent in dealing with potentially difficult situations that without strong classroom management and control could be very challenging. Students form very good relationships with their teachers and trust them. Students relate well to each other when working in groups and relationships across minority ethnic groups is extremely harmonious and a real strength. Students' individual responses to questions are often good but a greater class response needs nurturing through more discussion work.

142. Teaching, all of which is undertaken by subject specialists, is overall good and there was some very good teaching observed. Teachers are committed, caring and supportive of students within their charge. Classroom management and control is usually very good and built on very good and effective relationships with students. This provides a good base for learning. Lessons are well planned and built on secure knowledge. Some lessons, although of sound quality, are too teacher led with insufficient opportunities for students to investigate and assess situations for themselves. A very good feature of every lesson was the sharing of the aims of the lesson with students at the beginning and testing their effectiveness at the end of the lesson. Best learning occurs in lessons that have a variety of practical activities that require students to involve themselves in their own learning. Similarly when visual aids such as video extracts, pictures, maps, diagrams, and graphs are used, especially when projected on to a master screen, learning is noticeably better. In a few lessons where there is good dialogue between the teacher and students that extends the students' knowledge there is a greater understanding of the topic taught. Work tasks in lessons are appropriate to the attainment levels of students. However, the written requirements are not challenging enough. In the best lessons teachers' presentations were lively, enthusiastic and interesting.

143. Fieldwork undertaken greatly enriches the curriculum and stimulates students' interest in the subject. It results in most effective learning. It is insufficient, however, in Years 7 to 9 both within and outside the local area. ICT has seen some development since the last inspection with applications linked to curriculum themes in each year of the course. Problems of access to computer facilities have restricted opportunities during the building stage of the new school. A more extensive, coherent programme of ICT skills progressively developed over Years 7 to 11 needs now to be implemented for all students.

144. Learning would be further improved if lessons were not so reliant on textbooks material and more local examples and maps used in teaching. In some lessons, learning suffers when teachers do not take sufficient time to place the lesson fully in the context of previous study and ensure that prior learning is secure. Many students experience difficulties with recalling important subject knowledge and more testing is required to develop students' thinking skills. There is scope for developing visual material in teaching and in the consolidation and re-enforcement of the main teaching points on the whiteboard. Key words, reading aloud in lessons and structured writing ensures literacy skills are appropriately developed. Numeracy skills are applied better to topics studied in Years 10 and 11 than in other years.

145. The subject is led effectively, with teaching and learning strategies appropriately developed and there is good professional direction. Day-to-day management and curriculum planning is of very good quality. The work of the department is carefully monitored through regular classroom observation and scrutiny of students' work but needs more rigour to raise standards. The assessment procedures are thorough and good. However, marking is very inconsistent across the department and is an area for improvement. Students are involved in the evaluation of their own learning and this needs to be further developed with teacher assessment to establish agreed targets. Staff work well as a team and the newly qualified teacher has been given very good support by the head of department and the school. Accommodation is excellent with subject rooms having a pleasant and welcoming ambience and some attractive wall displays of students' work. However, not all teaching accommodation is located together so that opportunities for professional dialogue are restricted and there is inefficient use of specialist resources. Learning resources are satisfactory overall. However, there are important shortfalls such as the need of a fieldwork budget, more computers, more visual resources, and a TV monitor and overhead projector as standard equipment in each of the specialist teaching rooms.

146. There has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection overall. However, more needs to be done to raise standards. The staff, who are the real strength of the subject, have the capacity to do this well.

HISTORY

147. Overall, the quality of provision in history is **good**.

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good overall, with much very good teaching, so that students are motivated and they make good progress in lessons.
- Students respond very positively to teachers' high expectations of behaviour and the presentation of work is good.
- There is good leadership and management of the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Students' attainment .
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) by students for learning history.
- Greater use of audio-visual resources to enhance students' understanding of the subject.
- Use National Curriculum attainment levels with students at end of Year 9 so that they are clearer about how they can attain higher levels.
- Greater use of assessment information to inform curriculum planning.

148. By the end of Year 9 students' attainment is well below average. Evidence from teachers' assessments and work seen confirms this judgement. Girls attain better than boys do, especially at higher levels. Students' achievement overall in Years 7 to 9, especially over the last year, is satisfactory. By the end of Year 11, students also attained well below the national average for grades A* to C in GCSE 2001. All students gained a grade in the range A* to G which is above average. Over the previous three years students' attainment improved considerably. Girls attain above boys in GCSE but the difference is much less than nationally. Boys attained significantly better in history than their other subjects, and overall relative performance in history is better than in all but one other subject. Evidence from students' work in Years 10 and 11 confirms that this positive trend in achievement continues. Achievement overall is satisfactory because, although improved at end of end of Year 11, attainment at present remains well below average. Progress made by identified groups of students, such as those with special needs, is good in relation to their targets.

