

INSPECTION REPORT

**ALTRINCHAM COLLEGE OF ARTS
FORMERLY GREEN LANE HIGH SCHOOL**

Timperley, Altrincham

LEA area: Trafford

Unique reference number: 106367

Headteacher: Miss M Lloyd

Reporting inspector: Mr W K Baxendale

2928

Dates of inspection: 11th – 13th March 2003

Inspection number: 249120

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Secondary Modern

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 16

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Green Lane
Timperley
Altrincham

Postcode: WA15 8QW

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr R Aubrey

Date of previous inspection: 3rd March 1997

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Atrincham College of Arts formerly Green Lane High School is a smaller than average, secondary modern school educating 760 boys and girls in the 11-16 age range. Its pupils come from some 40 primary schools that are spread between the local area and central and south Manchester. Recruitment is affected by competition from numerous local grammar, denominational and private schools and also from full comprehensive schools in neighbouring Local Education Authorities. The pupils are from well below average socio-economic backgrounds and an above average proportion of pupils, (about one in four), is entitled to a free school meal. The pupils' attainment when they start the school is well below average. The school has an above average proportion of pupils with special educational needs: over one in five is on its action plan. It also has a well above average proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs, 32 of them form a special unit for moderate learning or emotional and behavioural difficulties, but they are educated together with the rest of the school. A slightly above average proportion has a mother tongue believed not to be English, but only one receives extra support; the others are not beginners. The school was recently successful in its first attempt to obtain specialist status as an arts college, hence the altered name.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school that caters particularly well for its pupils. An outstanding team spirit welds its staff and pupils so there is a clear unity of purpose in a very good learning atmosphere. Excellent leadership by the headteacher, especially, and also by other key members of staff underlies the very good provision that cherishes individuals equally and has high expectations of each one. Helped by good teaching, the pupils' GCSE results are well up to what could be expected and their achievement over the five years they spend in the school is very good. The governors make very good contributions to the partnership. There is very careful stewardship of the average budget and the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Excellent leadership is the linch-pin of this very good school.
- The provision made for the pupils' welfare and general education is excellent.
- Pupils' personal development is very good and, as a result of good teaching and learning, they achieve very well.
- The school gets very good support from the parents and from the community.

What could be improved

- Some teaching does not cater well enough for lower attainers.
- The demand for information and communication technology (ICT) resources is outstripping provision.
- Pupils' aspirations are not high enough in science; those in Years 10 and 11 underachieve compared with the standards they reach in other subjects.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvements from the time the school was previously inspected in early March 1997 are good. Each main issue raised by that inspection has received careful attention and improvements put in place. School improvement planning is now very good and the evaluation of performance is better, although there is room for further progress in the

identification of ways of stimulating lower attainers to do better in some lessons. ICT meets requirements. The requirement for a daily act of collective worship is met and the governors' communications with parents are complete. Learning support meets needs but technical support is a little short, for example, in science. At the same time, standards have risen and the quality of education is now very good.

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				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	2000	2001	2002	2002	
GCSE examinations	D	C	D	A	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

Standards have risen substantially since the previous inspection and are well up to what might be expected. The school prepares its pupils well for their next stages in education or training, as, by the time they leave, all are literate, numerate, can collaborate and can use computers effectively. Because of the highly competitive local system, which places about forty per cent of all pupils in selective or other schools, typical intakes are of well below average attainment. The school comes very close to meeting its demanding targets.

Overall standards are below average in Years 7 to 9, but all pupils achieve well in that time; the targets they are set are of great help in this. Pupils in Year 9 read and speak well. Written work among current Year 9 higher attainers is just above average in English and history and about average in mathematics and science; that of lower attainers is less well presented and of a below average standard; some is incomplete. Rises in the pupils' National Curriculum test average point scores over the last five years are above the national trend, but attainment is, unsurprisingly, below average compared with all schools. Attainment in 2002 was well above average in mathematics and science compared with similar schools and also in English, according to teacher assessments.

