

# INSPECTION REPORT

## LOSTOCK COLLEGE

Stretford

LEA area: Trafford

Unique reference number: 106365

Headteacher: Mr L. Harris

Reporting inspector: Mrs J. Tracey  
20270

Dates of inspection: 6<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> May 2003

Inspection number: 251742

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Modern (non-selective)

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11-16

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Selby Road  
Stretford  
Manchester

Postcode: M32 9PL

Telephone number: 0161 912 5200

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Appropriate authority: Governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs J. Kilvert

Date of previous inspection: March 2001

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
20270	June Tracey	Registered inspector	Educational inclusion	<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>The school's results and pupils' achievements</p> <p>How well are pupils taught?</p> <p>How well the school is led and managed</p>
11077	Janet Harrison	Lay inspector		<p>Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
30941	Keith Brammer	Team inspector	English	
27803	Joseph Clark	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
14841	Michael Duffey	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
31779	Vivian Harrison	Team inspector	Design and technology	
23926	Douglas Howorth	Team inspector	Citizenship Geography	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
18676	Roy Meakin	Team inspector	Mathematics	
11975	Thelma McIntosh-Clark	Team inspector	Music	
19452	Anthony Pearson	Team inspector	History Religious education	
31680	Philip Redican	Team inspector	Art and design	

24887	Yvonne Salmons	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages English as an additional language	
21866	David Tracey	Team inspector	Science	
19295	Peter Wall	Team inspector	Physical education	

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## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>7</b>
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?</b>	<b>11</b>
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
<b>HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS ?</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	<b>28</b>

## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Lostock College is a smaller than average secondary modern school with 565 pupils on roll. There are almost twice as many boys as girls. The school is situated in the north of Trafford. It draws some of its pupils from areas where there are severe social problems and high unemployment. The school was recently awarded specialist status for the performing arts. It provides a range of link activities with the local community and other institutions. The mobility rate of pupils entering and leaving the school at other than the usual times is above average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals ( about 24%) is also above average. Seventeen per cent of pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds, about half being of Asian or African origin. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is slightly above average but few are at the early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils on the register of special educational needs ( 26%) is well above average. The school provides for a range of disabilities including physical, learning, behavioural and emotional difficulties. The proportion of pupils with formal statements of need is above average. Attainment on entry is well below average because a number of pupils have not acquired the basic literacy and numeracy skills expected for their age.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

Lostock College is an effective and rapidly improving school. It provides a good, relevant education for its pupils. Standards are below average in Years 9 and 11 compared with all schools but pupils achieve well in relation to their attainment on entry. This is in response to good teaching and very good leadership and management. The culture of the school is such that pupils are encouraged to value their own and others' achievement and success. The school provides good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Overall, pupils achieve well throughout the school in response to good teaching.
- The headteacher's leadership is outstanding. It fosters a good team spirit amongst all members of the community.
- The school cares very well for its pupils. It inculcates values and beliefs and encourages initiative and self-responsibility.
- The school provides very well for pupils of all abilities through its innovative curriculum and very good range of extra-curricular activities.
- The school successfully extends its expertise in performing arts to other institutions and the local community.

#### **What could be improved**

- Results in national tests and examinations could be improved further.
- More attention could be given to the development of pupils' literacy skills, particularly reading.
- There is scope for still further improvement in attendance, and in pupils' punctuality to lessons.
- There are not enough learning support assistants in some lessons to assist pupils with special learning needs.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The school has made very good improvement since its previous inspection in March 2001. Leadership and management have initiated major changes in the school's systems and procedures. Pupils' behaviour, attendance and attitudes to learning have improved in response to the changed culture in the school, better relationships and a more relevant curriculum. Teaching has improved significantly, from unsatisfactory to good. All these factors contribute to the rising standards of attainment, particularly those of the lowest-attaining pupils. The GCSE results in 2002 were the highest achieved in the last six years. The school environment has improved too - the bright, cheerful décor causes pupils to have more pride in the school. The school has recently gained specialist status for the performing arts. This has raised pupils' aspirations and confidence in themselves and the school.

### **STANDARDS**

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	E	E	E	B

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

### Years 7,8 and 9

Pupils' results in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were well below average in English and below average in mathematics and science compared with all schools. They were above average in English and well above average in mathematics and science compared with similar schools. The overall trend in pupils' average point scores over the last four years is similar to the national trend. Boys and girls attain similarly at this stage, contrary to the national picture where girls' performance is better. Pupils achieve well overall in relation to their attainment on entry. Evidence from the inspection indicates that the overall standard of work in Year 9 is below average, confirming the good achievement from pupils' starting point in Year 7. In Year 9, standards are above average for pupils' age in GCSE expressive arts; achievement in this subject is very good.

### Year 10 and 11

GCSE results are improving. In 2002, the proportion gaining five or more A\*-C grades was well below average compared with all schools; the proportion gaining five A\*-G grades was average. Similar comparison at one or more A\*-G grades showed attainment to be in the highest 5 per cent nationally. All the pupils in Year 11, including those with special educational needs or for whom English was an additional language, gained at least one GCSE grade. A small, but significant, proportion gained A\* and A grades. Taken over the last four years, the overall trend in results is similar to the national trend; in 2002, the rate of improvement was higher than that found nationally. Boys and girls obtained similar results. The school exceeded two of its three targets and came close to meeting the third. Future targets are challenging but achievable. Overall, standards of work in Year 11 are below average; pupils achieve well from their prior attainment levels in Year 9. There is scope for the most able pupils to achieve even better. The standard of work in performing arts is high. It is above average in information and communication technology (ICT) for those pupils taking the examination course.

Pupils' literacy and numeracy skills improve as they move through the school. They are below average overall in Year 11. Reading is the weakest of the literacy skills.

### PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Most pupils are responding well to the good climate for learning created by the school since the previous inspection. Pupils are growing in confidence and self-esteem. A small minority of the younger pupils are not as mature as their peers; in lessons, they sometimes take up a disproportionate amount of the teacher's time.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Behaviour in lessons and about the school is mostly good. However, there are a few pupils whose challenging behaviour slows the pace of learning of others in the group. The rate of exclusions is diminishing as a result of effective disciplinary procedures.
Personal development and relationships	<b>Good.</b> Pupils respect each other and generally work well together. They accept responsibility for their actions and show a willingness to learn from the experiences and opportunities provided by the school.
Attendance	Attendance is improving but remains below average. The amount of unauthorised absence is similar to the national average. Punctuality to some lessons could be improved.



## 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.*

Overall, teaching and learning are good throughout the school for pupils of all abilities. Teaching has improved since the previous inspection, particularly with respect to the proportion of very good teaching observed in lessons. The improvement is principally due to the ongoing development work that has taken place as part of the school's action plan. This incorporates new strategies, such as considering the way in which individual pupils learn best, and a change in approach to the management of pupils' behaviour in class. As a result, pupils have more positive attitudes to learning which, combined with the good teaching, are raising achievement and pupils' confidence. Teachers manage the small amount of challenging behaviour well, although the pace of learning for the whole class is sometimes reduced. Pupils are expected to work hard, and they generally do. The very best teaching observed was dynamic and inspired pupils with enthusiasm. Good use was made of praise and encouragement to reward success, however small. Areas for improvement, albeit in satisfactory lessons, were linked to lack of clarity in the aims of the lesson and a lack of urgency in the pace. In addition, the most able pupils in some mixed ability groups were not challenged enough. The quality and use of homework in Years 7- 9 are inconsistent.

Teaching is very good in French, ICT and performing arts in Years 10 and 11; also in expressive arts in Year 9. It is good throughout the school in English, mathematics, design and technology, geography, music and physical education; also in science, history and French in Years 7-9 and religious studies in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is satisfactory in other subjects and year groups. Basic literacy and numeracy skills are taught satisfactorily through English and mathematics but planning for their integration into teaching in other subjects is patchy. Not enough attention is given to the development of pupils' reading skills.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	<b>Very good.</b> The curriculum is well planned and innovative, especially for pupils in Years 9 to 11. The school's performing arts status brings an added dimension to learning in many subject areas. The provision is enriched by a very good range of extra-curricular activities, including many sports, that capture pupils' interest.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	<b>Good.</b> The school promotes a high expectancy of these pupils based on trust and good relationships. Teachers and teaching assistants work closely with pupils to give them the confidence to succeed. There are not enough teaching assistants to provide as much help as is needed across all subjects of the curriculum.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	<b>Very good.</b> Pupils progress well through a combination of individual teaching, small withdrawal groups and in-class support, allocated according to their immediate needs.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	<b>Good.</b> Provision for pupils' cultural development is very good. Pupils' good response to the improving culture and ethos in the school is a reflection of the high profile given to moral and social development. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	<b>Very good.</b> The school cares very well for its pupils by guiding and encouraging them and fostering their personal interests and ambitions. Pupils' attainment and progress is monitored well, especially in Years 9 - 11; the information gained is used effectively to help pupils understand how to improve their work.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	<b>Very good.</b> The leadership group provides clear direction and leads by example. It generates a good team spirit within the staff, which, in turn, raises pupils' expectations. There is an air of optimism about the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Governors have recently taken back their responsibility for the school from the local education authority. They are working closely with the school and appreciate the need for continuing improvement. Statutory requirements are met, except for the provision of a daily act of worship throughout the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	<b>Very good.</b> The school's analysis of its performance is accurate and self-critical. It precipitates action.
The strategic use of resources	<b>Very good.</b> Finances are allocated prudently, taking account of priorities in the curriculum and the need to provide a stimulating environment that encourages learning. Due consideration is given to the principles of best value in making decisions relating to resources and educational matters, for example, the diversity of provision within the curriculum.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils like school. It helps them to mature into young adults. The school expects pupils to work hard.</li> <li>• Teaching is good.</li> <li>• The school is well led and managed. The leadership has brought about effective change since the previous inspection.</li> <li>• There is a good range of extra-curricular activities.</li> <li>• The school is welcoming and readily approachable. It responds quickly to parents' concerns.</li> </ul>	<p>A small number of parents expressed concern about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The consistency and quality of homework in Years 7 - 9.</li> <li>• The behaviour of a minority of pupils in a few lessons.</li> </ul>

Inspectors agree with the positive views expressed by parents, especially with regard to the improvement in many aspects of the school's work since the previous inspection. With reference to homework, inspectors found it to be patchy and of variable quality in Years 7-9. The provision, quality and usefulness of homework in Years 10 and 11 were judged to be satisfactory. Inspectors agree with parents that there is a small element of poor behaviour in a few lessons. This reduces the pace of learning of other pupils. The school is aware of this and, as far as is possible, endeavours to provide extra support in class to support these pupils' specific needs.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and pupils' achievements**

1. Overall standards of work are below average in Years 9 and 11. This represents good achievement throughout the school taking into account the ability range of the pupils on admission in Year 7. Standards have risen since the previous inspection. There is scope for the more able pupils in the school to raise standards even further.

#### **Standards in Years 7, 8 and 9**

2. Attainment on entry is well below average. A significant proportion of pupils do not have the basic skills expected of children of their age, especially in reading.