149. Students at end of Year 9 use their knowledge and understanding of periods of history to role-play events. For example, Year 9 students wrote a letter to a friend describing their experiences of life in an air-raid shelter during the Second World War. Higher attaining students write with assurance and accuracy, but lower attaining students and many with special educational needs are limited by their use of English. Their written work is hampered by weak grammar, spelling and sentence construction so they struggle to write at length. Higher attaining students produce extensive writing, for example of concentration camp life. They use the Internet to obtain accounts by holocaust survivors. Students make good progress in interpreting and judging the reliability of sources of evidence. As part of their GCSE assessment students undertake independent enquiries. For example they use local sources to investigate the increase in coal demand to support the iron-smelting industry in Smethwick during the industrial revolution. At end of Year 11 weaker students do not use paragraphs well, sentences lack coherence and careless

spelling affects the quality of their work. They do not use enough evidence to support their answers convincingly.

150. Teaching has proved to be effective over the last year. The quality is good overall, and about four in ten lessons have very good teaching. Only one lesson was judged satisfactory. Teachers plan lessons very well and share learning objectives with students. At the end of lessons time is given for consolidating the main points. Teachers ask questions skilfully so that all students, including identified groups, participate in lessons. Very good use is made of support assistants so students with special needs receive appropriate guidance. Teachers link topics so that students build on what they know and understand. For example, in a Year 8 lesson the teacher used what students knew of Josiah Wedgwood's success as a businessman to study the impact of Richard Arkwright on the development of the textiles industry. Teachers manage students very effectively through the high expectations they have for behaviour and presentation of work. Students have very positive attitudes, their conduct is very good, and they take pride in how their work looks. Lessons have a brisk pace so time is well used, but students have sufficient time to complete tasks. Students learn how to use illustrations and documentary extracts as sources of historical evidence to answer teachers' probing questions. The use of film, more use of artefacts, and ICT would add variety to the methods employed. Occasionally teachers use inappropriate methods. For example, in a Year 7 lesson insufficient photocopies of a drawing of a *motte and bailey* castle were provided so some students could not see the details. Teachers give students opportunities to consider the morality of some events. For example, Year 9 students reflected on U.S.A. atomic bombing of Japan in 1945 and its devastating consequences. Work is regularly marked and helpful comments made. However, at the end of Year 9, students are not sufficiently familiar with National Curriculum levels to raise attainment. Teachers emphasise key words and improvement to spelling and grammar because many students do not express clearly what they know and understand. Lessons where students receive guidance, for example, in Year 8 on how to write an extended answer in history, make a very valuable contribution to raising achievement. With improved literacy students will attain better in the subject as they communicate their undoubted learning with more structure and evidence in their answers.

151. The head of department is a good leader and manager. There is now a strong team of teachers committed to raising students' standards and clear evidence at end of Year 11 of the progress that consistent teaching brings. At end of Year 9 last year there was inconsistent staffing, and the subject suffered in the general disruption brought by building work. The procedures for monitoring teaching and the system of annual review provide good methods for checking and modifying practices. Assessment information could be better used to inform curriculum planning. There is a deficiency of audio-visual resources and software for ICT. These need to be built-up and feature more often in the teaching methods used. The subject has made satisfactory progress in relation to the previous inspection report.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

152. Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- The teaching of GNVQ Information Technology
- The newly formed team works very well together to produce planning and teaching materials

Areas for improvement

- Cross curricular IT

153. The provision for ICT in Years 7 to 9 in discrete courses is satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11 the provision of ICT in accredited courses is satisfactory. Students who do not follow an accredited course in Years 10 and 11 follow a ten hour per year course that cannot in this time cover all the requirements of the National Curriculum. The provision of cross curricular ICT is unsatisfactory.

154. Standards that students attain in information technology are below national expectations by age 14. This is reflected in the results of internal and external testing. The school's 2001 assessments of the attainment of students aged 14 were below national expectations. There has been no discernible trend in recent years as results have gone up and down. Teachers' predictions for 2002 show an upward rise and should result in a figure that is just below likely national averages. All students including those with special educational needs are making at least satisfactory progress in the dedicated courses. Though there is some cross curricular IT to consolidate and develop skills this is limited.