Standards are average in Years 10 and 11; pupils achieve very well. Targets set for individuals are more finely honed and effective at this stage. The quality of essay writing progresses well. Pupils produce some very ambitious, original high-quality artwork and written work in personal and social education shows increasing self-confidence and a purposeful attitude to the future. Each year since 1998, increasing proportions have obtained at least five higher grade, A*-C, GCSEs. Improving results were recognised in 2001 by a government award. In 2002, higher GCSE results were, for the first time, near the national and well above the average for similar schools. Remarkably, GCSE English language and literature results were at the national average in 2002, because of very good teaching and very close attention to how pupils are doing. Well above national average proportions normally obtain at least five GCSE grades, but a fall in 2002 reduced average point scores to below average. The school's steps to help underachievers and others with personal problems are exemplary. Generally, girls do better than do boys, but by a lesser margin than that found nationally. Pupils from an ethnic minority and those with special educational needs also attain results that show very good achievement. Attainment in vocational courses, where the pupils produce copious amounts of often-good work, is well above average and results in a short GCSE religious education course are about average. Unsatisfactory progress in science leads to standards that are too low.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Because they feel secure and have confidence in their teachers, the pupils are very well disposed towards school, enjoying it and achieving very well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Occasional disruption, but behaviour is generally very good; pupils often support each other very well. Exclusion rates are very low.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. This is a happy, caring school with a strong sense of unity; the pupils collaborate very well in class and in the many popular out-of-school activities. Most have mature attitudes and enjoy celebrating successes, for example, in assemblies. Pupils genuinely respect a school they feel respects them.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Attendance rates are about average. The school takes its responsibilities very seriously: steps taken to get pupils to come to school are very good. Haphazard bus transport causes too many problems.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	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.

The school's very good learning atmosphere, created by excellent leadership, helps to produce a good quality of both teaching and learning at all stages. There are substantial improvements since the previous inspection, with now, for example, over four times the rate of very good or excellent teaching. Closely related to these improvements are the rises in standards. Resulting from very good school improvement planning, which has teaching and learning at its heart, almost all lessons are now very well planned and teachers are scrupulous in making sure all pupils take part. Teachers challenge pupils well by asking questions that get them to express their thoughts so that, in English, for example, where teaching is very good, they really enjoy good poetry, respecting others' viewpoints and sharing good humour with the teacher. As a result, the pupils' achievements in English are particularly good and teachers across the curriculum are now better at developing further all pupils' literacy standards as a means of improving learning. Mathematics teaching is good; because literacy weaknesses hinder lower attainers' progress; teachers show great patience in explaining work. The teaching of numeracy is well integrated; the pupils' use of number improves and results in mathematics have risen. There are good examples in design and technology and art and design, where outstanding opportunities also produce very good learning and personal development through working with Asian and Chinese artists in residence. A prominent feature of some of the very best teaching is the way new technology stimulates interest in art and design, modern foreign languages and the best science lessons; it gets the pupils involved and makes learning telling and fun, sufficient to rival commercial video and computer products. There are, however, too few resources for need, so ICT could play an even fuller part in promoting high quality learning.

Science teaching is satisfactory overall, but some is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11: it contributes to the lower standards in the subject. Undemanding exercises such as cutting out and some under-expectation reduce the pace of some lessons that have insufficiently varied, short but challenging exercises. Whilst there is good provision for pupils with special educational needs, there are some weaknesses in the way some teaching caters for lower attainers, with occasional mismatches between what pupils can do and the work set. As a result, the work does not always meet the needs of all pupils and the school's very thorough procedures for checking quality have scope for even greater concentration on these aspects of teaching and learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The curriculum meets all requirements fully and responds very well to the pupils' interests and needs. The specialist arts college provision gives exciting additions to pupils' learning opportunities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Literacy catch-up sessions are very effective so test results for 14 year-olds exceed expectations. Learning support assistants make good contributions and individual statements have clear expectations.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good. The pupils make very good progress and their literacy skills are well up to requirement. By the time they take examinations they do equally as well as the rest.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Very good assemblies, stimulating learning experiences and a very well supported, full programme of out-of-school activities and visits exemplify very good provision.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Excellent. Pupils know what is expected and are made very aware of how to do well; they respect the school and try very hard as a result.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The vision and energetic leadership of the headteacher play to strengths and provide a clear direction for a school in which standards are rising. The senior team works excellently together, giving a unity of purpose that translates into a very good quality of education and remarkable commitment among all those who provide and receive it.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. The governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities very well and show a great commitment to and pride in the school. Their contributions to strategic management are very good.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Analysis of performance is very good; heads of subject are held fully to account for examination performances and rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning is helping to raise standards. The school has a very effective system for checking on how it is doing which also helps establish priorities for improvement.
The strategic use of	Very good. The budget is very well managed to provide for current and carefully planned future needs; the school is meticulous in pursuing the

