

INSPECTION REPORT

CLARE MOUNT SCHOOL

Moreton

LEA area: Wirral

Unique reference number: 105129

Headteacher: Mrs L Clare

Reporting inspector: Mr J Plumb
16930

Dates of inspection: 18th – 20th March 2003

Inspection number: 249314

Short inspection carried out under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Special
School category: Community special
Age range of students: 11 to 19 years
Gender of students: Mixed

School address: Fender Lane
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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs B Moores

Date of previous inspection: May 1998

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Clare Mount is a community special school for boys and girls aged between 11 and 19 years. With 217 students on roll, it is larger than the average special school. All students have statements of special educational needs identifying moderate learning difficulties but some of the students have additional and more complex learning and behavioural needs. The profile of special educational needs is more complex than at the time of the last inspection. The attainment of students on entry is well below the standards attained by students of the same age nationally because of their special educational needs. Just over 63 per cent of students are eligible for free school meals, a figure well above the national average. This is an indicator that a very significant proportion of students experience considerable disadvantage. There are very few minority ethnic students and only two who have English as an additional language; neither is at an early stage of English acquisition. This Beacon school is at the cutting edge of a very significant number of local and national initiatives and has achieved Sportsmark and Artsmark awards. Although the school is committed to finding as many opportunities as possible for its students in mainstream schools, this strategy is at an early stage of development on the Wirral.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Clare Mount is a very effective school with a number of excellent features. Students with a wide range of special educational needs, including some with quite complex learning and behavioural difficulties, achieve very good standards across the subjects they study. Because of very good and excellent teaching, students make very good progress in literacy and numeracy and also in their personal development and independence. The headteacher, in partnership with the senior leadership team, provides excellent leadership. Management systems are excellent. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Very good teaching, particularly in English, mathematics, art and design and physical education has led to very good achievement in those subjects and across the curriculum.
- The excellent personal development of the students, and in particular their moral development, has produced happy confident students, who have excellent relationships with each other and with their teachers and other adults in the school, and have very good attitudes to their work.
- Parents think very highly of the school and the way in which it cares for their children. The school's partnership with parents and carers is very productive.
- The excellent leadership and management provided by the headteacher and her senior staff have produced a strongly self-evaluating school in which all staff feel involved.
- Learning support assistants make a valuable contribution to the standards achieved; the service they provide is very well managed.
- Curriculum opportunities are very good in the sixth form.

What could be improved

- Budgeting, to eradicate the deficit and set a balanced budget for the next financial year.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good improvement since it was last inspected in May 1998. The quality of teaching and learning has improved. Strategies for developing students' literacy and numeracy skills are very much better than they were when the school was last inspected. The curriculum, particularly in Years 10 and 11 and also post-16, and accreditation opportunities have improved. Leadership and management have improved. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's performance are

significantly better than at the time of the last inspection. The targets on individual education plans are more specific. Opportunities provided for students' spiritual development are much better than they were at the time of the last inspection, but there is still scope to improve further the opportunities to promote students' cultural development. The number and quality of learning support staff are much improved.