155. By Year 9 students have a basic capability in using a suitable range of industry standard software. They are stronger in using word processing and desktop publishing software than in using spreadsheets and databases. They can produce a range of posters and other documents that combine text and images. Their understanding of databases is limited though they can use some of the terminology associated with them and they can successfully conduct simple Internet searches. They can model information for example when they create simple profit and loss accounts using a spreadsheet package though they do not explore simulations of real events in their course. They have a limited understanding of programming languages that control the movement of simple devices.

156. The school offers GCSE Information Technology in Years 10 and 11. It has introduced GNVQ IT in Year 10. The students who do not take either examination course follow an unaccredited ten hour per year course where they learn about a range of business applications of IT. Progress in the accredited courses is satisfactory. In the ten hour course it is unsatisfactory because in the time allocated it is impossible to meet all the requirements of National Curriculum Information Technology.

157. Results in the GCSE examinations over the past few years have been below and well below national averages. Predictions for this year show an improvement. This is reflected in the standards observed during the inspection which were around average. The school introduced a GNVQ Intermediate Information Technology course this year. All candidates have completed the first units.

158. In the GCSE course students attain average standards in their knowledge and understanding of databases. Their projects show that they understand the contexts in which they are used. They successfully create systems for notional organisations and show through careful annotation the steps in their development. They are aware of the legal restrictions affecting the storage of data. They have a sound knowledge of ways in which the modelling of information is used in financial and other contexts. GNVQ students are developing a sound knowledge and understanding of input, output and storage devices used in computer systems. They have developed an awareness of the likely requirements of the users of systems. They have attained sound standards against the examination criteria producing a range of business documents such as letterheads, business cards and promotional materials.

159. In Years 10 and 11 there is only limited cross curricular ICT and it does little to advance the skills and knowledge of the applications of ICT.

160. Attitudes and behaviour are overall good in information technology lessons. They are best in lessons where students are given a degree of autonomy as they are in GNVQ lessons. In these lessons students follow a distance learning course that sets tasks backed up by tutorials that give clear and relevant guidance for their completion. Students appreciate this style as it gives them a good level of independence. The approach allows teachers to work with the individuals with most need, to support and guide efforts while others get on at their own pace. Though this is the first year of the course indications are that both students and teachers find it motivating. Teachers are planning to extend this style of teaching and learning to the courses in Years 7 to 9.

161. Teaching is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Introductions to lessons are brief and outline clearly what is to be covered in the lesson. Teachers are still developing their use of interactive display boards but these are already useful in offering examples of new and stimulating uses of the technology. Planning is generally good and provides a structured and progressive scheme of work for students. Teachers are not complacent and are constantly reviewing courses to see if there are ways of developing new teaching and learning styles to help students progress at the rate of which they are capable. In this age range teachers intervene too much and on occasion students become frustrated at being stopped during practical sessions. The requirement for students to complete an evaluation of their progress over the term is a good way of teaching students to become more aware of the contribution they make to their own learning.

162. Teaching is good in Years 10 and 11 in the accredited courses. Teachers work together well and make best use of the strengths each have. They are well prepared and make sure that students have the maximum time on computers. This motivates and sustains interest and hence learning. The modular approach of the GNVQ course with its short term achievable targets has worked well and has motivated students to produce a good volume and sound standard of work so far in the course. Assessment is overall good in discrete courses however, there is no form of assessment for information technology across the curriculum. The gains that students make in some lessons such as in English, mathematics and science are not assessed or recorded and any contribution made at home is not acknowledged.

163. The leadership and team work in the department are good including the contributions of technicians. This is a developing and improving department that is building on the success of distance learning approaches. The provision of computers is low and this restricts the range of opportunity for other subjects to use the ICT in their lessons. Overall the school lacks a programme and organisational structure to develop and manage information technology across the curriculum.

Modern foreign languages

164. Overall, the quality of provision in Modern Foreign Languages is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teachers work well, producing good materials for learning.
- Teachers take students on visits to France and Spain, so that students can use the languages.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers need to use the foreign languages more in lessons.
- Students need to check their written work more carefully to avoid basic errors.
- The department lacks sufficient text books, readers, magazines, and computer software.
- Schemes of work and assessment need development.