resources	very best value for money.
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PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents like the ways the school expects their child to work hard and to do his or her best. • Parents think the quality of teaching is good. • The parents feel comfortable approaching the school with questions or problems. • Parents appreciate the good quality of leadership and management. • Parents like the progress their child makes at the school, becoming, in the process, a mature and responsible young adult. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few parents have reservations about the amount of homework set. • Some think there is not enough information on how their child is getting on.

Inspectors noted the high parental agreement with the questions on work, progress, teaching and leadership; this report upholds those sentiments. Inspectors agree fully with parents that the school does get the pupils to work very hard and do their best; achievement is very good. It also helps pupils to become mature and responsible. Those who have some difficulty coming to terms with school life understand how the school helps them. Inspectors also find that the school does provide all the required information on pupils' progress and note that parents feel comfortable approaching the school with questions or problems. The issue of homework is hard to resolve, as some parents thought there was too much, others too little. Inspectors find that the school's policy on setting homework and the very good measures taken to help pupils in its completion play very important parts in raising standards.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Excellent leadership is the linch-pin of this very good school.

1. The headteacher's excellent, very busy, yet unostentatious leadership makes this school what it is. She has, through fine example, created a situation where everyone does their best for the school, so winning unreserved acclamation from pupils, parents, staff, governors and the Local Education Authority. Leadership has a simple purpose, which is to make sure the school's motto, 'to know, to care, to live', is practised. It is singularly successful in this, having developed from what was reported to be a good school by the previous inspection into one that is now very good and in which standards are continuing to rise and every pupil is valued equally.

2. This is a school with an outstanding commitment to improvement through sharing the burden. It has a very good capacity to succeed. The headteacher, very strongly supported by the senior team, plays to individual strengths, so tasks are carried out well. At the same time, leadership is diligent in overcoming any perceived weaknesses. Delegation of responsibility and shared accountability are the firm bases upon which the school runs. A main feature of the organisation is the very close teamwork that stems from it. It is rare that pre-inspection staff meetings show this so clearly; parity of esteem and mutual support came across very strongly. These were reinforced during the inspection and professional satisfaction is a key aspect in producing improvements and in raising standards. The ways decisions are made and communicated are very good.

3. The school's management structure is very efficient. Responsibilities are clear and effective. Relations between senior and middle managers are very good; all are fully at home seeking assistance from others. Open dialogue has characterised the setting up the school's now very good approach to raising literacy standards. The head of English has promoted successfully the idea of the centrality of literacy skills to raising standards. He has undertaken, with his team, to check on each pupil's ability, (from evidence provided by a dossier of their work across Year 7), to read for research purposes and to report back in writing to at least the level expected of 11 year-olds starting the school. Representatives of each subject are now engaged in lively debate as to how to increase expertise and to identify areas for collaboration. A working party also oversees the running of a similar project for numeracy, with encouraging results of better pace in teaching and greater interactivity between teachers and pupils in lessons in all subjects.

4. The school has very good procedures for checking on quality. Heads of subject and senior team members conduct regular sessions observing and reporting on the quality of teaching and learning in departments, so generating a healthy professional dialogue. A very good performance management scheme complements this and provides a sound footing for identifying training needs. Heads of department carry out, mainly very well, clear responsibilities for the quality of teaching and learning in their department, the curriculum provided (relevant alterations are afoot in science) and pupils' behaviour. Accountability is tight through termly sessions with the headteacher. The deputy headteacher with curriculum responsibility oversees its operation very effectively. Collaboration between heads of year and heads of department, for example on how best to tackle areas for improvement, is very good: it raises standards. Heads of year observe and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in personal and social education: this is good practice. The addition of very effective academic heads of year to complement the also very effective pastoral heads of year structure is also helping to raise standards.

5. The very good governing body carries out its statutory duties fully and is very keen to be part of what it rightly sees as a very good organisation, holding it closely to account and also helping it do even better. Since the previous inspection the governors have become more involved, have improved their own training and begun to draw more thoroughly on the many skills of individual members; governors also provide effective support to new appointees to the body. They are fully persuaded that the school supports the pupils particularly well against sometimes very difficult social backgrounds that do not always appreciate the value of the education provided.