3. In 2002, pupils' results in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were well below average in English and below average in mathematics and science compared with all schools. They were well above average in mathematics and science and above average in English compared with schools of similar background. Pupils' results in English in previous years were better than in mathematics and science. They were above average compared with all schools in 2001. The school experienced problems with the marking of the English papers in 2002, as did some other schools. A relatively small proportion of pupils exceed the national curriculum level expected for their age, as might be expected considering that 35 per cent of pupils in the 11+ age group in the borough attend grammar schools. Over time, the trend in the pupils' average point score in national tests is similar to the national trend. Boys' and girls' performance is similar overall, contrary to the national picture where girls' results are better. This is explained by the fact that in Years 8 and above there is a larger proportion of higher-attaining boys in the ability range. In Year 7, the proportions are more evenly balanced. The targets set for future years are challenging but information from regular updates on pupils' progress suggests that they are achievable.

4. Evidence from the inspection, including lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work, indicates that the overall standard of work in Year 9 is below average. Standards of work in GCSE expressive arts are similar to those expected of pupils who are two years older. This represents very good achievement and explains why the school has confidence in entering the whole year group for the GCSE examination this year. Standards are average in music and physical education, well below average in art and religious education, and below average in all other subjects.

#### **Standards in Years 10 and 11**

5. Pupils' average point score in GCSE examinations in 2002 was well below average compared with all schools. It was above average compared with schools of similar background. The proportion gaining five or more A\* - G grades was average compared with all schools and above average in relation to pupils' attainment in Year 9. Similar comparison at one or more A\*-G grades shows attainment to be very high compared with all schools and with pupils' prior attainment in Year 9. The performance of pupils from ethnic backgrounds is carefully monitored and analysed. It is broadly similar to that of other pupils of comparable ability. All the pupils in Year 11 in 2001/2002 gained at least one GCSE grade. A small, but significant, proportion of pupils gained A/A\* grades. In drama and English literature the proportion gaining these grades was similar to the national average, which represents particularly good achievement. There has been a significant improvement in results since the previous inspection. In 2002, the proportion gaining five or more A\*-C grades was the highest for six years; the proportion gaining five or more A\*-G grades was the best ever achieved by the school. Taken over the past four years, the overall trend in GCSE results is similar to the national trend; the rate of improvement in 2002 was significantly higher than that found nationally. Averaged over time, girls' performance is better than that of boys, but to a lesser degree than found nationally. In 2002, boys' and girls' results were similar. The school exceeded two of the three targets set by the local education authority and governors in 2002. The third, for five or more A\* - C

grades, was just missed. Targets for the current year are equally challenging. Information gained from ongoing assessment of pupils' work indicates that they are on track to achieve them.

6. Overall standards of work in Year 11 are below average. The standard of work in performing arts is high, representing very good achievement in Years 10 and 11. Standards are above average in ICT, average in design and technology, geography, music and physical education, and below average in other subjects. Staffing difficulties, now almost resolved, have affected pupils' achievement over time in some subjects, particularly science. Pupils' achievement from their starting point in Year 9 is very good in ICT and satisfactory in science, art, history and citizenship. Pupils achieve well in other subjects.

### **The school as a whole**

7. Most pupils with special educational needs attain the standards they are capable of and make good progress. Some achieve very well. In 2002, all the pupils with statements of educational need gained at least three grades in GCSE examinations, most attained four or more. Pupils make good progress overall in English, mathematics, science, geography, modern foreign languages and history. However, in Years 7-9, progress is only satisfactory in art, music, history and ICT because support from teaching assistants is not available in many of these lessons.

8. The pupils with English as an additional language range from those with little or no English to those who are confident users of the language. They make good progress overall; in some cases, they make very good progress. For example, some pupils in Year 10 had reached the end of the intermediate stages of English within a few months, and spoke confidently with good English accents about their work in school. Most pupils make faster progress in listening and reading than in speaking and writing. Progress made by pupils at the advanced stages of English is satisfactory overall; in spite of their apparent competence, some still need more opportunities to develop English to higher levels to match their ability.

9. Standards of literacy improve as pupils progress through the school. They are below average overall in Year 11. Pupils make good progress in speaking and listening although teachers could still do more to encourage them to use talk to evaluate their own and others' work. Good progress has been made in developing pupils' writing skills because this has been the focus of development work aimed at raising achievement. Standards in reading are below average. Pupils have a limited vocabulary, especially in Years 7-9. They do not have enough opportunities to practise reading and the skills of comprehension.

10. Overall, pupils' numerical and mathematical skills are below average in Year 11. This represents good progress from pupils' entry in Year 7 because the school has adopted a proactive approach to the development of these skills.

11. Pupils' ability to use ICT skills for the purposes of research and presentation of written work has improved considerably since the previous inspection. This is evident in the quality of coursework presented for GCSE across a range of subjects. In Years 7 - 9, however, standards vary considerably due to difficulties the school has experienced in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced staff. Progress is good in classes where the stability of staffing has been maintained. It is unsatisfactory in other classes; in some, there has been very little advancement in standards since the beginning of the school year.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

12. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour have improved since the previous inspection and are now satisfactory. The school has worked hard to change the culture of the school and the learning environment to one in which pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They generally behave well in lessons and around the school. Some parents expressed reservations about standards of behaviour in a few lessons. Inspectors found that behaviour was often good and overall satisfactory. However, they agree with parents that there is a minor concern about behaviour, particularly in some of the Year 7 classes. This is due to a small number of immature or lower-attaining pupils, often boys, who dominate the teachers' attention.

13. The improvement in behaviour is mirrored by a decline in the number of exclusions. There were, creditably, no permanent exclusions in the last year. Fixed period exclusions were higher than average, but are starting to reduce with the effective behaviour management strategies in place.

14. Most pupils take pride in the quality of presentation of their written work in response to teachers' expectations. They mainly respond well to teachers' advice about how to improve the quality of their work. In Years 9 -11, pupils have a reasonable understanding of the closeness of their work to predicted targets; most aspire to meet them.

15. Pupils with special educational needs develop good attitudes because of the encouragement and support they receive from teachers and teaching assistants. They generally co-operate with their teachers and get on well together. Behaviour in class is usually good but occasionally, where there is a preponderance of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties and no support from teaching assistants, behaviour can be unsatisfactory and inhibit learning. The Smart Centre makes a valuable contribution to pupils' personal development, assisting pupils to manage their behaviour more effectively, so that they are at less risk of exclusion, and helping them improve their attendance and raise their self-esteem. Across all years, pupils with special educational needs mix well with other pupils and are fully integrated into the daily life of the school.

16. Around the school, pupils are generally friendly and helpful. Relationships are good, including those between pupils of different ethnic backgrounds. Pupils say that bullying is not a significant concern in the school and they are confident that teachers will quickly sort out any issues.

17. Many pupils show a good degree of initiative and personal responsibility. The newly established school council is starting to be an effective body in school decision-making. Pupils in each year are keen to raise funds for charity. Several pupils give freely of their time to help with drama and sports projects either in the school or at primary schools.

18. Attendance levels have improved since the previous inspection, but are still below the national average of 91 per cent. In 2001/02, attendance was 90 per cent overall with Years 7 and 8 just above 90 per cent and Years 9 - 11 just below. Levels of unexplained absence have fallen and are around the national average. Punctuality to lessons, however, remains an area for improvement. It is noticeable that attendance is often higher in classes and activities that capture the pupils' interest, for example, in after school classes in subjects such as the expressive arts and ICT. Attendance in Year 9 reached 100 per cent during the inspection week when pupils were engaged in National Curriculum tests.

## **HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?**

19. Overall, teaching is good throughout the school. This represents a significant improvement since the previous inspection when teaching was unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching, and pupils' positive response to it, is a contributory factor to the rising standards. Pupils in Year 9 were taking national tests in English, mathematics and science during the inspection week so it was not possible to observe lessons in this year group. A hundred and one lessons were observed in other year groups. Of these, 26 per cent were judged to be very good or better, including three per cent that were outstanding. A further 51 per cent of lessons were good; the remainder was satisfactory. The proportion of very good or better lessons was twice that in the previous inspection. Regular monitoring visits from official authorities since the previous inspection also point to the overall improvement in the quality of teaching.

20. Throughout the school, teaching is good in English, mathematics, design and technology, geography, music and physical education and satisfactory in art and design. In Years 7 - 9, teaching is good in science, history and French and satisfactory in ICT and religious education. It is very good in the GCSE expressive arts course. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is very good in French, ICT and performing arts. It is good in religious education and satisfactory in history and science.

21. The improvement in teaching, and hence learning, is principally due to the development work that has taken place as part of the school's action plan. Training sessions regularly feature discussion about strategies relevant to the ability range of the school as a whole, and individual classes in particular. Central to the improvement in teaching is the shift towards consideration of pupils' preferred styles of learning and recognition that this varies from pupil to pupil. Pupils themselves are becoming more aware of how they learn best. Their achievement is at its highest in those lessons where teachers base their planning on a sound understanding of what stimulates pupils to become self-motivated and independent. Another factor in the improvement in teaching is the management of pupils' behaviour. The code of conduct is explicit, understood by pupils and enacted by teachers. Most pupils respond to the approach, which rewards and encourages positive attitudes. There are, however, instances of challenging and confrontational behaviour, particularly in the younger year groups. These occur more often at times when there is no additional adult help to diffuse pupils' frustration in not being able to make progress with the task in hand. Teachers handle these situations well, following school procedures, but sometimes at the expense of a reduction in the pace of learning for other pupils. Parents commented on this at the parents' meeting, whilst making the point that they have confidence in the teachers to do their best for all pupils.

22. Where teaching and learning are good, pupils are well managed and the whole of the lesson time is profitably spent on a variety of activities that sustain pupils' interest. Pupils are expected to work hard, and they generally do, acquiring new skills and knowledge in the process. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subject is transferred to pupils and good subject knowledge enables them to pursue pupils' questions and lead them to new lines of inquiry. For example, in a Year 11 geography lesson, pupils were encouraged to use photographs to supplement the evidence they had extracted from maps when describing the advantages of using a river as a port. Other successful strategies are the sharing of the lesson's aims with pupils, so that they know what it is they are to learn, and the use of praise and encouragement when they succeed, albeit in small incremental steps. Teachers are innovative in designing lessons that enable pupils' to have a feel for what has been achieved. This raises pupils' confidence and prepares them well for follow-up lessons. The school emphasises the importance of presentation of written and practical work. Most subject departments follow this up in the marking of pupils' work. In mathematics, for instance, pupils' work is well organised, usually complete and neatly presented. It demonstrates that pupils are being taught to think logically and to develop the capacity to explain how they have tackled the work. The quality of marking is variable, more so in Years 7 - 9, mainly because it does not always lead to pupils understanding what it is they have to do to improve their work further. To some extent this is linked to the use of the school's procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. These are not yet fully extended to Years 7 and 8. Features of less successful, but nevertheless satisfactory, lessons were the lack of urgency in pupils' completion of the given tasks and vagueness in the lesson's aims. In addition, and of major importance, the work provided for the most able pupils in some mixed ability classes was not always sufficiently challenging, nor were pupils given enough scope to work independently on more open-ended questions.