165. The school has suffered from severe staffing difficulties in recent years. This has had an impact on standards.

166. All students study French or Spanish in Years 7 to 9. In September 2001 there were insufficient teachers for Modern Languages, so all students in Year 10 were disapplied, except those studying Panjabi. In Year 11 there is one group studying French and one group studying Spanish.

167. French GCSE results were well below national standards in 2001. GCSE results in French were lower than standards in similar schools in 2001. They were also lower than most other subjects in the school. Teacher assessments at age 14 were below national standards in French in 2001. Only a few students in the current Year 9 in May 2002 have reached level 5 in French in listening, speaking, reading and writing: standards are below national expectations. Performance in the lessons seen in Years 7 to 9 showed students working below national standards. Throughout the school students are stronger in listening, speaking and reading, and weaker in writing. When listening to a French teacher, students in a Year 8 class were able to decide which statements related to a series of pictures in their text book. When speaking, students in a Year 7 lesson could describe eye and hair colour in various people. Students in a Year 9 lesson were able to read a description of different French shops and identify them from what they sold. When working in pairs, other Year 9 students were able write a French dialogue about buying clothes. Students' achievements are satisfactory, overall.

168. Spanish GCSE results were well below national standards in 2001. GCSE results in Spanish were lower than standards in similar schools in 2001. They were also lower than most other subjects in the school. Teacher assessments at age 14 were below national standards in Spanish in 2001. Only a few students in the current Year 9 in May 2002 have reached level 5 in Spanish in listening, speaking, reading and writing: standards are below national expectations. Performance in the lessons seen in Years 7 to 9 showed students working below national standards. When listening to a Spanish tape, students in a Year 7 class were able to understand details about various animals. When conducting a class survey, the same students could ask others about their pets. When reading 4 shopping lists in Spanish, students in a Year 9 class could match them to the 4 correct people. Having studied a Spanish shopping dialogue, the same Year 9 students were able write the dialogue from memory. Students' achievements are satisfactory.

169. Overall, there is a satisfactory amount of written exercises and sustained writing in French and Spanish: however, students make unnecessary errors in grammar and spelling. Students do not check their written work carefully enough: the errors students make in written work are preventing students from achieving higher standards. Girls usually attain better results than boys. There are no significant variations between students of different ethnic groups. Students have some reading sessions: these contribute to their general literacy and develop their skills and knowledge in French and Spanish, including the use of dictionaries. Students spend most of their time using the foreign languages in listening, speaking, reading and writing: this contributes to their literacy skills, but these are at lower levels than they would be in English. Numeracy activities have been incorporated successfully into schemes of work, and are used by teachers. Students have limited access to computers, but use them well when they have the opportunity.

170. The overall quality of teaching French, in the lessons seen, is good. Half the lessons seen were good, and the others had a number of good features. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. The quality of teaching is improving standards and ensures satisfactory or good progress.

171. The overall quality of teaching Spanish, in the lessons seen, is good. All the lessons seen were good. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. One Bengali lesson was seen: the quality of teaching was good.

172. The quality of teaching is improving standards and ensures satisfactory or good progress in all three languages.

173. The teachers are proficient in the foreign languages, have good accents, and project their voices clearly. They use the foreign languages for parts of the lesson, but sometimes use too much English. They plan a well organised sequence of activities, which involve the students in their learning. Some teachers do not use overhead projectors sufficiently. They exploit other resources effectively to increase learning. Standards of discipline are generally good, but a few students find it difficult to concentrate sufficiently. Time is used well, and teachers are good at encouraging oral work in pairs: this improves listening and speaking skills, and develops confidence in the students. Staff display students' work, maps, posters, and other authentic material, which increase the students' knowledge of the languages and countries concerned. However, more maps and display are needed in some classrooms. Students' work is assessed regularly, and results inform subsequent teaching. Useful homework, which consolidates learning, is set regularly. The teaching of those with special educational needs is good, and meets the needs of these students as well. Teachers manage classes well, and give students a variety of experiences in the classroom, including songs, role plays, and class surveys, which extend and consolidate their learning.

174. Teachers ensure that all students make appropriate progress. They provide challenging tasks for the higher attainers, and give support to those with special educational needs.

175. The vast majority of students behave well. They show interest in their work, sustain their concentration, and develop good study skills. Their response is usually satisfactory or good throughout the school. Some students show an obvious sense of enjoyment in lessons. They work well in pairs, and sometimes have opportunities to use their initiative in creating role plays and working independently. Their positive attitudes are enabling them to improve their performance. However, a few students find it difficult to concentrate and achieve their potential. Most students make satisfactory progress in lessons throughout the school.