6. Governors help effectively with school improvement planning, they are closely involved with subject departments, but are wise enough to respect the school's leadership and management, expecting and allowing them to do their jobs. Governors feel equally included, being consulted thoroughly by the headteacher and working in school with, for example, young enterprise schemes. Governors understand the aims of the school and reinforce the general atmosphere of caring by, for example, vetting pupils' CVs, conducting mock interviews with them and acting as mentors to selected pupils in Years 10 and 11.

7. The methods used to produce and to review the very good school improvement plan are also all embracing. All staff and governors are involved through the deputy headteacher, so that its implementation is smooth and effective. Extending the principle of effective consultation that characterises the way the school operates, the parent body regularly makes its own contributions through responses to questionnaires. Consultations with pupils, who recognise quality, are also frequent and effective.

8. The school is fully staffed with suitably qualified personnel, although there is scope in science, for instance, to use individuals' specialisms more effectively. Because the staff pulls so well together most feel sufficiently challenged and refreshed, so they wish to stay in post; turnover is relatively low and those who do so leave with regret. Typical of the school is the continuing involvement of teachers obliged to retire through ill health who, for example, volunteer to accompany educational visits. The school is attractive to staff and recruitment remains good.

9. The budget balances and the school provides very good value for money. A large carry over is directly earmarked to purchase equipment for the new arts college facilities.

The provision made for the pupils' welfare and general education is excellent.

10. Equality of opportunity and of valuing the individual permeate school life. Excellent procedures are in place to support pupils, many of whom lack confidence in their own abilities, partly as a result of selection at the end of Year 6. The school recognises the importance of giving all pupils a fresh start with their learning. It does this very well and does not give up on anyone. Many 11 year-olds, starting the school, find it hard to cope with the secondary curriculum. Detailed assessments of pupils' attainment and ways of learning show that very many are visual, unsophisticated learners who struggle with text; a goodly number are above average practical workers, but they also struggle with the written word. A few are visual learners who are good with both pictures and text and a very few are good with words and are able to pick things up easily from hearing them. Measures to help the many pupils overcome their literacy problems are increasingly successful. All teachers recognise and act upon their responsibility to raise the pupils' self-esteem by contributing well to their welfare and academic progress.

11. Pupil support management structures are very good. Academic heads of year complement the work of year heads by overseeing homework, identifying underachievement across subjects, helping pupils keep up with coursework, chasing up absences, providing

encouragement to effort through assemblies and communicating with parents through homework diary checks. Referrals are both positive, as the school genuinely celebrates success, and negative. Pupils who do well in pursuit of their very carefully monitored academic targets receive personal letters of congratulation. Any underachievement is countered by numerous often-effective measures, the mainstay of which is a mentoring programme carried out mainly by senior members of staff and sometimes governors or industrialists from outside school.

12. The induction of new pupils is very good. They quickly feel secure. In conversation, pupils from all year groups claimed that the security they felt in school was among its most attractive features. Any bullying occurred outside school, but the very few incidents in school were, in the pupils' minds, very quickly and effectively dealt with and there were no recriminations. New pupils appreciate extra help they receive with reading and the allocation of pupils from Years 10 and 11 to care for them in their early days in school.

13. Exhortations to pupils to do well are many and effective. All pupils like what they endearingly see as 'doggy treats': the merit stamps and certificates they receive for endeavour and success. A personal achievement scheme in Years 7 and 8 has important criteria that are monitored through form tutors and include signed homework and correct uniform; prizes are given to those who meet requirements. Promoted in assemblies and celebrated in classrooms, corridors and print, the school constantly reminds pupils of the value of commitment. The staff, administrative, ancillary, support, maintenance and teaching, all provide excellent role models in this respect. An interesting retort to an inspector's question on what were the strengths of the school suggested the caretaker would be a suitable person to describe them. The excellent respect people have for each other is clearly shown in the very warm greetings that are commonplace. Pupils appreciate the staff's great efforts to boost morale, this helps them to combat a sense of failure some had when starting the school as 11 year-olds. Inspectors find it hard to see how they would be getting much better support in their education elsewhere.