23. Three outstanding lessons were observed during the inspection in ICT, music and GNVQ performing arts. All took into account the strategies being promoted by the school. In music, the teaching was charismatic. Pupils interacted well with the teacher, forcing the lesson on through their own demanding questions. Common features of all three lessons were the impressive range of teaching techniques, clear focus and shared sense of purpose between the teacher and pupils. The lessons provided good opportunities for pupils to demonstrate mature, independent thinking.

24. Teachers recognise the importance of developing pupils' literacy and numerical skills but there is a lack of consistency about their promotion throughout the curriculum. For instance, the use of numeracy skills is not planned and promoted in every subject although there is clear evidence of them being taught and used to assist practical work or to add strength to the explanation of a particular phenomenon. With regard to literacy, the school lacks a robust policy for developing these skills. Other than in English and a few other subjects there is not enough evidence of provision for the development of literacy skills being included as an integral part of the planning for lessons. Given that the overall standard of reading is low, teachers could give more thought to the level of text being used. The language and layout are not always meaningful to pupils of lower ability so they do not understand what it is they have to do.

25. The teaching and learning of pupils with special educational needs is good. Teachers generally plan lessons with reference to pupils' individual education plans, devise materials that pupils can read and understand, and make effective use of any support that might be available. Teaching assistants, where present, are well deployed and make a significant contribution to pupils' learning. They know their pupils well and are committed to seeing them achieve. Insufficient use is made of the learning support department's computerised independent learning system, which could help pupils improve their basic skills, particularly in reading and spelling.

26. Teaching in the Smart Centre is good. It is extremely well organised to meet the individual needs of pupils who work in it for varying periods of time depending on personal circumstances. It is particularly effective because teachers from different subject departments teach within it when their subject expertise is required to support an individual pupil's study.

27. The teaching of English as an additional language is very good overall. Support staff and class teachers work very well together, ensuring that pupils learning English undertake similar tasks to those of other pupils. Many examples were seen of very effective learning support, for example in English, geography, mathematics and history. In some lessons, pupils make less progress because subject teachers do not always give adequate information to learning support staff before the lesson.

28. Some parents raised some concerns about the quality of homework. Evidence from the inspection revealed a lack of consistency about the quantity, quality and setting of homework in Years 7 - 9. Older pupils tended to be more responsible about the completion of homework, mainly because it often took the form of independent coursework that was set to fixed deadlines.

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

29. The curriculum provision is very good and has improved since the previous inspection. Statutory requirements are now met.

30. The curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant and provides equally for boys and girls of all abilities, aptitudes and backgrounds. Time allocations for subjects match those usually found except that for religious education in Years 7-9 which is insufficient to fully cover the locally Agreed Syllabus.

31. The quality and range of learning opportunities is very good but a special strength in the performing arts. An exciting, popular and successful development is that all pupils take expressive arts at GCSE in Year 9. The specialist nature of the college is also having a very positive impact on the quality of learning in other subjects. For example, in personal and social education, pupils produced a powerful video on the rights of asylum seekers.

32. Innovative curricular planning has resulted in the provision of a broad range of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 that are matched to the needs and aspirations of pupils. Partially as a result of this, attendance in Year 10 is gradually improving. Those in Year 10 taking GNVQ courses in ICT and performing arts have the opportunity to gain 11 GCSE grades if they are successful in all subjects. The modular nature of these courses, whereby ongoing work contributes to the final grade, encourages pupils to build on their success and is improving standards and results. Very good links with local colleges for courses in animal care, motor vehicle technology and building construction are proving successful in motivating pupils who opt for such courses. This is an exciting and challenging curriculum. Parents have welcomed its introduction and development.

33. Pupils who join the school at other than the usual times, often because they have had problems at their previous schools, do equally well. The school makes a huge effort to ensure the continuity of their learning and provides them with a relevant curriculum or arranges effective provision in the Smart Centre.

The latter provides well for all members of the school community. It enables pupils who have particular difficulties, or who have fallen behind with their work through absence, to receive individual help before returning to their classes. Staff in the Smart Centre are instrumental in supporting the school's aim for every pupil to attain at least one GCSE grade in Year 11.

34. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. They have full access to all National Curriculum subjects and all gained some measure of success in the GCSE examinations last year. Pupils who attend the Smart Centre for some of their lessons are not denied their curriculum entitlement but take their class work and coursework to the centre with them. The Youth Award Challenge from the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) affords pupils the opportunity, through various challenges, to develop key skills in areas such as information technology. Pupils also benefit from college placements and courses that involve spending part of the week in school and part in work. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils with very weak basic literacy skills to have specialist teaching in reading, writing and spelling, either in small groups or individually. There are no opportunities to practise their reading with older pupils or adults.

35. Learning opportunities for pupils at the early and intermediate stages of learning English are very good overall; pupils initially receive a combination of individual teaching, small withdrawal groups, and in-class support, as appropriate for their needs. This support is gradually withdrawn until the pupils reach the advanced stages of English. Teachers are not always aware of the learning needs the pupils at the advanced stages of English may still have. However, in mathematics, art, and geography, teachers are aware of these pupils and give good language support as required. There are insufficient library resources in pupils' home language and in English language learning to encourage pupils to study independently.

36. There is a very wide programme of extra-curricular activities and many pupils take part. Parents recognise this very good feature of the college's provision and appreciate the time that teachers give to these activities. This work does much to extend pupils' learning experiences, improve their standards of work and raise their self-esteem and confidence. The contribution of the performing arts subjects is very good and makes use of external experts and professionals. The Harlequins Theatre Company and local primary schools value this work within the local community. There are overseas residential experiences for pupils, for example, a recent visit to Paris. The level of participation in the very good range of sporting activities is high. There are 14 sports clubs and ten team games, including soccer for girls. All subjects provide extra lessons for coursework and revision. Additional teaching after school for the GCSE in expressive arts, ICT and for the national tests in Year 9 are highly commendable and effective in boosting pupils' confidence in their ability to succeed.

37. The provision of personal, social and health education (PSHE) is satisfactory. It has some good features and some important areas for improvement. There are some very good units of work especially in Years 10 and 11 on sex and drugs education. Statutory policies for these have been adopted by the governors and are fully in place. The programme also includes many aspects of citizenship. However, the organisation of PSHE, religious education and citizenship is not sufficiently co-ordinated to provide good and coherent learning opportunities. Planning is at an early stage; links with the use of the form period and citizenship elements in other subjects are not yet secure.

38. Careers education forms part of the PSHE programme in Years 9, 10 and 11 and is good. There were no careers lessons during the week of inspection, but the feedback from pupils was that they are pleased with the support and advice they are given and feel equipped to make objective decisions about the next stage of education. Specialist staff from external agencies effectively supplement the provision of careers education. All Year 11 pupils are interviewed and from this an action plan is produced. The work experience programme for Year 10 is well integrated within careers education, for example pupils apply and are interviewed for the vacancies. Pupils have adequate resources in the newly refurbished careers room from which to research options. However, there is scope to increase first-hand information with visiting speakers from industry on a range of career options.



## **Links with the community**

39. Links with the local community, local primary schools and other institutions are very good and are of great benefit to pupils. Co-operation with primary schools and the community is particularly extensive in sport and performing arts. There has been good improvement in establishing the transfer of pastoral and academic information from most of the feeder primary schools. The 'Sports Cool' project and the Trafford/ Salford sports co-ordination partnership provide excellent opportunities for other pupils to visit the school for sports activities and also for teachers from the school to teach in primary schools or arrange joint projects. The joint projects in sport, dance and drama increase pupils' skills and enthusiasm as well as helping them to familiarise with Lostock College so that they look forward to joining the school in Year 7. For example, 500 pupils from the primary schools and the school joined in an excellent dance initiative 'The King's Cold Feet'. The school also runs sessions after school for children from the primary schools to study French. Other pupils are invited to attend a study group to raise their literacy and numeracy skills. Good links have been made with community sports clubs so pupils can continue to develop their interests. School facilities are open in the evenings and weekends for schoolchildren and people of all ages within the community. On Saturdays about 100 children and adults enjoy the excellent range of sports and activities on offer at the school. This establishes constructive relationships and engages parental support.

## **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

40. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school's code of conduct, agreed jointly with staff and pupils, is a clear statement of a shared vision and sense of purpose that underpins the ethos of raising self-esteem through raising standards of achievement. It provides firm support for pupils' personal development.

41. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. Assemblies for different year groups, held on a daily basis, usually include an invitation for pupils to reflect on the theme, although time allocated to the reflective activity itself is too short to have sufficient impact. A 'Thought for The Day' is included in tutor time on other mornings, but its quality and consistency is not monitored and is too variable. All department schemes of work identify opportunities for recognising the spiritual impact in certain aspects of work but there is at present no system of monitoring the implementation of the principle. However, on a number of occasions throughout the year, the school is united in reflecting on important current events such as the recent war in Iraq, and annual acts of remembrance take place on Armistice and Holocaust memorial days. For a number of pupils who are members of junior wings of the armed services the significance of these occasions is strong. By enhancing the quality of the environment with good internal maintenance and decoration, and a vibrant display of pupils' work, pupils' day-to-day experience is enriched. Areas outside the school buildings are becoming equally attractive; the school is particularly successful in encouraging pupils not to scatter litter; outdoor seats and litter bins are in good condition and garden areas are well maintained and respected. As part of an initiative in association with the local council to improve the environment, parts of the grounds have recently been reclaimed and planted by a group of pupils in Year 8, who take turns to care for plants which they have grown.

42. The school operates a good moral code that clearly distinguishes between right and wrong and provides good support for pupils' moral development. Expectations of pupils' taking responsibility for their conduct in and out of class are high, and relationships are clearly based on mutual respect. Moral issues form a significant part of the course in personal and social education. Many pupils contribute to annual fund-raising for charities such as Red Nose Day and the school has become closely associated with supporting the local children's hospice. In addition, pupils are currently raising money for a respirator for a local hospital in memory of a former pupil. In lessons, pupils are expected to be aware of their responsibility for their own and others' learning opportunities, and for their safety. For instance, in physical education they learn to avoid situations which will endanger others, and in design and technology, they learn safe workshop practice. In cross-curricular work in history and expressive arts, pupils explore themes such as slavery and racism. Through such activities they learn to appreciate the background to events that touch their own lives before forming opinions.

43. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities organised in many parts of the school both at lunchtime and after school provides well for pupils' social development. There is a wide range of musical, sporting and drama activities, and clubs for homework and games. Field trips and visits to places of interest take place regularly. During lessons there are frequent opportunities for pupils to work in pairs and small groups, learning to make decisions and to work co-operatively. In addition, pupils strengthen the school's contact with primary schools by providing workshops in music, drama, sport and modern foreign languages. There are regular opportunities for pupils to display their abilities out of school. The school choir recently performed at a conference for school governors and the production 'The Culture of Football' was presented in the Lowry Art Gallery before being presented in London.