176. The organisation of the curriculum meets statutory requirements. There is no head of department at present, but an Assistant Head Teacher has been acting as an effective mentor to the department. She and an LEA consultant have been providing valuable support: the teachers are working well in difficult circumstances. The department lacks sufficient text books, readers, magazines, and computer software. Visits to France and Spain encourage social interaction and personal responsibility, and improve language competence. The text books and other materials used, together with the visits abroad, help develop awareness of the diversity and richness of other cultures. The quality of most teaching, the attitudes of most students, and visits abroad have a positive effect on standards. However, some teachers could use the foreign language more in their teaching.

177. There have been some improvements since the previous report: students work more in pairs and groups, teachers share lesson objectives with the students, and behaviour in lessons is better.

MUSIC

178. Overall the quality of provision in music is **good**.

Strengths

- Standards in recent years have been well below expected levels but work seen during the inspection indicates clearly that standards are rising.
- Teaching seen during the inspection was good overall.
- In the lessons seen, students learn well. They work with interest and enthusiasm and behave well. They are now making good progress.
- Interest in the subject is growing with numbers in the option groups and numbers of students having instrumental lessons both increasing.
- Leadership is an emerging strength. The head of department has a clear sense of purpose and direction for the department.

Areas for improvement

- More resources for music technology are needed to support the necessary development of composing skills across the age range and to give students the opportunity to 'create, manipulate and refine sounds' as required by the national curriculum.
- Studies of world music need further development and more resources will be needed to support this work.

179. All students from ages 11 to 14 follow a National Curriculum music course and GCSE music is offered as an option. Curriculum provision for music has improved since the last inspection but time is still limited at the end of Year 9. Students do not have the opportunity to develop the music technology strand of the National Curriculum as resources are very limited. Some areas of world music are studied but further development of Asian music is needed. Instrumental lessons in a variety of instruments are offered free of charge to the students and teaching time has been increased by 5.5 hours per week this year. Extra-curricular music clubs are being developed and concerts and visits are arranged through the school and Art-Site.

180. At the end of Year 9 standards are below the expected levels for most but there are some students who are achieving the expected standard. In the years since the last

inspection standards have been well below average as students have had limited practical experience in their lessons.

181. In performing, those students in Year 8 who can maintain a steady pulse while playing a melody accompanied by chords are achieving the expected standard for the stage of the course, as are students in Year 9 who sustain cross rhythms accurately in ensemble playing. Most, who have difficulty playing steadily, or difficulty in combining parts, are below the expected levels. Composing skills are less well developed. Students have good ideas but they do not have the opportunity to use music technology to develop them and they are limited in composing by their own performing skills. They can select appropriate sounds in their work and combine melodies with rhythms. Their control of harmony and structure is weaker. Not all compositions use chords and work is often short. Listening skills are developing well; students listen carefully and they can recognise the musical elements. In classroom oral work they can describe these fairly accurately but individual written work is weaker and correct use of musical terminology needs further development. Students do not have the opportunity to develop the required music technology skills. Students enter in Year 7 well below the expected standard and many have very little experience of practical music-making. Achievement in lessons seen and progress in recent times is now good.

182. GCSE results in the previous years have been far below national average standards. Work seen and recordings heard during the inspection demonstrate improving standards although they still remain below the national average for most. In performing, some students can play pieces of appropriate difficulty level accurately and with some musical understanding. Most, play simpler pieces fairly accurately. In ensemble playing, the rhythmic detail is not always precise. Composing is generally of a lower standard than performing but current work shows some improvements from previous years and a few achieve national average standards. Students can maintain their chosen styles and demonstrate control of melody and rhythm. Those achieving the standard can use the musical elements within clear structures while others struggle to organise their ideas coherently. Students have little opportunity to use music technology to organise their ideas and to construct their compositions. Listening skills are assessed as below average standards for most but opportunities to see this work in the inspection were limited.

183. The improving standards that were seen during the inspection indicate good progress in recent times, particularly as the present students had limited opportunities to develop practical skills when they were aged 11 to 14.