STANDARDS

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

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

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

Students make very good progress and achieve high standards measured against their prior attainment. The very effective implementation of the Key Stage 3 strategy ensures that all students make very good gains in English, mathematics and science. Many students, by Year 9, attain standards in aspects of physical education, particularly in gymnastics, tennis and swimming, which are close to national expectations. By Year 11, many students attain the expected national level in art and design. Gains in social confidence and independence are particularly good. By age 19, students are very well equipped to cope well with the next step into the adult world. Students with challenging, need-related behavioural difficulties begin to gain in self-esteem, which leads to an improvement in their behaviour. Overall standards achieved throughout the school in all subjects are very good. Standards achieved in the sixth form are very good.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students have very good attitudes to learning. They enjoy school and are enthusiastic about learning. Their keenness to learn contributes to the very good standards they achieve.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good. Students are courteous and in many lessons observed their excellent behaviour contributed to their very good learning. They are a joy to teach.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are excellent. Because of very good provision, students make very good gains in social confidence and independence.
Attendance	Very good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching is very good throughout the school and a very significant proportion of teaching is excellent. During the inspection, 27 lessons were observed. Teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons, and at least very good in 78 per cent of lessons. The very high quality of teaching is a very significant contributory factor to the very effective learning on the part of the students and the very good progress they make. The strongest element in the teaching observed was the very good knowledge and understanding which staff had of the special educational needs of each individual student. Consequently, students are exceptionally well managed and so develop in self-confidence and independence. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in English, mathematics and science. It was at least very good in all other subjects observed and excellent in geography and physical education. The teaching of personal, social and health education and citizenship is very good and contributes very significantly to students' personal development. Very good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to support the teaching of all subjects. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is very good and students are very well equipped in the important life skills required to survive effectively in a robust adult world.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is very good. The vocational courses on offer in the sixth form have excellent features. Accreditation opportunities throughout the school are very good. The strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy are very good. The provision for promoting citizenship and for personal, social and health education is very good. Extra-curricular provision is a very significant strength of the school.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	The provision for the few students with English as an additional language is very good.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for students' spiritual and cultural development is good, but more could be done through the curriculum to promote students' awareness of cultural diversity. Provision for moral development is excellent, while that for social development is very good.
How well the school cares for its students	Procedures for ensuring students' welfare, including child protection, are very good. Procedures to ensure students are safe and not at risk are very good. The monitoring of attendance is very good. Assessment is used very well to demonstrate the progress made by students and to inform planning to raise standards further.

Parents and carers have the highest opinion of the school; they consider that they are listened to sensitively and that the school responds positively to their ideas and concerns. Because they are so valued by the school, the parents' and carers' involvement in their children's learning makes a very significant contribution to their high standards.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership is excellent. Management is excellent. The senior leadership team works in an effective partnership and the clear structures and systems ensure that all staff are involved in effective decision making and are fully involved in every aspect of school life.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The governing body meets its statutory responsibilities very well. The governing body is both very effective and supportive of the headteacher.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Monitoring and evaluation of the school's work are excellent. All staff are successfully involved in school self-review and, through the excellent model used, strengths are celebrated by all and areas for improvement are successfully identified.
The strategic use of resources	Learning resources are used very effectively. Learning support assistants are effectively deployed and make a valuable contribution to students' very good learning. Very good use is made of grants available to the school. The principles of best value are applied well. The school recognises the urgent need to get out of its licensed deficit budget situation and the importance of setting a balanced budget so that the school is placed in a more secure position.

Teachers have a very good range of special educational needs expertise. The accommodation has strengths and weaknesses. Specialist rooms for art and design, rural science, science and food technology are very good. The appearance of parts of the outside of the building is grim but the dedication and commitment of the staff has resulted in the inside of the building having attractive displays which create an exciting learning environment.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fact that this is a very happy, positive and caring school • The fact that teachers are passionate about their work and know each child and parent by name • The brilliant teachers who have successfully created an ethos of 'one big family' • The emphasis on the arts and school performances which helps their children use their imagination and successfully boosts self-confidence • Very good post-16 work experience • The fact that the school is amazingly good at developing their children's independence and relevant life skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The outside of the building which 'looks like a prison' could be more appealing

The inspection team fully agrees with parents' positive views. The school certainly operates as one 'big family' where all students are valued and the emphasis is on building the confidence and self-esteem of every student and preparing every student so that they are equipped to cope well with the next step in life's important journey. The school is very aware of parents' legitimate concern about the quite appalling appearance of some parts of the external building; financial constraints have prevented the governing

body from making improvements on the outside but they have concentrated on creating an exciting learning environment on the inside.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Very good teaching, particularly in English, mathematics, art and design and physical education, has led to very good achievement in those subjects and across the curriculum.