44. Provision for pupils' cultural development is very good. In art, music, drama and English, as a result of visits to theatres, art galleries and museums they learn about their own culture and also about the diversity of European and non-European cultures. There is particularly good provision for pupils to learn about the cultural diversity of contemporary society. A 'Sikh Awareness' day recently taught pupils about traditions associated with food and costume. In modern foreign languages pupils learn about other European cultures and about the French-speaking countries of the world. They discuss topical issues and are encouraged to listen to other people's arguments before forming judgements. The modern languages department organises very good opportunities for the pupils to celebrate their own cultures by taking GCSE in their home language, for example Russian and Urdu, through links with the local language college. Overall, the school is an harmonious community in which the teaching encourages pupils of all backgrounds to practise respect for others' views and beliefs. The school's policy for racial equality is effective.

#### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?**

45. The procedures for child protection and pastoral care are very good. Form and year tutors take a keen interest in the well being of the pupils. A breakfast club is available to provide a hot snack in the morning. This and personal touches, such as the posting of a card to pupils on their birthday, promote an atmosphere of value and respect.

46. A significant number of pupils join the school during the school year, some of whom have been in difficulties at, or excluded from, other schools. Last year 40 pupils joined at other than the usual admissions time. The successful integration of these pupils, and the success they achieve, demonstrates the effectiveness of the pastoral system.

47. Procedures for identifying pupils with special educational needs and bringing concerns to the attention of the learning support department are good. In lessons, teaching assistants give very valuable support although there are not enough of them to provide support as often as it is needed in some subjects. They know the pupils well and work hard to help them achieve success. During the inspection pupils were taking their National Curriculum tests and the support they received, from both teachers and assistants, in helping them prepare for the tests was exceptional. Pupils who attend the Smart Centre receive good support from learning mentors in managing their behaviour, improving their attendance, developing their social skills and improving their self-esteem. Individual education plans are of good quality and are a valuable source of information in helping teachers set work appropriate to pupils' needs. Pupils with poor reading skills do not get enough support. For example, there is very little withdrawal from timetabled lessons for specialist teaching to help improve their reading and other basic skills.

48. The pupils with English as an additional language receive very good personal, cultural and language support from the school and from the visiting advisory teacher. They integrate well into the school community and all its activities.

49. Pupils benefit from the services of a full time counsellor, who provides one-to-one counselling and group and lunchtime activities. As part of an initiative to raise the attainment of girls the counsellor and

educational welfare officer organised a course for a group of girls in Year 7. This was effective in raising their self-esteem and motivation.

50. The school effectively supports pupils' personal development. Form time in the morning is used constructively and makes for a good start to the day. Pupils' views are beginning to be represented effectively through the school council. Suitably detailed records are kept on pupils' personal development and the school is prompt to contact parents with concerns or praise about their child's progress. Attendance procedures are satisfactory although still more remains to be done to convince some pupils and parents of the benefits of regular attendance. The electronic system of registration is working effectively and enables the school to keep a good track of attendance not only at school but also at each lesson. The full time educational officer gives excellent support with home visits. There is a separate phone line for parents to use to notify the school of reasons for absence and displays of attendance figures and certificates about the school draw pupils' attention to the importance of regular attendance. These measures, together with highly focused attention of the staff involved, have secured a significant improvement in attendance figures. Continued effort and vigilance is needed to raise levels still further.

51. Pupils are reasonably punctual to school in the mornings, but too many pupils lack a sense of urgency when transferring between lessons. Valuable teaching time is then lost.

52. The management of behaviour is good and much more consistent than at the time of the previous inspection. This has not been achieved easily as there are a significant number of pupils who display potentially challenging behaviour. The good quality of relationships between staff and pupils is a key feature in the school's effective management of behaviour, as is the positive emphasis on rewarding good behaviour and effort. Pupils like the system of merits, which accumulate to the awards and school pens. The school is an orderly community that provides an effective climate for learning in the vast majority of lessons. However, there remains a need to develop further strategies to support and integrate the small number of younger pupils, mainly Year 7 boys, who are immature in their social and learning skills. Pupils and parents are confident that the school will promptly resolve any occasional incidents of alleged bullying.

## **Assessment**

53. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are good overall in Years 7 and 8. However, the information gained could be used more effectively to inform pupils of their progress in relation to National Curriculum levels and to show them how to improve. The results of national tests taken in Year 6 and of other nationally standardised tests enable the school to build up a clear picture of each pupil's attainment at the start of Year 7. This information is used effectively to set targets for Year 9 national tests and GCSE examinations. Good procedures are in place to monitor and review individual pupil's progress through regular annual reports to parents, supplemented by two interim progress reports. The information gained is also used to modify lesson plans.

54. Assessment procedures are very good for pupils in Years 9 to 11. Several times a year subject teachers report on whether or not pupils are on target to achieve their predicted grades for National Curriculum tests or GCSE examinations. Pupils giving cause for concern are carefully monitored and parents are kept fully informed.

55. Assessment for pupils with English as an additional language is excellent. All pupils at the early and intermediate stages of English language learning have an individual language plan which shows their competence according to the National Assessment in English Achievement (NASSEA) steps, and clearly outlines their specific language learning needs. The support programmes are constantly amended in response to the changing needs of the pupils.

56. There is strong direction by senior managers who assist heads of year and form tutors in personally monitoring how well pupils are progressing towards their targets. They also help with the mentoring of individual pupils to provide personal support and encouragement. Assessment procedures vary in

effectiveness across subjects: they are very good in ICT, unsatisfactory in history and religious education, and good in other subjects.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

57. Parents have positive views about the school. The response to the questionnaire issued before the inspection was low but the views expressed, together with those from the meeting with parents, indicate a good degree of satisfaction with improvements in educational standards, teaching, behaviour and attendance. Parents find that the school is welcoming and friendly. They believe that their children are expected to work hard and that the school is well managed. The inspectors agree with parents' positive views.

58. A significant minority of parents thinks that homework could be more consistent and that behaviour could be better in some lessons. Inspectors agree that homework could be strengthened in Years 7 - 9, but consider that homework and coursework for older pupils is satisfactory. Behaviour in the school was found to be satisfactory overall and often good, but inspectors agree with parents that there is a pocket of lessons amongst the younger children where an unsettled minority disturbs the concentration of others.

59. The partnership with parents has improved and is good. The school runs a 'parent survival course', which provides a valuable forum for parents to share and discuss concerns and to learn behaviour and stress management techniques. Suitable opportunities are provided for parents to become more involved at decision points in their children's education. For example, the interactive careers evening is well organised and provides readily accessible information. The school takes care to send important guides and information by post to ensure that parents receive them. An excellent video featuring pupils describing life at their school is given to parents and their children before they join the school.

60. The school provides satisfactory quality of written information. The prospectus is well presented and there are regular informative newsletters about school life. However, the annual written reports on pupils' progress, whilst broadly meeting statutory requirements, could usefully be improved in format and content. For example, they do not adequately report standards and progress in religious education. Whilst the reports provide adequate information about potential grades in subjects they do not always indicate the level the child is currently achieving or the work being covered in the subject. In Years 9-11, interim reports are issued as well. These are good because they clearly indicate current and potential levels and so keep parents suitably involved in dialogue about their child's progress. The pupils' planners are proving effective as an additional channel of communication between school and home and are regularly checked by form tutors. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are kept well informed about their children's progress and are fully involved in annual reviews. Learning mentors make regular contact with parents through their base in the Smart Centre.

61. The school productions are of high quality and are very popular with parents and the local community. A typical example was the 'Showcase' to launch the Arts College status in November. This featured over 100 pupils from the school performing extracts from 'Grease' and 'Oliver' as well as original pieces devised by the pupils. Parents give good support to the school. The parent and teacher association organises educational as well as fund-raising events such as the Christmas Fair and the sponsored walk. Parents raised an impressive £25,000 to support the school's successful bid for Arts College status. Parents give satisfactory support to their children's education. Between 50 to 80 per cent of them attend the annual consultation evening with teachers. The school, however, rightly recognises the need to involve a minority of parents more positively behind the drive to raise educational standards and attendance. To this end the school has planned some promising initiatives to involve parents and the community in lifelong learning projects.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

62. Significant changes have taken place since the previous inspection. They have been managed carefully, in suitable stages. Staff, pupils and parents have been involved in consultations and planning and, as a consequence, are fully committed to the school's priorities - raising attendance, achievement and attitudes. Improvement in each of these aspects of the school's work is clearly evident. The leadership and management of the school are very good. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. These are major factors in the raising of the school's image and the improved culture of the school to one in which pupils have positive attitudes and higher aspirations. The introduction of a more flexible and appropriate curriculum for older pupils has contributed to this. Teachers and non-teaching staff have worked extremely hard to accommodate new practices. Morale is high and there is an optimism about the future.

63. The leadership team has established a good ethos for learning. Training for middle managers is increasingly improving their management and organisational skills. Its effect is evident in more highly focused planning, better teaching strategies and active response to information gained from regular evaluation of departments' work and results. There is still more to be achieved, for example, with respect to the extension of assessment procedures in Years 7 and 8 and the implementation of whole-school practices for the development of pupils' literacy skills. The headteacher and senior staff have high profiles about the school. They make it their concern to be 'out and about' at strategic times and use the opportunity to take a personal interest in pupils' attitudes towards work and school. The leadership team has high expectations of itself and others. Its enthusiasm is infectious and is driving the school forward. The school improvement plan is realistic but challenging. It promotes a vision for the future with a realism that developments need to be progressive and soundly underpinned by good financial planning. Systematic monitoring of teaching and learning has been a major priority since the previous inspection, the ultimate target being the raising of pupils' attainment. The results of national tests and examinations are closely analysed and the information gained is quickly fed back into the school's systems to bring about further improvement. Arrangements for the induction of new teachers and teachers' professional development are good. These are closely aligned to the school's priorities.

64. The school has positively set about marketing itself to parents and the community at large because it is proud of its pupils and their achievements. Good use is made of the new ICT facilities to provide easy access to school for parents via e-mail. Parents appreciate the quick response to their queries. Other channels of communication, such as the 'anonymous' telephone line, demonstrate the school's willingness to listen to and act on parents' concerns, whatever they may be.

65. The management of the learning support department is good. The interests of pupils with special educational needs are positively promoted and there is a shared sense of purpose both within the team of specialist staff and throughout the school. The work and morale of the department have been sustained despite the long-term absence of key staff through illness. Some developments have, not surprisingly, fallen behind schedule. The development plan is out of date. Although the practice is not widespread, some pupils are placed in lower ability groups because of their poor behaviour rather than their attainment level. Specialist teachers spend too much time teaching mainstream classes when there is a more urgent need to work with small groups of pupils to help improve their reading, spelling and other basic skills.

66. The organisation of provision for pupils at the early stages of learning English is very good. ICT is used well for administration. Clear information keeps teachers well informed of pupils' English language level and enables them to understand and provide for their specific learning needs, for example, in design and technology, history, religious education, geography and French.

67. The Smart Centre is very well led and managed. It is appropriately focused on helping pupils of all abilities to achieve their academic potential. It plays a major part in ensuring that all pupils leave school with at least one GCSE grade but strives for better than this where it is possible to do so. In replacing the previous arrangement by the Smart Centre, the school has ensured that even for pupils with the severest emotional and behaviour difficulties, the focus is on promoting learning and raising achievement rather than simply containing negative behaviour. The centre also provides well for pupils who have missed significant amounts of work through absence or because they have only recently joined the school.