14. The school's tracking measures are watertight, so very nearly all pupils keep up or are brought back on track, except in a very few extreme cases. The steps taken to retrieve school refusers are excellent: home visits, work set for completion at home, flexible timetables and modifications to the curriculum exemplify the excellent approaches to making sure all pupils are included and have a chance to succeed. Child protection arrangements are fully in place. In addition, the school's methods for accommodating anger and stress are similarly excellent. Pupils work with highly qualified counsellors, including a 'Relate' representative: staff and pupils have also undergone related six-week courses. A cooling-off centre, aptly named the 'Rubicon' is well run and effective in isolating pupils with problems, so allowing others to get on with their work and helping those in need to come to terms with their gremlins.

15. Pupils are very well supported by a curriculum in Years 7-9 that is broad and balanced, giving all of them the opportunity to make progress in all subjects of the National Curriculum. Religious education now fits very well into provision. It has increased substantially since the previous inspection and complies fully with legal requirements: it is now part of the mores of the school. Some provision is made for pupils to be taught in similar attainment groups in Year 8 and this is done in most subjects in Year 9, but some further refinement is needed to the way lower attaining classes are taught. Imaginative provision for citizenship makes a very good contribution to pupils' personal development. ICT provision meets requirements; it is taught separately in Years 7 and 9 and as part of design and technology in Year 8. Every department teaches literacy and numeracy largely effectively; pupils leave the school able to read, write and calculate at least satisfactorily.

16. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is broad, balanced, and relevant to the pupils' needs: it meets statutory requirements. The timetable permits attainment groups in English, mathematics, science and modern languages to be finely graded. All pupils are expected to take at least one language, though a small group has been withdrawn officially from this subject in the current Year 10.

17. Better to meet the pupils' interests and needs, the school introduced GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualifications) courses several years ago and now teaches leisure and tourism and ICT at both foundation and intermediate levels, as well as the new applied vocational GCSEs in both subjects. A BTEC award for aspiring chefs is also part of a curriculum that is relevant to pupils' needs, but which undergoes constant improvement. As a specialist Arts College, the school has embarked on several initiatives. These include the offer of two GCSE subjects, photography and art and design, which can be studied outside normal school time and the school plans to introduce other subjects related to the arts. Links with other institutions are good in Years 10 and 11, especially those engendered by the vocational courses, which include business links with a very high profile local professional football club, museums and stately homes.

18. Good provision is made for pupils with special educational needs. An effective system ensures that every pupil with identified needs is supported with their learning. The pupils are assigned to one of the eight classroom assistants, known as their "key worker", and receive daily support with basic skills during tutor time. Information on each child's learning needs is passed to teachers in each subject, so they can adapt their teaching accordingly. Meetings of teacher representatives from each subject are held regularly, enabling the special educational needs co-ordinator to provide training or disseminate information and teachers to raise any concerns they may have. Individual Education Plans meet the requirements of the Code of Practice and are distributed to each department. The classroom assistants work effectively in lessons under the direction of subject teachers, helping all pupils with their learning, and extra, specialised support is provided for disaffected pupils to help their return to the classroom. The positive effects of this support can be measured: nearly all pupils with special educational needs reach standards at the end of Year 9 that exceed expectations. In Years 10 and 11, progress is more varied, but this can often be attributed to poor attendance; those who attend regularly achieve very well. Work still remains to be done on implementing fully the latest revisions of the Code of Practice for special educational needs.

Pupils' personal development is very good and, as a result of good teaching and learning, they achieve very well.

19. Because of the school's excellent care for pupils, they make very good strides in their personal development. In the parents' eyes the school is very good at helping their child to mature and to be responsible. Inspectors agree fully with these sentiments.

20. The good quality of teaching and of learning is the main contributor to the pupils' very good personal development. Often very positive experiences in the classroom are catalysts that bring the pupils to an appreciation of the enjoyment they can find in learning, which leads to very good achievement.

21. The good teaching, of which there is much more than at the time of the previous inspection (a fact noted by the parents in their questionnaire returns), stimulates learning because of the wide variety of methods used. In a Year 9 English lesson with numerous pupils who found learning difficult, the teacher organised for example, silent reading, group discussions, question and answer sessions and shading in certain parts of a text to break up time and to sustain concentration and confidence. The teacher's manner was constantly respectful and the pupils repaid this by taking a serious interest in the things they were doing.