1. Standards in English are high across the school. The implementation of the Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy is very effective and the school has worked hard to develop its own scheme of work so that tasks are relevant to the students' abilities. This enables students to make very good progress in English lessons and to achieve very well. There has been considerable improvement since the last inspection.
2. Students enjoy reading a wide range of texts. For example, students in Year 8 showed high levels of interest in the way the author of the book 'Krinkle Krax' created suspense within the text. They likened it to their recent viewing of a popular soap opera, with one student commenting "It's just like Coronation Street, it ends just as you are about to find out what happens".
3. Very good teaching in literacy is helping to improve standards. Teachers make very good use of multi-sensory approaches and resources to improve spelling and writing skills. The excellent relationships between staff and students bring out the best in each student and ensure very high standards of behaviour. High expectations are a key feature of lessons and the very warm personal approach from staff stimulates students to try hard and achieve success.
4. Very good leadership of the subject has enabled a consistency in the approach to literacy that ensures all students achieve as well as possible. The use of literacy to support other subjects, such as science, personal, social and health education, and humanities, is very good and has improved considerably since the previous inspection.
5. Drama is very well used to improve communication skills and students are developing into confident young people who are willing to offer opinions and listen carefully to others. Emphasis is now being rightly placed on the development of alternative means of recording experiences, so that those students who find writing difficult, can record through tapes, videos and ICT.
6. Mathematics has developed well since the last report. The National Numeracy Strategy has been introduced very effectively into Years 7 and 8 and very good leadership together with a high standard of teaching has contributed to consistent improvement in standards of achievement.
7. The mathematics curriculum continues to be very good. Students receive a broad curriculum with good balance between experiences of number, space, shape and the use and manipulation of data. In addition, they are challenged within mental mathematics sessions and have good access to ICT for the development of spreadsheet and other data-processing skills. Since the last report, the National Numeracy Strategy has been implemented in Years 7 and 8, with detailed plans for its extension next year to Year 9. This has been very successful. The three-part lesson now allows more practice in the mental skills associated with mathematics, while plenary sessions encourage students to examine what they have learned and what still needs to be done.

8. The teaching of mathematics overall is good, with many lessons that are very good indeed. Most lessons are delivered with pace, humour and the very good use of a range of resources to exemplify and reinforce concepts. Thus, in a very good Year 8 lesson with the second set, the teacher started with a puzzle, how to arrange numbers, including negative numbers, in order. Each number was coded and the correct order resulted in the spelling of the word 'purple'. This was followed by individual and group work identifying fractions of shapes and then identifying equivalent fractions. All of the activities were modelled very well by the teacher, who used the whiteboard and overhead projector to very good effect. Students received instruction and examples in a wide range of ways, using sight, sound and touch. This, together with the very good knowledge of students shown by the teacher, contributed to very good progress by all students in terms of both skills and confidence in mathematics. It is not surprising that students say that they enjoy mathematics very much. Inspection evidence suggested that where teaching is less brisk some benefit would be derived from the sharing of good teaching practice across the department.
9. A Year 9 mathematics lesson exemplified the very relevant and effective use of ICT throughout the mathematics curriculum. For this lesson, the group used the ICT suite. This ensured that every student had access to reliable hardware which, together with the very good knowledge and excellent classroom management displayed by the teacher and learning support assistant, provided a first class resource and one that encouraged every student to participate to the full. The lesson started with the teacher and learning support assistant working very well together in presenting students with a guessing game, how to form certain sums of money with limited numbers of coins. This, in turn, led to the pricing of items in a café using the coins. Very soon each student was able to enter menus on a spreadsheet based on how many items could be bought for a certain sum of money. Some students needed more assistance than others, but all showed great confidence with the computers and the data-handling software used. Higher attaining students within the group were able to complete the early tasks and move on to using more complex formulae within the spreadsheets. Each student worked at an appropriate level and all made at least good and usually very good progress in the space of 40 minutes.
10. Good and very good mathematics teaching provides a sound basis for enabling students to solve problems independently during the first three years. The success is shown by the improvement in the number and quality of the results in accredited courses at age 16. At Certificate of Achievement level, eight students passed in 2001 and 19 in 2002, all at grade 3. Currently ten students are on GCSE courses. This represents very good progress for many students who entered the school with a patchy and insecure knowledge of mathematics.
11. The management of mathematics is very good. There has been a strong emphasis on the development of literacy skills, the regular completion of homework and the development of student self-assessment within the subject. In addition, good work has been carried out in the monitoring of teaching, the development of regular assessment and on action taken as a result of these assessments. There has been a steady progress in mathematics over the past few years. Inspection evidence indicated that this progress is likely to continue.
12. Art and design continues to be a very real strength of the school. Very good teaching and imaginative planning have meant that a large number of students attain GCSE qualifications before they leave Clare Mount.