68. Some of the governing body's powers were suspended after the previous inspection when the school was deemed to have serious weaknesses. Since then, the governors, some new, have worked very closely with the local education authority and headteacher. They are fully conversant with factors that have led to decisions about management, financial planning and personnel. Governors are also aware of the school's strengths and areas still in need of further improvement. Their thinking is guided by an awareness of the importance of raising standards to match the potential of the school's intake. The governors are now well placed to fulfil their responsibilities. Their powers have recently been restored. The governing body has yet to fully meet the requirement for a daily act of worship for all pupils.

69. The financial planning, control and spending of monies for their given purposes are very good. The school's priorities are reflected in the management of the accounts, for example, the reduction of staffing to a balanced level to meet curriculum needs cleared the deficit in 2001/2 and restored a surplus budget. Current planning takes account of the reduced numbers in the current Years 7-9 and arrangements for providing a broad and relevant curriculum for them in later years. The principles of best value, including consultation, comparison and challenge are rigorously applied. The school's administrator worked closely with the local education authority during the period when it took over the governors' responsibilities.

70. The school has an adequate number of staff to meet the needs of the curriculum but the recruitment of suitably qualified teachers in some subject areas, such as science and ICT, has affected pupils' attainment. The team of learning support assistants is very effective, and deployed well, but there are not enough of them to provide sufficient help, especially in subjects other than English, mathematics and science. Even in these subjects more help would be beneficial because of the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs.

71. The school campus is extensive and well maintained. It is also a well-used community resource. The upgrade of the interior of the buildings, including the bright, modern and welcoming reception area, has uplifted the school's image and the pupils' pride in it. Well-executed displays of pupils' work and topics of interest brighten the corridors and constantly attract attention. The enclosure of the site by secure fencing has reduced vandalism and enabled the school to improve the grounds to a condition suitable for pupils' relaxation and socialising at break and lunchtimes. Parents are pleased with the improvements. More resources for learning have been provided since the previous inspection, especially in ICT, but more are still needed. There is a sensible rolling programme to improve resources in each subject area in turn and according to immediate need.

72. Taking into account the improving standards, the very good improvement overall, the quality of teaching and the effective use of income, the school now provides good value for money.

## **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

73. In order to consolidate and further improve the school's work, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- (1) Endeavour to raise pupils' results in national tests and examinations still further by:
  - providing more challenge for the most able pupils in each year group to gain A\*- C grades at GCSE,
  - raising the overall standard of work in ICT in Years 7-9 to a more consistent level across each year group,
  - using information from assessment procedures more effectively in Years 7 and 8 to raise pupils' aspirations,
  - improving the provision and quality of homework in Years 7 - 9.

*(Paragraphs 1, 11, 22, 26, 53, 84, 111, 128, 129, 147, 150, 154, 157, 164, 184, 191 )*

(2) Give the development of literacy skills a higher profile throughout the school by:

- introducing more activities to promote reading, such as paired reading, book clubs, visiting authors etc
- integrating the development of reading and comprehension skills into lesson planning in all subjects so that pupils become less dependent on the teachers for instructions,
- making more use of the library.

*(Paragraphs 2, 9, 24, 78, 89, 91, 154, 155 )*

(3) Persist with procedures to further improve attendance, such as the rapid follow-up to first day absence, and improve pupils' punctuality to lessons.

*(Paragraphs 18, 50, 110, 142 )*

(4) As soon as is reasonably practicable, provide more teaching assistants to assist pupils with special learning needs.

*(Paragraphs 7, 25, 70, 116, 148, 156, 171 )*

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	101
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	55

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	3	23	52	23	0	0	0
Percentage	3	23	51	23	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.

### Information about the school's pupils

#### Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	565
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	136

#### Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	26
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	146

#### English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	22

#### Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	40
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	32

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.9
National comparative data	7.8

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.1
National comparative data	1.2

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 (Year 9)*

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	97	36	133

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	46	63	54
	Girls	27	26	25
	Total	73	89	79
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	55(69)	67(52)	59(55)
	National	66(64)	67(66)	66(66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	15(36)	26(27)	13(24)
	National	32(31)	45(43)	33(34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	71	55	56
	Girls	31	22	27
	Total	102	77	83
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	77(68)	58(59)	63(53)
	National	67(65)	70(68)	67(64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	27(33)	17(27)	12(20)
	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	101	56	157

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	26	91	101
	Girls	15	49	56
	Total	41	140	157
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	26(22)	89(79)	100(93)
	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	30.1
	National	39.8

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

*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	465	53	
White – Irish	1		
White – any other White background	2		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	21		
Mixed – White and Black African			
Mixed – White and Asian	2		
Mixed – any other mixed background	2		
Asian or Asian British - Indian	4		
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	6		
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	4		
Black or Black British – Caribbean	18	9	
Black or Black British – African	3	3	
Black or Black British – any other Black background	22	10	
Chinese	2		
Any other ethnic group	7		
No ethnic group recorded	5		

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

*Teachers and classes*

*Financial information*

**Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	34.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.4

**Education support staff: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff	14
Total aggregate hours worked per week	444

**Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76
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**Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	20.6
Key Stage 4	22.7

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

Financial year	2001/02
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	£
Total income	2690411
Total expenditure	2580335
Expenditure per pupil	3982
Balance brought forward from previous year	-72428
Balance carried forward to next year	37648

### Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	28
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	8
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

### Results of the survey of parents and carers

#### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	565
Number of questionnaires returned	30

#### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	56	7	0	2
My child is making good progress in school.	35	62	3	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	40	40	18	2	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	17	48	17	18	0
The teaching is good.	25	61	10	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	41	52	7	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48	42	0	4	6
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	65	35	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	35	58	3	4	0
The school is well led and managed.	45	48	3	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	45	50	5	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	50	48	0	0	2

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

### ENGLISH

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

#### Strengths

- Pupils achieve well throughout the school.
- Provision for drama and media studies is particularly good.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- The subject is well led and managed.

#### Areas for improvement

- Pupils' reading and writing skills could be improved further.
- Pupils' spelling, vocabulary and accuracy could be improved.
- Teachers' marking is inconsistent in Years 7 - 9.
- Greater use could be made of the library to encourage pupils to read more and to support the further development of literacy skills.

74. Pupils' standards in English on entry to the school are well below average. Their results in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 rose from average in 2000 to above average in 2001. They were well below average in 2002 although they remained above average compared with similar secondary modern schools. Prior to 2002 results were consistently better than those in mathematics and science. Boys' results are closer to the national average for their gender than are the girls' results, although girls attain better results than boys overall.

75. In GCSE English and English literature, boys' and girls' A\*-C results over the past three years were below the national average: A\*-G results were average. These results are very creditable given the low standards on entry and the fact that the school enters almost all pupils for both examinations. Last year, 97.5 per cent of Year 11 pupils entered for literature, compared with the national figure of around 84 per cent. Over the past two years, girls have outperformed boys in literature, but to a lesser extent than they do nationally. The number of top grades, A\* and A, attained in literature in 2002 was close to the national average. Analysis of results showed that many pupils did better in literature than they did in most of their other subjects. Pupils' results in media studies were commendable. The proportion gaining A\*-C grades was above the national average; all pupils obtained a grade. Results in the three English subjects were higher than those attained in mathematics and science.

76. The standard of pupils' work in Years 9 and 11 is below average. This represents good achievement throughout the school given their attainment on entry. The school has worked hard to maintain standards in Year 11. Nearly all pupils have made sufficient progress to be entered for GCSE with a realistic chance of attaining a grade in both English and literature.

77. Overall standards of speaking and listening are average in all year groups. There are frequent opportunities for paired and group discussions in most lessons and both boys and girls can work together to explore and develop ideas. However, the limited vocabulary and lack of confidence of some pupils means that the quality and clarity of their responses are not always adequate. Listening skills, particularly among lower ability boys in Years 7-9 and some girls in Year 7, are often poor; and this affects the pace of lessons. Teachers often have to repeat instructions, explanations and answers. By the end of Year 11, most pupils readily volunteer to read and answer in class. They successfully take part in assessed rôle play situations, presentations and discussions of literature and media texts and topical issues, such as terrorism and the ethics of advertising.

78. Reading for information and understanding is below average in all years, but particularly in Years 7-9. On entry, many pupils have a limited vocabulary and are unfamiliar with a range of literature. They have weak deductive and inferential skills and often have difficulties understanding both literary and non-literary texts, such as textbooks and newspapers. Additionally, they tend to miss implicit meanings and messages in texts because they cannot see beyond literal interpretations. However, because all pupils study both English and literature in Years 10 and 11, most rapidly develop their comprehension skills in these years. Few pupils read for pleasure and little use is currently made of the excellent library facilities.

79. The standard of pupils' writing is below average. Spelling, punctuation and sentence construction are well below average on entry; most pupils have difficulties with factual, argumentative and other extended writing. However, by the end of Year 11, the most able pupils present and support their opinions and write lively and original creative pieces. Many pupils of all ages and abilities enjoy writing stories and poems and, as they move through the school, the more competent use similes and alliteration to add colour to their descriptive writing. There are some sensitive and thoughtful responses to the 'September 11' disaster in classroom displays and Year 10 books. Middle and lower ability pupils have problems with extended writing in all year groups, but recently introduced strategies are helping them to structure and develop their work effectively. The department's emphasis on the drafting and planning of work is paying good dividends though, by the end of Year 9, over half the pupils still have problems with the technical accuracy of their work. Critical skills are also below average. Although pupils readily give personal opinions, many have problems when analysing language and imagery. When they use quotations, they usually paraphrase or explain them, instead of considering their effect on the reader or an audience. Also in literature, many pupils regularly offer irrelevant biographical and historical detail, such as 'Hardy lived in Dorset', instead of a considered critical response to the text. Additionally, middle and lower ability pupils often use an inappropriate narrative style, writing about plot and character as if they were real events and people, and not literary constructs. These pupils make too few references to authors, their style, themes or intentions.

80. Pupils taking media studies in Years 10 and 11 achieve well. Most quickly become familiar with the subject's specialist vocabulary and develop their understanding of media concepts because of good teaching and their own interest in the subject. Standards of work are average. Interpretations and opinions are usually well justified and although some pupils have difficulty expressing themselves clearly on paper, their discussions show that they are fully aware of the social, cultural, economic and moral influences of the media.

81. All pupils have a weekly drama lesson in Years 7-9. Drama is an optional subject at GCSE. The subject makes a significant contribution to pupils' social and moral development because they consider a number of topical issues, such as bullying, running away from home and racism. They gain self-confidence, self-esteem and self-discipline and develop their creativity through improvisation. They form positive relationships by working collaboratively, making decisions, solving problems and evaluating their own and others' performances. In Years 10 and 11, standards of work are average and achievement is good. GCSE results in 2002 were slightly better than the national average and pupils attained a high proportion of grade As. Pupils are well aware of the skills of acting and stagecraft. They use voice, gesture, body language, space and levels well and are aware of the impact of what they do on an audience. Additionally, they have a sound knowledge of theatrical conventions and are beginning to apply their understanding of the work of practitioners such as Stanislavski and Brecht to their own work.