The teacher's humour created a warm atmosphere that brought out the best in the pupils who, as a result, achieved very well. Similarly in a Year 9 history lesson, the pupils were led to thinking in new and different ways about world events; in the process, a particularly capable classroom assistant helped pupils with special educational needs. In Year 11 GCSE art and design lessons, the pupils are able to achieve very well working in a calm, purposeful atmosphere of deep concentration and having their ideas challenged very well by the teachers.

22. Personal and social education lessons play important parts in pupils' personal development. The themes studied contribute very well to the teaching of citizenship. Sometimes the topics appear dry, but very good teaching and collaboration with classroom assistants, in Year 8, brought to life the topic of different types of employment, so the pupils achieved very well.

23. Much good teaching helps the pupils to learn how to collaborate. They do this in full class, group and paired learning activities that let them assert their own thinking, but also listen carefully to that of others. There were numerous very good examples of pupils doing this. In a Year 11 GNVQ ICT lesson, excellent teaching helped the pupils to engage in some impressive group discussions on joint projects; they co-operated particularly well and excellent support from the teacher led them to think more clearly about the audience they were to target. Because they worked so well together, the pupils' listening to their peers provided extra information on a range of scientific and social topics. Team building activities with Year 11 pupils in an excellent personal and social education lesson faced the class with challenges, such as carrying an object over a ravine. The pupils were engrossed in negotiating what to do, thinking logically and gaining an awareness of the importance of teamwork and the importance of having confidence in others to succeed. A very good music lesson helped the pupils to criticise positively the work of their fellows who had, as pairs, for example, given performances on drum and guitar.

24. The best teaching challenges and praises at the same time: 'What do you think? What makes you say that?' followed by 'That was a brilliant answer' were important features of a Year 11 lesson in which the pupils made very good progress in understanding not only the poetic language but also the thoughts and feelings expressed in verse by a black poet. The very subject matter, racism, contributed greatly to the pupils' personal development. In another excellent English lesson, the teacher encouraged the pupils to make their own decisions and to put forward their own points of view, which they did confidently, unafraid to disagree or to express a minority viewpoint. The speed with which the lesson moved forward and the way in which its different parts were inter-linked were exemplary.

25. Although homework causes some consternation to a few parents, inspectors found that its setting and completion make a significant contribution to the pupils' personal development and to their achievement. The very discipline of regular homework led older pupils to recognise its importance, though some had reservations about the completion of coursework as part of homework, thinking that rates were sometimes excessive. The school's excellent caring disposition is apparent in the homework clubs available to pupils so they are able to gain access to helpful books and computer programmes for homework.

26. The very careful attention paid to achievement through setting targets for improvement also pays off very well; it raises standards and gives the pupils a real sense of responsibility. Based on previous attainment, any individual's predicted grades are monitored very carefully and the sophisticated system of support now in place has been a major reason behind the continuing improvements in standards since the previous inspection. The targets the school sets for itself mirror the practice with individuals and are demanding. With current Year 11 pupils' starting points as 11 year-olds in mind it will be remarkable if last year's

GCSE results can be sustained, but the high levels of achievement reached by the pupils have led to a sequence of pleasant surprises in the recent past.

27. Beyond the classroom the school provides numerous extra opportunities for the pupils' personal development. Many out-of-school activities, organised on two evenings per week when the school has thoughtfully laid on special late transport are very well supported. A survey conducted by the staff shows that the pupils who launch themselves with greatest keenness into the programme are the ones who also achieve best all round. Musicals, plays, sports activities, dance and homework clubs all provide ideal chances for the pupils to become more accomplished, interesting young persons; interviews with a sample show just how well this occurs.

28. Careers education is very good and a very good programme of work experience further underpins personal development. An open evening for providers of such experiences is much appreciated by the pupils who also feel it helps enormously that they are expected to attend parent consultation meetings so that a full dialogue takes place.

29. Responsibility is taken very seriously in a school that has a graduated prefect system with selection at the end of Year 9 and relevant selection procedures to positions as senior prefects in Year 11. The school rewards success in many ways, not least for regular attendance. A school council has started recently and the school's already well-established procedures for consulting pupils typify the esteem in which they are held and their acceptance as team players in the provision of their own education.

30. The pupils' pathways to their next steps in education and training are well prepared in consultation with other providers and their experiences in the school prepare them singularly well for such steps.