13. The inspection team was asked to look at the provision for art and design within the school in particular. It did so and was very impressed by many facets of the subject. The very good art teaching enables all students to gain an accredited qualification. In 2002, nine students gained GCSE passes, five at Grade C and this represented a very real achievement, placing many students on a level with their peers in mainstream schools.
14. The art and design curriculum is very well managed and resourced by the co-ordinator. It provides a wide range of media experiences, links with classical artists and, above all, opportunities for students to use their imagination and planning skills. The co-ordinator has taken every opportunity to keep up to date with the possibilities of ICT within the field of art. Some work is already undertaken using basic paint and drawing programs. The links with local training initiatives in the field of computers and art is already being included in curriculum planning for art and design and is likely to enhance both student enjoyment of, and achievement within, the subject.
15. However, the greatest contribution of this subject lies in its celebration of student achievement, examples of which are to be seen all around the school. In addition, it places a premium on looking at the wide range of cultures in the world and this, in turn, adds to students' ability to value other countries, other faiths and other students.
16. The provision for physical education is excellent and makes a very valuable contribution to students' personal development and to their social skills, particularly their skills of working collaboratively as team members. The junior sports leadership award (JSLA) in Year 10 and the community sports leadership award (CSLA) in Year 11 also make a very significant contribution to students' awareness of what constitutes very good citizenship.
17. Standards of attainment are close to the national expectations in gymnastics, in swimming in Year 7 and in tennis by Year 9 because of the very good teaching and the perseverance of the students who are so determined to succeed. The quality of teaching in swimming is very good because it is based on expert subject knowledge and also excellent knowledge of the needs of individual students. As a result, students make excellent gains in improving their stroke and breathing techniques and also outstanding gains in confidence in the water. In tennis, the challenge and high expectations on the part of the teacher result in students developing positioning on the tennis court and hitting the ball close to a level expected for students of their age. All Year 10 and Year 11 students enjoy participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and this makes a very significant contribution to their personal development, particularly to their ability to be independent. During the inspection, all students observed were fully included in all activities and there was considerable evidence of them having much enjoyment and fun. The contribution made to students' gains in confidence by the swimming session in Year 7 and the extra-curricular tennis club open to lower-attaining students of all ages was particularly impressive.
18. Every lunchtime the physical education co-ordinator, in partnership with the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme co-ordinator, provides physical activities which are open to all students. The programme of fun activities provided contribute successfully to building students' confidence as well as to developing their physical skills of co-ordination and their personal skills of functioning effectively as part of a team.
19. The school does very well in inter-school sporting events. As a result of the excellent leadership and management of physical education, older students gain in the confidence to use sports centres in their own time and develop individual fitness

programmes. The confidence they acquire whilst at school prepares them well to look after their bodies and to keep fit in adult life, and this is no mean achievement by this very successful department.

The excellent personal development of the students, and in particular their moral development, has produced happy confident students, who have excellent relationships with each other and with their teachers and other adults in the school, and have very good attitudes to their work.

20. All students, including those with complex behavioural needs, have a very positive attitude to learning and this makes a very significant contribution to their learning. In all lessons and around the school, behaviour is very good. The very good personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme and the very good provision for citizenship makes a very valuable contribution to students' excellent relationships.
21. During the inspection, students were most courteous and helpful towards the inspection team and it was a real privilege to talk with them. Many instances of older students helping younger students were observed. Because of the quality of the opportunities provided, students make very good gains in their development of independence and important life skills. These include, for post-16 students, independent travel opportunities to college and the Laird shipyard, and students in Years 10 and 11 have opportunities to plan and lay on sporting events for younger students and to take on responsibility for welcoming visitors to the school. The joy that students experience in belonging to the school community was evident in the outstanding musical performance they put on with such confidence at the end of term. This high quality performance was greatly enjoyed by parents and the inspection team alike.