82. Pupils taking the literacy progress units in Year 7 to boost their performance to the level expected for their age are achieving very well. This is due to very good planning and organisation and the expertise and enthusiasm of the small team involved in teaching the units. The co-operation between subject staff, the English department and the learning support assistants (LSAs) is excellent. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well because teachers are well aware of the help they require and give them targeted support when there is no LSA available. Similarly, those for whom English is an additional language receive good quality support from teachers and considerable encouragement from other pupils. The most able pupils in Years 10 and 11 are suitably challenged by the GCSE syllabuses and the wide range of tasks set: however, those in Years 7-9 are rarely given activities which really extend them.

83. Pupils' learning is helped considerably by the very good quality curriculum. Drama lessons include a module linked to the Shakespeare text for the Year 9 national tests. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 study both English and English literature. Pupils' awareness of citizenship and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good, but these two aspects are not yet considered when planning lessons. Newly written teaching units now identify regular opportunities for all pupils to use ICT to develop their learning, particularly through research, devising presentations, writing and editing; and there is ready access to computers in the department and in the school. There are also some interesting shared lesson plans; with a unit on sea songs, for example, taught in music.

84. Teaching and learning are good overall. Some very good teaching was seen in all year groups. Most pupils have a positive attitude to English and to their own learning, hence they learn and achieve well. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations of pupils; they share what they are to learn with them, plan well for all abilities and needs, and offer a range of challenging activities. Additionally, relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. All of these qualities were seen in a Year 10 lesson in which pupils examined their own interpretations of visual images, such as a swastika, and then analysed in groups the images presented in an Yves Saint Laurent perfume advertisement. This was very good preparation for their next coursework assignment. However, in a few lessons in Years 7-9, there is a lack of challenge for the most able, and pupils' inattention and poor listening are not always well managed. Teachers' marking in Years 10 and 11 is helpful and clearly shows pupils what they need to do to improve, but in Years 7-9 there is a lack of consistency. Though all comments are positive, some are too general and do not always identify pupils' strengths and weaknesses or refer sufficiently to the National Curriculum assessment criteria.

85. The leadership and management of the department are good. Teaching is well-monitored, departmental planning links effectively to the school's priorities; the organisation is sound, communication very good and responsibilities appropriately delegated. The main strength is the high quality of dedication, hard work, commitment and optimism shown by this team of experienced teachers. They are constantly looking for ways to improve standards and have recently started to make use of attainment data to set targets for both pupils and themselves.

86. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Resources, including access to computers, are now good. Pupils' behaviour in the majority of lessons is also good because it is well managed. Literacy progress units are well established and taught, and all lesson plans in Years 7-9 contain literacy objectives.

#### *Key skills across the curriculum - Literacy*

87. Overall standards of literacy are well below average on entry to the school and are below average by the end of Year 11. The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) has been implemented and improvements are being seen in nearly all subjects.

88. Most pupils make good progress in speaking, including those for whom English is a second language, and standards are satisfactory. Many teachers plan for paired and group work in lessons and pupils are usually willing to participate: however, listening skills, especially in Years 7-9 are not well developed. There is some good practice: for example, a Year 10 food technology class discussed and evaluated the dishes that they had prepared. Not all subjects regularly encourage pupils to use talk to evaluate their own or others' work, to explore opinions or to discuss or identify what they need to do to improve. Most pupils make little use of ICT software, such as PowerPoint, to make presentations to others.

89. Reading standards are below average because many pupils have a limited vocabulary, particularly in Years 7-9. Teachers plan to extend technical vocabulary by making good use of the key subject words which are clearly displayed. Books provided in some subjects are too difficult for the least able, often because the language and layout of the text is off-putting to them, although they are suitable for the higher ability groups. There are opportunities for pupils to use the Internet to develop their research skills, in

history, for example, but the school does not have a reading for pleasure culture and pupils are not encouraged to read beyond the textbooks provided. Departments rarely use the excellent library.

90. Although writing standards are below average, departments have done some good work on this skill. There are opportunities for pupils to write in a variety of styles in most subjects: for example, in science, Year 10 pupils wrote letters expressing their personal views on environmental issues. In some subjects, but not all, pupils are given writing prompts and careful guidance to help them structure their essays.

91. The school is making very good use of the local authority's advisory service to develop literacy, but not all staff appreciate the importance of a robust and concerted literacy strategy across the curriculum for raising overall standards. Some teachers regard it as an English, rather than a whole school, initiative. However, there has been very good staff co-operation to implement the literacy progress units in Year 7. The school has not yet fully considered how literacy can be promoted through form time, pupils' clubs and societies, paired and shared reading activities, both with other pupils and adults, or the involvement of the librarian and the library.

## MATHEMATICS

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

### Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good so pupils achieve well from their starting points.
- Positive relationships between teachers and pupils result in a purposeful atmosphere in lessons.
- Good leadership of the subject promotes a shared commitment to raising standards.

### Areas for improvement

- Pupils' overall performance at GCSE could be raised further.
- ICT could be used more frequently to enrich and support learning.
- Pupils could be encouraged to participate more in the question and answer parts of some lessons.

92. In 2002, pupils' results in national tests taken in Year 9 were below the national average for all schools. They were well above average when compared with schools of similar background. Girls and boys attained similar results, reflecting the national picture. The overall trend in results over the past four years is similar to the national trend, with a significant improvement in 2002.

93. In 2002 almost every pupil was entered for GCSE and almost all attained a grade within the A\*-G grade range. The proportion of pupils entered for GCSE and the proportion attaining a grade were both above the national average. The combination of the high level of entry and minimal failure to obtain a grade is indicative of the department's intent to provide a sound and relevant education in mathematics for pupils of all abilities. However, results within the A\*-C grade range were well below the national average and many pupils, particularly girls, did less well in mathematics than in some of their other subjects.

94. Evidence from the inspection indicates that standards of work are below average in Year 9; they reflect the 2002 results. Overall, pupils achieve well from their starting point in Year 7. In Years 7-9, all pupils study similar topics at levels that are suitably matched to individual needs, reflecting the positive impact of newly developing schemes of work and national initiatives. For example, all pupils have a good grasp of the properties of each of the measures of average. Lower attainers readily identify the mode and calculate the median and mean of simple sets of discrete data. Pupils in middle groups systematically tabulate and organise data in order to determine the mean, median and mode. Highest attainers show that they understand which measure is most appropriate to use in different situations. All pupils have benefited from the use of the National Numeracy Strategy and fluency with basic arithmetic has improved since the previous inspection.

95. Standards of work are below average in Year 11. They are higher than indicated by previous GCSE results because recent improvements have not been in place long enough to be fully reflected in results. This represents good achievement from pupils' starting point at the beginning of Year 10. There is clear evidence of continuity and progression. Topics are revisited and extended at regular intervals and there is a good balance between the rehearsal of prior learning and acquisition of new knowledge and skills. This results in pupils confidently applying their knowledge to more complex situations. Additional, voluntary arrangements are in place to provide pupils with greater experience of work appropriate to their GCSE level of entry. The quality and quantity of work produced by lower attaining pupils is higher than that typically observed; it is raising their sights, confidence and self-esteem.

96. Based on evidence from the inspection, there is no discernible difference in the performance of boys and girls. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to that of their peers. A good feature of a small number of lessons is the active contribution of learning support assistants. In one observed lesson this enabled those for whom English is an additional language to make particularly good progress. In another lesson the support was effective in ensuring pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties were able to produce work that matched their ability.

97. Almost all pupils are well behaved in lessons. Teachers respond quickly to the small minority of pupils who find it difficult to sustain concentration on a task for a sufficient length of time to achieve results. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils result in most lessons being conducted in a purposeful and harmonious atmosphere. The quality of written work is generally very good. It is well structured and helps those pupils who have difficulties with retention and recall. It is also indicative of the positive attitude to learning being inculcated by the school's culture.

98. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. It has improved since the previous inspection. Teaching in the lessons observed ranged from satisfactory to very good, the majority being good or better. Teachers' thorough planning and lesson preparation, subject expertise and good management of pupils were characteristics of almost every lesson. Differences in lesson quality were related to variations in the overall structure of lessons, the range of approaches and particularly the levels of pupils' involvement during question and answer parts of lessons. In the best lessons, the teachers' command of the subject was reflected in the skilful way they framed questions and utilised a wide range of pupils' responses to promote learning that was underpinned by understanding. Thorough planning reflects the positive and progressive impact of the National Numeracy Strategy on the structure and content of lessons. A good example was a Year 11 lesson in which a group of lower-attaining pupils, having identified by way of a questionnaire the topics that they assessed as requiring thorough revision for their impending GCSE examinations, enhanced their confidence and competence in calculating angles in a variety of contexts. The teacher shared the aims of the lesson with the pupils and, at its conclusion, involved them in evaluating the extent to which the aims had been met. The teacher raised pupils' sights and esteem by involving them in questions at appropriate levels so that success could be duly accompanied by praise. Similar features were observed in a lesson for higher-attaining Year 11 pupils. Pupils' good levels of concentration and interest resulted in them deploying a range of prior learning to extend their knowledge and skills in the handling of data. Consequently, they confidently and competently produced trend lines for use in calculating seasonal variations. In less successful, but nevertheless satisfactory, lessons pupils are not sufficiently engaged in the development of knowledge and skills. As a result, impetus and concentration are limited because there is less interest and enthusiasm.

99. Pupils' work is well marked and assessment is used to set targets for each pupil. Most pupils are well aware of their targets and know what they need to do in order to meet them. Information gained from assessment is used effectively to identify strengths and weaknesses that lead to changes in the programme of work.

100. The leadership and management of the department have improved since the previous report. The department is well managed and leadership promotes a shared commitment to raising standards. There is a clear sense of educational direction and this is reflected in a range of other improvements. For



example, schemes of work and teaching strategies take account of national initiatives. The use of ICT to enrich and support learning is now incorporated into the schemes and planning recognises that this is an area for further development. Monitoring of the work of the department is good. Very good quality display in classrooms and corridors celebrates pupils' work and engenders a purposeful, mathematical ethos. Overall improvement since the previous inspection is good, with significant improvements in teaching, learning, planning, accommodation and learning resources.

#### *Key skills across the curriculum - Numeracy*

101. The school has adopted a proactive approach to promoting numeracy across the curriculum and significant improvement has been made since the previous inspection. Action has embraced national initiatives and there is now a whole school policy for developing pupils' numerical skills. All teachers have taken part in a training programme for raising awareness of numeracy and its relevance to teaching in all the subjects of the curriculum. Development is ongoing.

102. The incorporation of the National Numeracy Strategy into curriculum and lesson planning is having a positive effect on standards in mathematics lessons. Pupils' fluency with arithmetic and number work has improved since the previous inspection. Mathematics lessons are increasingly using the structures provided in the national framework and this has improved the overall shape of lessons. However, the use of a summary discussion with pupils at the end of lessons requires further development.