The school gets very good support from the parents and the community.

31. The very pleasing results and very high return rate of questionnaires indicate very strong parental satisfaction with the school. During the pre-inspection meeting, attended by forty parents, not a single adverse comment was made about provision. Parents are clearly very impressed with the ways the school cares for their children and the governors also play their important parts in working with the school. Such positive partnerships raise standards and are part of the very strong sense of common purpose, typified by first-rate support for some good quality sporting, drama and music productions the pupils and hard-working staff put on regularly.

32. Indications of how such a purpose spreads out into the community came from a very enthusiastic group of friends of the school who met inspectors to expand on a very wide range of background interest and commitment to helping. Representatives of official schemes to promote pupils' welfare, retired persons who went to considerable lengths to procure resources for the school, partner primary school head teachers and local industrialists were among numerous others who saw the school as a model of good practice. They applauded not only the high standards the school obtained, but also how it fitted so well within the community.

33. Arts college status has given added impetus to the school's community dimension. Well-advanced schemes include services to local schools and partnerships with very high-profile schools in the wider area. The presence of a Chinese and an Asian artist in residence captivates the pupils in lessons and provides many opportunities upon which the school is building to promote the arts.

34. A new sports hall is broadening the pupils' opportunities to practise in lessons and take part in inter-form and inter-school activities. Several sports organisations have already signed up and make good use of the facilities. The course for aspiring chefs brings pupils into contact with the wider community and mentoring arrangements bring them into contact with governors and others who support the school. Pupils who find the curriculum difficult also have opportunities to study off site, broadening, for most, their contacts with the outside world.

35. Off-site activities that promote personal development and help learning, but are also part of the contacts with the wider community, include annual weekend and week-long residential for pupils in Years 7 and 8, visits to the Lakes, France and skiing trips. Such activities make significant contributions to the pupils' education and to the vibrancy that abounds in the school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Some teaching does not cater well enough for lower attainers.

36. A lot of attention has been paid to teaching quality and the results are clearly seen in the substantial improvements since the previous inspection. The school's planning, training and checking procedures are very effective. Nearly all lessons are well prepared with relevant stages that leave the pupils clear as to what they are to do and aware, at the end, of what has been accomplished; some lessons are not so well organised, or timing goes awry. There is, scope for further concentration on helping teachers to devise work that responds well to the situations found in each of their classes.

37. The following examples are rare, but during the inspection, lower attainers were occasionally not stretched enough and their learning suffered as a result. In some science lessons, for example, the pace was too slow and challenge too low.

38. A lack of pace in a Year 10 GCSE art and design lesson with mainly lower attainers meant the pupils' output was small; their interest waned so much that they did the work that was eventually set without enthusiasm or care. The teacher spent far too much time trying to organise the pupils into working groups. The situation was aggravated by the pupils' inflexibility and their irrelevant need to establish superiority over their peers. Because of inattention and sporadic attendance, the pupils were unable to recall what they had done the day before. The amount of time dedicated to a single activity was too long in some lessons. In a Year 9 geography lesson, for example, the pupils' immaturity meant that work done on fault lines was beyond the concentration and understanding of the lower attainers in the class.

The demand for ICT resources is outstripping provision.

39. Whilst the school meets its legal requirement to teach it as a subject, there is a shortfall in the ways ICT assists learning in other subjects. Its use in class is not widespread enough. There is good practice; one good example of pupils using computers to devise tourist data for visitors to a football tournament typified the ways ICT helps learning in the leisure and tourism course. Teacher training has been undertaken, but the availability of ICT equipment falls short of potential usage. Science teachers, for example, are unable to carry out data logging or modelling through lack of equipment. On numerous other occasions, lesson planning is curtailed because of difficulties getting to computers. The governors' purchasing decisions have created a demand that is outstripping provision.

40. Of particular importance in the consistent upgrading of teaching and learning quality is the availability and use of sophisticated ICT. In, for example, some art and design, science and modern foreign languages lessons, the teachers' highly-imaginative uses of specialised equipment, which attaches a computer to a projector and allows multiple ways of presenting, testing and evaluating interactively with the pupils the work being done, set learning alight. All pupils were enthralled, took the opportunities very seriously and made very good progress in their learning. Such equipment and the use of computers in other ways adds dimensions to learning that match the attractions of high technology the pupils meet in their everyday lives outside and, in the hands of trained teachers places learning on a higher plane.