Parents think very highly of the school and the way in which it cares for their children. The school's partnership with parents and carers is very productive.

22. The school translates its caring ethos into the daily life of its students by ensuring a very high level of provision for their welfare and personal protection.
23. The very efficient arrangements for child protection and health and safety make a very substantial contribution to the atmosphere of warmth and wellbeing that makes students feel safe and secure. As a result they enjoy coming to school, as can be seen in the very high attendance levels compared with similar schools. The deputy headteacher, as the designated person for child protection, ensures that the local education authority procedures are well rehearsed. As well as undergoing regular training, she arranges training sessions for adults in the school to ensure a high level of alertness, and she maintains personal contact with the child protection officer of the social services department.
24. The same person co-ordinates very effectively the very detailed arrangements for health and safety throughout the school. Vehicles and pedestrians are strictly segregated as the students arrive at the school. The transport escorts lead students to the assembly point in the school playground where they are met by the teacher on duty. Messages from parents are handed to the teacher, and any unaccounted absences are relayed to the school office where the secretary telephones the relevant family or carer within ten minutes of registration. The school takes very seriously this aspect of its duty of care, and its strategy to promote full attendance is allocated to a very senior member

of the staff team. 'Health and safety' is a standing item on the agenda of staff meetings, and all adults in the school are made aware of their responsibility to report hazards and to conduct risk assessments in their classrooms. These procedures are further enhanced by termly inspections by the school's health and safety committee and by annual risk assessments conducted by the local education authority. Fire drills are practised each term with an eye to improving evacuation time, no matter where the fire is located. The very detailed arrangements for first aid are co-ordinated by a nominated member of staff. She, and many other adults in the school, hold a current certificate in first aid. Proper records are maintained. All the above procedures create a climate of security and wellbeing that makes a major contribution to the education and personal development of this school's charges.

25. The parents/carers consider that the welfare for their children within the school is excellent and cannot be faulted. Parents have a very positive view of the school, and their involvement in their children's learning both at home and at school makes a very telling contribution to the school's very high standards.
26. The overall response to the parents' questionnaire and the comments at the parents' meeting with the registered inspector were overwhelmingly positive, indicating a very high level of support for the school and its managers. No significant concerns were expressed on any one of the questions in the survey; on the contrary, many parents wrote additional supportive comments on the back of their questionnaires. One parent made a point of including office staff, midday helpers and classroom assistants among the people who had contributed to her daughter's education and helped to build her confidence, adding that she will miss them all when she leaves the school. Another describes the staff as 'absolutely brilliant'. Even on the usually divisive question of homework, parents agreed that the school has got it right, highlighting the very good use made of the home/school diary to keep parents in touch with their children's progress and to share concerns. Such exceptionally positive comments from parents demonstrate a very productive partnership that makes a very substantial contribution to the education of Clare Mount's students. The arrangements for reporting and consultation and review meetings are excellent.

The excellent leadership and management provided by the headteacher and her senior staff have produced a strongly self-evaluating school in which all staff feel involved.

27. Leadership is excellent. Since the last inspection, the headteacher has secured very good improvements in the curriculum, systems for monitoring and evaluation and the deployment of learning support assistants, despite a period of considerable turbulence and a change of personnel in the senior management team. Following the departure of one of two deputy headteachers, she has seized the opportunity to restructure the senior management team, and has built around herself a well-qualified and high-performing team. All members of this team lead most effectively in their own areas of responsibility. For example, the deputy headteacher has a significant pastoral role, and secures high standards of pastoral care and welfare. Three assistant headteachers between them take on leadership of the post-16 provision, the curriculum and its monitoring, assessment and tracking of students' and students' progress. Increased delegation has strengthened the management team and increased its capacity for improvement.
28. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's work is excellent. It has improved in two key areas since the last inspection. School self-review is now well established. The

headteacher, supported by other members of the senior management team, takes a lead in this process; there is a clear framework, and a manageable cycle that involves all staff. As a result, staff feel thoroughly involved in the process, which successfully identifies strengths and areas for further development.