184. The teaching is good overall and some very good teaching was seen too. Teachers know their subject very well and have an equally good knowledge of their students' learning needs which they endeavour to meet. Students with special educational needs and students for whom English is not their first language make equal progress to all others. Gifted and talented students are given suitably challenging tasks to which they respond well. Lessons have a variety of tasks that maintain the interest of the students and these are broken down into short timed tasks to ensure a good rate of progress and a good pace to the lessons. Performing, composing and listening skills are neatly dove-tailed and developed and students enjoy their learning in these areas. Relationships are very good, teaching is good humoured and there is a pleasant, good learning environment in lessons. The teacher takes great care to involve everyone in all the activities and to build their confidence. The students respond by keenly volunteering performances and musical opinions. These are valued and students listen well to each other and to the teacher. They enjoy their music lessons and work with interest and energy. They want to achieve and improve. Classroom management is good and students co-operate very well with each other in small group work. On-going assessment is a feature of all lessons and among the best seen.

185. The head of department offers good leadership and has a clear sense of direction for the development of music in the school and has maintained this through considerable difficulties in accommodation in recent years. Standards are beginning to rise again and interest in music is growing. Numbers in the option groups are above national average size and the number of students learning instruments is now broadly in line with all other schools. Assessment procedures are very well thought out. Students are fully aware of their national curriculum levels and also know what they must do to improve their levels. Results are regularly recorded with judgements made about progress. Strategies are already being developed to address the weaknesses noted in the correct use of musical terminology, harmony and structure. Weaknesses in resources are noted in the department development plan.

186. Improvement in relation to the last report is satisfactory. In the interim period, however, standards dropped to well below the expected levels and, in the last 2 years, the department has worked hard to turn this around. With the new accommodation, and with the provision of the much-needed computers to support classroom development of skills in music technology and composing, the department is well poised to move forward.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

187 Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good
- Students bring good attitudes to their work and participation rates are very high
- Leadership and management of the subject is capable and enthusiastic

Areas for improvement

- GCSE results are well below the national average
- Students' skills in improving their work through planning and evaluation are below average
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory and restricts opportunities for learning

188. GCSE results for 2001 were well below the national average. However, students did slightly better in physical education than they did in their other subjects. Passes at grades A* to C were a big improvement on the previous year.

189. By age 14 standards in physical education are average. As students enter the school with below average standards, this represents good achievement. Standards are highest in students' acquisition and development of skills. These are above average in volleyball and athletics. For example, in volleyball students have an above average understanding of positional play and have developed good technique in serving and setting up. The ability to select and apply skills and tactics is below average and students' skills in evaluating and improving their performance are underdeveloped.

190. By age 16 standards are average overall. Given their attainment at the end of Year 9 this represents satisfactory achievement. Standards have been adversely affected by the difficulties with accommodation, now on the way to being remedied, which have denied students regular access to playing fields and specialist indoor facilities. Standards in girls' cricket are above average. Higher attaining girls have developed very good bowling and batting techniques and understand the importance of body and feet position when facing the bowling or executing a shot. Although it was not possible to see any soccer being played,

the Year 10 football team has achieved much success in local competitions. Students know how and why they prepare for an activity and have a good knowledge of fitness and health, for example, in the importance of preparation for and recovery after exercise and the benefits of physical activity to a healthy lifestyle. As in Years 7 to 9, students' skills of observation, analysis and evaluation of their own and others' performance are below average. Standards in the theoretical aspects of the GCSE course are well below average. Students have underdeveloped research and extended writing skills and even higher attaining students rely too much on the teacher's notes in acquiring their knowledge and understanding of the subject.

191. Students with special educational needs make good progress and have benefited from the recent support of a learning support assistant who is shared with another subject area. Gifted and talented students, both boys and girls, are given encouragement and support, make good progress and go on to achieve much success in local and national competitions.

192. The quality of teaching and the learning it promotes are good overall. Lessons seen were split evenly between very good, good and satisfactory teaching. Teachers are very knowledgeable and enthusiastic about physical education so that students learn correct techniques and improve their performance, for example, in a Year 8 athletics lesson where students learned the most effective way to position the feet and body for a sprint start. Teachers have very good relationships with their students, which helps to create a cooperative atmosphere for learning in almost all lessons. Students' attitudes are very good in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. The vast majority of students enjoy the subject and want to learn. The management of students is firm but sensitive and little time is wasted in establishing control. Where teaching is very good, learning objectives are shared with students at the outset, students work in groups of similar attainment where they can challenge and test themselves and each other rigorously and competitively, and are encouraged to become independent learners, for example, in devising their own warm up routines. Where teaching is only satisfactory these features are absent. Teaching generally would be even better, and students' learning would be accelerated, if students were encouraged to take responsibility for analysing and planning improvements to their work. They are not usually involved in making decisions about their own learning and are not sufficiently encouraged to become independent learners. There are insufficient opportunities for students to use information and communication technology to enhance their learning, including in GCSE groups where the heavy dependence on the teacher's notes restricts students' development of the essential skills of independence, research and responsibility. In these groups work is not marked and graded against GCSE criteria and students are not set targets for improvement. Ongoing assessment in lessons is good with teachers' interventions helping students improve. Participation rates are very good and non-participants are nearly always involved as observers or umpires.