103. Although the use of numeracy skills is not planned and promoted in every subject there are many examples of them being used well to enhance learning and understanding. A range of data handling skills is well used in geography and the quality of graphs is improving. Appreciation of shape and size is a feature of lessons in performing arts as pupils use reflection and symmetry to develop movement patterns in dance. Measurement and weighing skills are used accurately in food technology and pupils' grasp of proportion and size is developed through work with resistant materials. Mathematical skills enhance performance in science; for example, pupils' competence in manipulating formulae and drawing graphs enables them to interpret the results of practical work.

104. Overall, the effectiveness of the strategies for teaching numerical skills across the curriculum is satisfactory.

## **SCIENCE**

Overall, the quality of provision in science is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 - 9.
- The subject is well managed; staff work well together as a team.
- The science curriculum is improving; it is now more relevant to pupils' needs and abilities.

### Areas for improvement

- Results in national tests and examinations could be raised.
- The school should aim to have all science classes taught by specialist teachers of science.
- More use could be made of ICT.
- The marking of pupils' work in Years 7-9 could give clearer indication of the standard being achieved and how to improve further.

105. Pupils' results in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were below the national average. They were well above average compared with similar schools and represented good progress from Year 7. Taken over the past four years results have improved in line with the national picture.

106. GCSE results in science in 2002 were well below average at grades A\*-C. They were not as good as in previous years when they were below average. Results were broadly average in the range A\*-G. The 2002 results represent a considerable degree of underachievement for this year group. Teaching suffered from difficulties with continuity of staffing, which in turn adversely affected pupils' achievement. Recent changes in staffing have led to clearer educational direction for the department and better teaching which is helping to improve pupils' achievement.

107. Current standards of work are below average in Year 9. Pupils achieve well overall because their attainment in science was well below average on entry to the school. In particular, their literacy skills are weak and this restricts their learning. However, as a result of good teaching in this age range pupils make good progress in each of the separate sciences, biology, chemistry and physics. For example, in chemistry, higher-attaining pupils have a sound understanding of the structure of the atom. They can use information data to calculate the number of elementary particles in individual atoms. They can write word equations for reactions but are less successful when balancing molecular equations. In physics, middle-attaining pupils have some understanding of the effect of forces on objects. They can interpret distance-time graphs and work out simple calculations using equations of motion. In biology, lower-attaining pupils can name most of the major organs in the human body and describe in simple terms how groups of organs such as the respiratory system function. However, their recall of topics they have previously studied is weak at times.

108. Standards of work are below average in Year 11. They are better than the most recent GCSE results suggest. The return to a modular science course in this age range is helping to raise standards by focusing on short term learning objectives. However, achievement is only satisfactory because the rate of improvement slows due to the disproportionate effect of non-specialist teaching in this age group. The highest-attaining pupils have a sound knowledge and understanding of physics; for example, they can name components of the electromagnetic spectrum and relate the frequency and wavelength of different radiations to their effect on the environment. These pupils are generally working at grades B and C in their GCSE studies. Middle-attaining pupils have a sound understanding of basic scientific principles and apply them appropriately such as when, in chemistry, they relate the properties of hydrocarbon fractions such as boiling point and viscosity to the length of the hydrocarbon chain present. Standards of work fall within the C - E range of grades. Lower-attaining pupils perform simple experiments to demonstrate, say, the reflection and refraction of light, but their background knowledge of these physical topics is limited. For example, they had little understanding of the concept of critical angle applied to refraction. They are generally working at the lower GCSE grades.

109. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language generally make good progress in their lessons and achieve well. This is because of teaching that supports their learning well. As a result, almost all pupils achieve at least a G grade in their GCSE science examinations.

110. Pupils' attitudes to their work are satisfactory overall. In class, most pupils are well behaved and concentrate well on their work. They enjoy practical work and this helps them learn better. For example, a Year 8 class enjoyed performing an experiment that modelled the process of rock erosion. As a result they made good progress in their understanding of this topic. Where pupils display challenging behaviour, teachers manage the situation well through friendly but firm discipline. Hence, the progress of the whole group is not affected. However, too many lessons are characterised by pupils arriving late so that the flow of teaching is adversely affected and progress is slower than planned.

111. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. They are good in Years 7-9. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection – a considerable improvement on the previous inspection. Teaching is better in Years 7-9 because the introduction of the National Science Strategy in this age range has led to teaching that places a greater emphasis on what pupils are to learn and outcomes. This,

together with the use of three-part lessons, has given teaching a better structure that has improved learning. The use of non-specialist teachers in Year 10 and 11 has led to slower progress for some groups of pupils. This problem will soon be resolved as the smaller number of pupils in Years 7 to 9 progress through the school. Pupils make good progress in lessons where they know what it is they are expected to achieve. Where these features were not present, lessons generally lacked pace and focus and progress was slower. Teachers manage their classes well and most lessons are conducted at a good pace. Planning of work is thorough and practical activities are carried out with due regard to safety. Learning support assistants work effectively with individuals or small groups of pupils and this improves learning overall. The introduction of good quality schemes of work in Years 7 and 8 that incorporate the National Science Strategy is significantly improving provision in science. Pupils' work is marked regularly but in Years 7 - 9 pupils would benefit from an indication of the National Curriculum level being achieved and specific details on how to improve. Teachers positively promote the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. For example, in a Year 8 lesson pupils were taught to skim and scan a passage on air pollution to obtain the essential facts and concepts about this topic. This strategy improved pupils' learning by speeding up their work. As a result, their knowledge and understanding of global warming and acid rain improved considerably during the lesson. Pupils make some use of ICT in their science lessons; for example, it is used extensively to facilitate revision for examinations. However, pupils need to make more use of data-loggers to improve investigative and experimental science.

112. The department, after a period of uncertainty due to staffing problems, is now well managed. Teaching and learning are monitored by direct lesson observation and this is helping to raise standards through the sharing of good practice. Teachers and support staff work well together as a team. The technician ensures that the department functions smoothly on a day-to-day basis. There is clear educational direction, for example, with the proposed introduction of GNVQ science. The department has made good improvement since the previous inspection. The science curriculum is more relevant to the pupils' needs, teaching is better and standards are improving.

## ART AND DESIGN

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

### Strengths

- Standards of work are improving.
- Work in textiles is lively and richly decorated.
- The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' cultural development.

### Areas for improvement

- GCSE results could be improved.
- There is a lack of pace and urgency in some lessons.
- Pupils lack confidence when working from observation.

113. Pupils' results in GCSE examinations in 2002 were well below average compared with schools nationally. Pupils did not do as well in art and design as they did in most of their other subjects. The number of pupils taking the examination was too small to reliably compare the results of boys and girls. Results have declined over the last three years.

114. Standards of work in Year 9 are well below average but pupils' achieve satisfactorily considering their low starting point on entry to the school. All pupils make steady gains in developing their skills, such as when handling clay to produce well-made ceramic masks. Higher-attaining pupils make good use of colour to create bold patterns with swirling lines in yellow, blue and purple. Pupils benefit from learning about the work of a wide range of art and artists. This includes the art of other cultures, for example, Indian prints and Australian aboriginal paintings. Pupils' observational work, however, lacks confidence. They prefer to copy from books, or use their memory and imagination to create images. In addition, their painting skills are weak; paint is sometimes applied rather crudely to the picture surface.

115. Standards of work in Year 11 are below average. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. They make steady gains in their skills, knowledge and understanding of the subject. Their work in textiles is lively and richly decorated. The highest attaining pupils use bright colours and metallic glue to create fluid lines and shapes. Others make interesting landscape paintings by carefully placing the shapes of trees and buildings to create balanced compositions. Pupils sometimes use ICT well to research the work of artists, or to create collages, but this approach is not yet widespread enough. Pupils' work based on observation is an area for improvement, as in the earlier year groups. Pupils' approach to this aspect of the work is not confident enough to fully develop the relevant skills. In addition, pupils do not experiment enough with materials to give their painting a sense of excitement or discovery.

116. Pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily, although the lack of learning support assistants means that they sometimes do not benefit as much as they could from the good range of materials which are available. Pupils with English as an additional language also achieve satisfactorily because many lessons feature clear demonstrations so that all pupils can see what to do to succeed. Pupils from the Smart Centre achieve well in art and design. They enjoy lessons and try hard because of the practical activities, such as modelling in clay, and the high levels of individual attention they receive.

117. Pupils' attitudes are satisfactory overall. They are good in Years 10 and 11, where relationships between teachers and pupils are stronger. The great majority of pupils show satisfactory levels of interest in lessons, which promotes satisfactory levels of achievement. Pupils receive less time for art and design lessons in Year 9 than in Year 7 and 8; this restricts the variety and amount of work covered in this year group and confines overall achievement in Year 9 to satisfactory rather than better.

118. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall in all year groups. In the best lessons, relationships are good, and pupils apply themselves well to their work. For example, in a Year 11 class, pupils showed positive attitudes from the start of the lesson, responding well to the teacher's introduction. They showed good levels of interest in their work, behaved well, and tried hard to succeed. As a result, they made good gains in their skills in drawing and textiles work. At times, however, there is a lack of a sense of urgency in lessons, the atmosphere is comfortable, and pupils chat too much without concentrating enough on their work. Consequently, the pace of the lesson begins to slow, and learning is no better than satisfactory.

119. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning, and standards of work, are regularly monitored but recent staffing difficulties have resulted in changes of staff and some teaching by non-specialist teachers. This has affected recent results and the coursework of current Year 11 pupils. However, consistent staffing has been re-established and standards are improving. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' cultural development by organising gallery visits and by using visiting artists to work with pupils. In addition, pupils are encouraged to enter competitions, in which they achieve measurable success. For example, winning entries included a logo for the Local Authority and a stage costume for a well-known pop group.

## CITIZENSHIP

Overall, the quality of provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- The specialist nature of the school is having a very positive impact on the quality of learning in citizenship for some pupils.
- There are some good opportunities for promoting citizenship through exciting and practical projects.
- Good relationships assist pupils in learning to respect the feelings, values and beliefs of others.

### Areas for improvement

- Standards could be raised further.
- There are no procedures for assessing and reporting on pupils' work in citizenship.
- The school lacks a coherent programme for the teaching of the subject.
- More opportunities could be provided for pupils to develop the skills of research and investigation.

120. The overall standard of work in citizenship is below average but there are examples of work of a high standard. Pupils' achievement throughout the school is satisfactory in relation to their attainment at the start of Year 7. Teaching and learning are also satisfactory. Good relationships are fostered as pupils learn to respect the feelings, values and beliefs of others. This approach has made a good contribution to the improvement of attitudes and behaviour in the school since the previous inspection.

121. Pupils gradually increase their knowledge and understanding of what it means to be an 'informed citizen' as they move through the school. They make satisfactory progress in developing their skills of communication, participation and taking responsibility. For example, in the new democratically elected school council, pupils engage in a good range of discussions to develop awareness of their rights, responsibilities and duties to the wider community. When acting as monitors, pupils in Year 9 noticeably increase in confidence and in their ability to deal with people in a very practical way. Classwork, however, provides few opportunities for them to develop the skills of research and investigation.