29. Curriculum monitoring is linked well to the evaluation of students' progress. Detailed analysis of assessment information enables the school to measure the progress made over time, compare the performance of its students with those in similar schools nationally, and compare the performance of different groups within the school. The results of this analysis are used well in annual subject reviews, an innovation introduced since the last inspection.
30. Every year, each subject leader meets with the two assistant headteachers responsible for both assessment and curriculum monitoring respectively. A standing agenda is used in these meetings, and each person contributes to a full review of the subject. Results of monitoring of planning, direct teaching, students' achievements against targets set, and analysis of assessment information are all taken into account, and areas for further development are identified. Examples have included the need to develop a GCSE mathematics course, and the need to provide English booster classes for higher-attaining students approaching national tests in Year 9. Resource and staff development needs are also identified. There is also evaluation of the impact of any additional resources that may have been allocated, such as the use of a French assistant, or funds to support extra-curricular activities. Subject leaders feel very well supported by these annual reviews; they find the approach particularly useful when they are new to the role of co-ordinator, or where they are the only ones who teach a subject.
31. Well-understood and transparent arrangements for monitoring and evaluation, as well as for the allocation of resources, are key factors in the successful development of a whole-school approach to monitoring and evaluation. Although the school has a budgetary deficit, the headteacher makes best use of the resources available.

Learning support assistants make a valuable contribution to the standards achieved; the service they provide is very well managed.

32. The previous report asked the school to liaise with the local education authority to provide a support staff level in line with national recommendations. The school has addressed this issue very well. Although the number of support staff is still below nationally recommended levels, there has been a significant increase and those now employed are of a very high quality, making a considerable contribution to students' progress.
33. Learning support assistants are allocated to curriculum departments and this works very well in ensuring that they are full and equal members within the planning and delivery of lessons. It also means that assistants can, and do, receive regular training within their own subject areas. In addition, the imaginative timetabling at the end of the school day allows these staff to feed back assessment information to class teachers and bring their own plans and records up to date. Within classes, all of the support staff provide sensitive and informed advice to students. Thus, in a very good Year 9 mathematics lesson in the ICT suite, the teacher outlined the development of spreadsheet skills. Both he and his support assistant were agreed about the objectives and clearly knew each student well. This meant that, when students worked on their own, skilled advice could be provided that challenged each individual student at an

appropriate level. It was clear that both teacher and assistant had the relevant ICT skills to allow them to provide advice which supported students, but also left them enough 'space' to work out their own solutions. This was done with a sensitivity and clarity that allowed very good progress to be made by almost every student in the space of 40 minutes.

34. Three additional learning support assistants have been trained as learning mentors. Their role is to identify, support and monitor students who experience difficulties within the school. They see themselves as 'breaking down the barriers to learning'. The inspection team was very impressed with the expertise of this team, the sensitivity with which they supported students and the very close and effective contacts they had with families. The role is a complex and demanding one, but has been developed in a very imaginative way. The mentors bring a wide range of youth work skills to their role and a commitment which ensures thorough ongoing support for the most vulnerable students. Two initiatives exemplify the success of this venture. At lunchtimes, the mentors run clubs to occupy and develop students. These have the informality of youth clubs, but are well structured and extremely supportive. They provide a continuity and security for students that enrich the lunchtimes and prepare them well for work in the afternoons. In addition, the mentors arrange visits to theatres, bowling and sporting events as well as alternative courses. The involvement of students in army preparation courses, for example, has been a considerable success and assisted in the inclusion of a number of older students in the adult world outside school. This is a model of what learning mentoring should be.
35. The management of all support staff is very good indeed. All of these staff have a direct link to the deputy headteacher who ensures that they have appropriate professional training in all areas of their work. Their knowledge of first aid and child protection procedures is first class. As line manager, the deputy headteacher ensures that their needs are monitored and developments are made to make the maximum use of their many skills. The overall quality of support and the very effective management adds significantly to the development of independence and self-worth in students throughout the school.
36. High quality work-experience opportunities and college links enable students to develop independence and maturity as they move through Year 12 and beyond. Very effective personal education contributes greatly to students' enjoyment of school and college life. They are developing into polite, courteous young people who are able to make valid choices, through their experiences, about their own futures. Comments from employers suggest that work placements are very successful. One commented that a student 'has come on in leaps and bounds and is pleasant and confident', another that 'the student is great with customers and staff, always looks smart and arrives punctually'.
37. The wide-ranging opportunities and high-quality teaching and support available, all have a very positive impact on the high standards that students consistently achieve.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Budgeting, to eradicate the deficit and set a balanced budget for the next financial year.