193. The head of physical education has only been in post for a few months but has made a very good start in identifying what the department needs to do in order to raise standards. The focus is very much on raising students' levels of attainment through measures to improve teaching and learning. There is a willingness to embrace new ideas and to seek out best practice. Links are being developed with local sports clubs and sports facilities such as Warwickshire Cricket Club and the Alexandra Stadium. A very good risk assessment procedure has been devised and implemented. An excellent working relationship exists within the department's team of highly qualified specialist teachers. They give up much of their time to extra-curricular sport and provide good role models for students' personal development. There are important weaknesses which require tacking. The arrangements for dance are unsatisfactory as this activity is currently only offered to girls. Although National Curriculum requirements are fully met, continuity for learning is a

cause for concern in some activities which do not last long enough for students to experience success. A detailed scheme of work needs to be drawn up to incorporate into every lesson opportunities for students to plan and evaluate their work both as individuals and in pairs and groups setting themselves targets for improvement. Ways need to be found to share the very good practice that exists in parts of the teaching with all members of the department. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Students' attitudes are better and higher attaining students are more challenged.

194. Accommodation is unsatisfactory and students have no access to grassy areas for activities such as cricket or athletics that have to be taught on tarmac areas. Accommodation will improve when the school has the use of the artificial grass surface currently under construction. However, there is uncertainty whether this surface will be marked only for soccer which will seriously disadvantage sports such as hockey which cannot be played elsewhere on the school site and which is a popular mainstream sport, particularly for girls.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

195. Overall, the provision for religious education is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teaching
- Progress of students in Year 9
- Continuing improvement in GCSE (short course) results

Areas for Improvement

- Standards in Years 10 and 11
- Use of ICT in all aspects of religious education
- Involvement of faith communities and parents in the work of the department

196. Attainment in Years 7 to 9 is in line with the expectations of the Birmingham *Agreed Syllabus* for 14 year olds and these are sometimes exceeded. In the last three years improvements have been made in the provision for religious education and in standards at Year 9 and Year 11. Since the last inspection all students in Years 10 and 11 have followed a GCSE (short course) and between 1999 and 2001 as the numbers of students achieving a grade A* to G rose, so did the average grade achieved. The trend in improvement slowed a little in 2000 and in 2001 results remained well below average. The results for religious education were among the best achieved in the school and the difference between boys and girls is less significant than in schools nationally.

197. Observation of lessons and analysis of students' work shows that attainment by more than half of fourteen year olds is currently average or above. Students develop their knowledge of religious principles such as good, evil, love and relationships and question what they study and apply it to their experiences of life. The *Agreed Syllabus* requires more understanding of moral and social issues. In Year 7 students develop knowledge of betrayal and denial through the stories of Judas and Peter at the *Last Supper*. Note taking and reading aloud support students' literacy and those whose first language is not English are helped to use a dictionary. In Year 8 a 'Rap' musical style and poetry are used to help stimulate a vocal and written response on attitudes to wealth. Little time is spent learning about religious symbols or using artefacts. In Year 9 students relate religious ideas to suffering, cruelty, war, abuse and illness through the use of well-chosen photographs. There is a strong spiritual, moral and social focus in lessons as students prepare to study the 'Holocaust'. Students' achievements are good.

198. Students do not build effectively on the knowledge and understanding gained in Years 7 to 9 and standards in Years 10 and 11 currently remain below the expectations of the locally *Agreed Syllabus*. Higher attaining students are not challenged sufficiently by teaching styles to achieve the higher grades. In a Year 10 lesson human existence is explored through '*Thinking about God*' and '*Thinking about Morality*'. Some higher attaining students demonstrate very good thinking skills by relating their own personal faith to the subject of discussion for example the belief in Muhammad as a messenger from God. Some students found discussion difficult and were more comfortable writing answers down. Extended writing in Year 10 displays a grasp of more abstract thinking; for example the meaning of '*One God*' as understood by different faiths. Students in Year 11 were on study leave but assessment by teachers shows that some will achieve the targets set for them. Students' achievements are satisfactory.