Pupils' aspirations are not high enough in science; those in Years 10 and 11 underachieve compared with other subjects

41. Standards in science are too low. When they arrive in school as 11 year-olds national test results suggest they are doing better in science than in either English or mathematics. By the time they take national tests for 14 year-olds at the end of Year 9, they are still in advance of English and mathematics compared with similar schools, but by a smaller margin. On average, the pupils' GCSE results are almost a grade lower than their average GCSE points score; only one-third of the candidates obtained a higher, A*-C, GCSE grade in 2002, substantially fewer than in other subjects, yet the 2002 results were an improvement over previous years.

42. The school's leadership has arranged useful extra help for science and some staffing problems have been resolved. A new head of subject appreciates the enormous support she receives and has set some important targets for improvement based upon analysed data. New textbooks have been purchased and the course for Years 10 and 11 has changed to try to overcome the pupils' literacy and numeracy weaknesses and Year 11 revision sessions are helping. The subject's profile is, however, still too low.

43. Some teaching does not engage the pupils sufficiently, so they have only low aspirations. In one Year 11 lesson, for example, the teacher's thinking on food chains was somewhat muddled and the low-level tasks did not help the pupils to grasp the idea. Pupils were left unsure as to the main difference between a herbivore and a carnivore; as a result, they found it hard to create an accurate poster showing food chain processes. Too much work was dedicated to cutting and pasting in this and in another Year 10 science lesson in which time was wasted and the pace of learning very slow. The pupils were unable to recall what they had done the previous lesson and much chattering and disinterest permeated the lesson in which learning was, as a result, unsatisfactory. The timing of the lesson was weak; the teacher ran out of time before being able to conduct a resume of what had been covered in the session.

44. The department is unable to use scientific computer applications and science teaching that is sometimes excellent is not shared sufficiently. Sometimes teachers struggle with aspects of science that are not part of their specialisms.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

45. In order to improve provision even further, the staff and governors should:

- (1) Concentrate even further on devising work that is tailored to the learning of lower attaining pupils. Spread good practice by checking closely on how successful work has been in meeting the needs of all pupils in each class.
(Paragraphs: 36-38)

- (2) Budget, when funding is available, to extend the range of learning experiences pupils enjoy, particularly ICT applications such as computer-linked white boards.
(Paragraphs: 39-40)

- (3) Raise the pupils' aspirations in science by improving the quality of some teaching so that it matches the best, of which there is a lot, already in the department.
(Paragraphs: 41-44)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	52
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	24

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	8	15	20	7	2	0	0
Percentage	15	29	39	13	4	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents about two percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	760
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	160

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	32
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	108

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	11

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	8
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	13

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.6

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.2

National comparative data	7.8
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National comparative data	1.2
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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 9)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	78	73	151

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	34	51	49
	Girls	48	44	46
	Total	82	95	95
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	54 (65)	63 (60)	63 (56)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	24 (32)	29 (31)	18 (25)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	52	51	53
	Girls	52	50	50
	Total	104	101	103
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	68 (63)	66 (56)	68 (60)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	22 (26)	30 (23)	23 (18)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	61	63	124

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	24	54	60
	Girls	31	55	61
	Total	55	109	121
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	44 (37)	88 (95)	98 (100)
	National	50 (48)	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 pupil	School	35.3 (35.7)
	National	39.8 (39)

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 pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	46
	National	N/A

Ethnic background of pupils**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	723	7	2
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	1	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2	0	0
Black or Black British – African	3	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	10	0	0
Chinese	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	49.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.9

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	21
Total aggregate hours worked per week	489

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	69.9
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.7
Key Stage 4	19.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	2 107 367
Total expenditure	2 067 733
Expenditure per pupil	2 772
Balance brought forward from previous year	57 956
Balance carried forward to next year	39 633

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	14
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	18

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
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	760
Number of questionnaires returned	581

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	37	51	8	3	1
My child is making good progress in school.	44	49	4	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	35	55	5	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	34	47	13	4	2
The teaching is good.	49	46	2	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	38	46	12	3	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	58	36	3	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	70	29	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	38	47	10	2	3
The school is well led and managed.	57	36	2	1	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	48	45	4	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	46	41	5	2	7