38. The school is currently running a deficit budget, with the agreement of the local education authority, while the latter has been reviewing funding arrangements for special educational needs and learning support assistants. This situation is unsatisfactory; the school cannot plan efficiently and the uncertainty is not good for the morale of the highly committed staff. Swift resolution is called for so that the headteacher can plan with confidence the best use of resources, including staffing, to meet the curricular and special educational needs of the students.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

39. In order to raise standards further, the headteacher, staff and governors should:

Eradicate the licensed deficit budget situation and set a balanced budget and so position the school on a secure and confident footing for the future by:

- a) making robust decisions about the required level of staffing to meet the curricular and special educational needs of the students;
- b) capitalising on the new formula for special educational needs funding;
- c) making effective capital out of all the funding for all learning support assistants being positioned on an even playing field; and
- d) making effective use of the allocation of grant money allocated from European funding.

(Paragraph: 38)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	27
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	17

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	4	17	4	2	0	0	0
Percentage	15	63	15	7	0	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 more than three percentage points.

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	No of students
Number of students on the school's roll	217
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	137

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	2

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	3
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.47

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.57

Attainment

Because of: a) the special educational needs of the students; and b) the small numbers involved, it is not appropriate to report on positional/proportional attainment in the National Curriculum assessment tests (NCATs) at the end of Year 9. However, all students have the opportunity to access these NCATs and one high attaining student in last year's Year 9 attained a Level 5 in his mathematics NCAT and because of this the school has introduced a GCSE in mathematics this academic year. Year 11 students have opportunities to succeed in GCSEs as well as a wide range of other accredited courses. A high attaining student in 2002 attained a grade C pass in GCSE art and design and a grade D pass in GCSE drama. In fact, in 2002, four boys and one girl attained grade C passes in GCSE art and design. Post-16 students achieve considerable success in accredited vocational courses. Opportunities are provided at the appropriate level for all students to experience success both academically and in their personal and social development at a level which is appropriate to their special educational needs.

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	160	25	1
White – Irish	1	0	0
White – any other White background	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	1	2	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	0	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	51	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	31
Number of students per qualified teacher	7
Average class size	9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	16
Total aggregate hours worked per week	470

Financial information

Financial year	2001-2002
	£
Total income	1,396,640
Total expenditure	1,430,312
Expenditure per student	6,501
Balance brought forward from previous year	- 59,582
Balance carried forward to next year	- 93,254

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	6.0
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	5.6

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	216
Number of questionnaires returned	88

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	68	27	1	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	67	30	1	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	64	27	0	0	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	51	39	2	5	3
The teaching is good.	75	24	0	0	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	70	22	6	0	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	80	19	0	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	81	16	0	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	60	32	3	0	5
The school is well led and managed.	76	18	0	0	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	69	25	3	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	53	40	1	2	3

Not all horizontal columns add up to 100 per cent because some parents/carers return questionnaires with some questions left unanswered.

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

Parents/carers who returned the parent questionnaires wrote very favourably about the quality of education provided for their children. Detailed comments on the backs of the questionnaire forms indicated that parents/carers were absolutely delighted with all that this quite remarkable and wonderful school achieves for their children.