199. Students' attitudes are good overall. They behave well except in the case of a small minority of boys in Year 9. Students work together well so that progress is good in Year 9 in the area of '*Learning from Religion*', which was a weakness in the last inspection. Students with special educational needs make good progress and are included in class discussions. Learning Support Assistants and teachers with responsibility for Ethnic Minority Achievement are effective because they discuss their role with the class teacher.

200. Teaching is good or better in over three quarters of lessons. Teachers are secure in their knowledge of the subject and show confidence in leading and intervening in discussion. Lessons are well structured when aims and expectations are shared with students. Good teaching occurs when classroom management is secure and students are motivated to respond in discussion for example after viewing a video of '*Jesus of Nazareth*' in Year 7. Weaknesses are in the teacher-led approach, the absence of the use of faith symbols and ICT. Teachers inform students about their progress against the expectations of the *Agreed Syllabus* and the school grading system. In Years 10 and 11 predicted and current grades at GCSE are indicated in reports to parents. Planning for the scheme of work and systematic assessment are mainly handwritten and in the early stages of development but are based on the Birmingham *Agreed Syllabus* for religious education.

201. The leadership and management of religious education are good, improving and supported strongly by the Head of Humanities. There are two qualified specialist and two non-specialist teachers of religious education and a recently appointed Head of department. Priorities are identified in the development plan but ICT is missing from the scheme of work and lesson plans. The time allocation for the subject is good in Year 7 and 9, but in Years 10 and 11 extension classes after school are needed to ensure coverage of the GCSE requirements.

202. Since the last inspection the department has provided a consistent approach to Years 7 to 9 although the suggestion in the *Agreed Syllabus* to "step into someone else's shoes" is not followed while learning about religions. Parents are informed of work in connection with individual faiths but are not involved personally. Reference to parent's rights to withdraw their children from religious education is missing from the school prospectus. Expansion of GCSE courses is proposed including a full course based on the *Agreed Syllabus* requirements. There is a strong commitment to succeed and a fundamental desire to improve standards.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

203. Overall, the quality of provision in vocational courses is **good**.

204. There are very good opportunities for students at end of Year 11 to learn about the 'world of work'. Later this year the school plans to extend these opportunities to more students at end of Year 11 and some in Year 9.

205. Students who take business studies gain a very good insight into the realities of the workplace. For example, in a Year 10 lesson students learned how companies recruit and select people for particular jobs. The very well planned lesson gave students a wide range of resources e.g. taped interviews, airline web site information, film of an interview. By moving between 'work stations' students' knowledge and understanding of the processes used increased. All students in Year 10 have lessons that develop their thoughts about work and their futures as part of the *modular course*. For example, in one lesson they used resources to cost the life-style they would like (house, car, hi-fi etc) and then looked at the type of job they aimed to do and its income. This brought a sharp reality to their thinking. A group of students in Year 10 who would not benefit from a wholly GCSE curriculum follow an alternative programme for part of the week. This gives them a series of challenges that leads to accreditation by ASDAN*. The challenges focus on building self-esteem, confidence, and improving basic skills. During the inspection a group of students organised and calculated the costs of a visit to Birmingham's *Millennium Point*. After this experience students reported proudly about their sense of achievement and looked forward to organising a residential trip to Wales. Observing and touching the exhibits heightened their learning. For example, they were amazed by the size of a steam engine, and how the large intestine worked. They all planned to continue with education after Year 11. The students thought the course was developing personal and study skills that were preparing them for future employment. They appreciated the strong support of the student support coordinator.

206. The complementary curriculum co-ordinator has worked closely with a number of outside agencies to develop further the work-related curriculum next September. A pre-vocational course for building skills, ICT and catering on one day a week at North Birmingham College (NBC) will increase its numbers. An applied GCSE course in leisure and tourism will be taught jointly by the school and NBC. Students currently following the Open College Network course in telematics successfully reach level 3 after one afternoon per week for 10 weeks. Teachers responsible for this area have created a complementary curriculum for a number of students next year. This will include five GCSE subjects studied at school, working with youth services, pursuing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, taking part in six vocational areas at NBC, five weeks work experience in a chosen area which will lead to a level 1 GNVQ qualification at the end of Year 11. The co-ordinator has worked hard and made very effective use of outside support to ensure the provision meets national expectations for the 14 to 19 curriculum.