122. Much of the work in citizenship across subjects is incidental though sometimes of high quality as the following example illustrates. In a Year 10 English lesson on the impact of visual images a swastika stimulated immediate discussion of the moral and social effects of Nazi principles and how they were embodied in the symbol. The quality of debate was high, covering racism, prejudice and discrimination. The specialist nature of the school ( for performing arts) is having a very positive effect on the quality of learning in citizenship for some pupils. A small group of Year 11 pupils made excellent gains in their knowledge and understanding of true citizenship in producing a powerful video entitled 'Alem will stay' to illustrate the issues of asylum seekers. Another group made similar gains when they participated in a very effective piece of drama to commemorate victims of the Holocaust. The drama was performed in assemblies and for the Trafford Holocaust Memorial Day. In specific citizenship lessons, within the programme of personal and social education, pupils in Year 10 reached average standards in writing on human rights and equal opportunities based on the style of Martin Luther-King's "I had a dream". However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to write at length to develop arguments or produce reports. This restricts standards. In the only citizenship lesson observed during the inspection, on animal rights, the standard of work of Year 7 pupils was below average because the worksheets were too simplistic to stretch the higher-attaining pupils. In addition, the learning of the majority of pupils was held back by the immature behaviour of a few boys who required too much of the teacher's attention.

123. Aspects of citizenship are covered in assemblies, the new tutor period and special days such as the European Day organised by the modern languages department. Although pupils' experiences of citizenship are not yet fully co-ordinated across the school there are some very good examples of the promotion of the subject through exciting and practical projects. One class has successfully channelled its energies into taking responsibility for improving the garden and toilets in their block of the school building. Others have attended and participated in the Trafford elections to the UK Youth Parliament. Leadership and management are satisfactory at this early stage of the introduction of citizenship. The content of the course across subjects has not yet been drawn together into a coherent programme of work. Teachers are still feeling their way to get to the heart of the demands of this new subject. Assessment procedures are not in place to determine the attainment and progress of individual pupils or whole groups.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good. Pupils achieve well.
- Leadership and management are good. They promote good relationships and a team approach across the department.
- The standard of practical work is good.

#### Areas for improvement

- There are not enough resources for ICT, especially CAD/CAM.
- The breadth of provision could be widened to include, for example, electronics and graphics.
- There needs to be a sharper focus on developing consistency of practice across the different areas of provision within the department.

124. Standards of work in Year 9 are below average overall. They match the recent teacher assessments for pupils achieving National Curriculum level 5, the level expected for pupils' age. From well below average attainment on entry pupils make good progress from Year 7 to Year 9 and achieve well, especially in practical work. Girls usually produce a better standard of work than boys, particularly in their design folders. Good examples of pupils' developing skills were seen in labelled working drawings in a resistant materials project in Year 8 and in the use of colour and ICT when Year 9 pupils created a 'mood board' in textiles. Where the work was of lower quality, pupils' graphical work was weaker, there was an over-reliance on commercial material in research, drawings were done in pen, not pencil and work was unfinished.

125. Pupils' results in GCSE examinations in 2002 were similar to the national average at grades A\*-C. Their performance in resistant materials was above the national average. Currently, standards of work in Year 11 are average overall with textiles the stronger of the specialisms. Examination results have improved over recent years. Good work was seen in all areas and pupils achieve well overall. For some pupils, design and technology is their best performing subject. In Year 11, good work was seen in projects involving research and the estimation of costs; also in the consideration of social, moral and cultural influences when designing clothing with an Islamic theme. In food technology, particular thought is given to presentational skills including the use of photographs when looking at the special dietary needs of different groups of people. Where the standard of pupils' work was not as good, ideas were not developed in depth and work was often incomplete. It lacked evaluation by the individual pupil. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls.

126. There is a good emphasis on the development of pupils' literacy skills and the use of technical vocabulary. The promotion and use of numerical and ICT skills is satisfactory and contributes to pupils' rising standards. However, CAD/CAM resources are not available in the resistant materials area and this restricts progress in this area to some extent.

127. Pupils' attitudes are good in most lessons. They usually settle quickly and respond well when suitably challenged but there are some distractions and instances when pupils do not respond readily to the teachers' requests for attention. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language, integrate well and make good progress. They talk confidently about their work and are proud of their achievements, especially the practical outcomes.

128. Overall the quality of teaching and learning is good. All the lessons observed were satisfactory or better; some were very good. In the best lessons, learning is accelerated and good progress made because teachers use their good subject expertise to develop and expand ideas. They have high expectations, maintain a good pace and manage pupils well so that they know what is expected of them. Typical of such lessons was the Year 11 class in which pupils were fully engaged in developing the skills required to answer examination questions. Most lessons also promote the development of social skills because pupils are required to work in teams or groups. In the lessons where pupils' progress was satisfactory rather than good, pupils' concentration on the task was not always sustained. The quality of homework is inconsistent.

129. Leadership and management of the subject are good. Documentation is thorough and clearly outlines policies and practices. A number of issues from the previous inspection have been resolved and the development plan has appropriate priorities. Procedures for assessing pupils' progress are good and records are kept methodically. However, pupils do not always know how well they are performing and there needs to be a sharper focus on developing consistency of practice across the department. Some aspects of the work, for example, electronics and control, are underdeveloped and there is no graphics module of work in Years 7 - 9, which accounts in part for some weakness in the presentation of design folders. A new food technology room has recently been installed and provides a good area for learning. Other workshops need upgrading to include ICT facilities such as CAD/CAM. Good displays of work in rooms and corridors celebrate pupils' good achievement and provide inspiration and encouragement for others. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

## EXPRESSIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS

Overall, the quality of provision in expressive and performing arts is **very good**.

### Strengths

- Teaching and learning in both courses are very good. Pupils achieve very well.
- Standards in the performing arts course are high.
- The leadership and management of these courses are very good.
- The courses are challenging. They contribute well to pupils' personal development.

### Areas for improvement

- The GNVQ performing arts course could be opened up to a larger number of pupils.

130. In an innovative and challenging development of the curriculum for pupils in Year 9, all have been entered for the GCSE examination in expressive arts. Standards seen during the inspection were average, representing very good achievement for pupils who are two years younger than most candidates taking the examination.

131. Pupils' creative efforts are high, and all are aware of the importance of developing communication with an audience. Most successfully combine their composing skills with dance. Pupils of higher ability demonstrated imaginative work in their compositions which were well structured, played with an appropriately selected instrumental sound and sensitively interpreted in dance of their own devising. Pupils of average ability created dance and music to interpret their own poetry; less able pupils work with determination and commitment although they have difficulty in sustaining an atmosphere. Responses to the study of the film comedies of Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy were perceptive, both in their appreciation of the importance of music to highlight the comedy and drama, and in their identification with the plight and pathos of the clown. Plans for improvised drama draw on pupils' understanding of the complementary nature of drama, music and dance. Their writing is detailed, well organised and lively, demonstrating their willingness to tackle the high challenge the course offers.

132. Pupils make very good progress because teaching is very good. The content of the course draws on a wide range of stimuli which includes poetry, Asian dance and Street Dance. In addition, there are a number of cross-curricular themes that examine moral issues such as slavery, bullying and racism. The subject makes a significant contribution to pupils' independent learning and personal development.

133. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow the GNVQ course in performing arts and are entered at the intermediate level of GNVQ, which is the equivalent of four GCSE grades at C or above. Standards of attainment in the course observed during the inspection were high, with boys and girls, and pupils from different ethnic backgrounds, attaining equally well.

134. The course offers a high challenge, clearly structured learning, and requires high quality creative effort. Pupils have extensive opportunities for personal development and independent learning and they respond with high levels of commitment. As a result, they develop a comprehensive range of skills across a wide spectrum which include organising, publicising and presenting an event. In addition, pupils learn about the requirements of a production through activities as diverse as character interpretation, costume design and set construction. Their records of work are detailed, thorough and well presented. They demonstrate an increasingly mature approach, together with a capacity for self-evaluation and enhanced self-esteem.

135. The course is well supported by very good teaching, very good management, and very good resources.

136. The group taking the course at present is small, but plans are in hand to increase numbers significantly in the coming year.



## GEOGRAPHY

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **good**.

### Strengths

- Excellent classroom management underpins very good behaviour and enables learning to occur at a good rate.
- There is a very good focus on developing pupils' writing skills.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and skilfully adapt methods to match the needs of the pupils.
- Pupils with learning and other difficulties make good progress

### Areas for improvement

- The use of computers to support pupils' learning could be further developed.
- Standards could be raised further, especially in Years 7-9.
- There is no subject specific plan to guide the development of geography.

137. Overall standards of work are below average in Year 9; they are average in Year 11 where they have improved considerably in the short time since the previous inspection. These standards represent good achievement in relation to attainment on entry in Year 7. There is no significant difference between the attainment of girls and boys.

138. In Year 9, higher-attaining pupils make good progress and reach above average standards in work describing and explaining climate graphs of tropical rainforests. They consider the economic, social and moral implications of exploiting this natural resource and are beginning to grasp the concept of sustainable development. Lower-attaining pupils cover the same work in less depth because of the concentration on developing their language skills. This enables them to attain standards that, although below average, represent good achievement.

139. In Years 10 and 11, higher-attaining pupils achieve well and gain high marks in their investigations. They use fieldwork techniques competently to correlate height with slope, soil depth and acidity. They satisfactorily describe and explain graphs of river discharge and successfully match them to different environments. The standards of work of lower-attaining pupils are below average because their written work is very brief and sometimes incomplete. They have difficulty in using maps to identify differences between river valleys. Nevertheless, they achieve well in relation to their attainment at the start of the course.

140. In 2002, all the pupils entered for the GCSE examination gained a grade. Overall, the results were below the national average but they represented good achievement for both girls and boys. In the previous year considerably more pupils gained results that were slightly above the national average: a commendable performance.

141. Pupils with learning and other difficulties and those who are at an early stage of learning English make good progress in all year groups. This is due to the focus in teaching on the development of writing skills and because work is carefully matched to pupils' needs. For example, in Year 9, all these pupils reach average standards when investigating and describing the contrast between rich and poor families in Brazil. The work of learning support assistants is very effective.

142. Pupils' behaviour is usually very good and has improved since the previous inspection. Their positive attitudes make a substantial contribution to the improving standards of work and enable learning to proceed with interest and lively enthusiasm. However, the poor attendance of a few pupils spoils the continuity of their work and thus affects their progress.

143. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers' excellent classroom management and the mutual respect between teachers and pupils underpin the very good behaviour and enable learning to occur at a good rate. Teachers have good subject knowledge and skilfully adapt methods to match the needs of the pupils. There is a very good focus on developing pupils' writing through the use of short structured tasks, advice on how to write at length and an emphasis on the spelling and use of technical words. Hence, pupils make effective use of a range of writing styles including reports, poetry, extended writing and newspaper articles. These good features were observed in lessons on the water cycle. Very good teaching in a Year 11 lesson was characterised by effective use of resources so that pupils made rapid gains in their knowledge and understanding of the location of different industries. Learning was less effective on the occasions when teachers' explanations were too long and when opportunities were missed to extend pupils' understanding and skills. For example, in a lesson on the location of settlements, the use of a sketch map using Stretford as a case study would have enhanced pupils' learning.

144. Basic numerical and mathematical skills are well taught. For example, pupils competently use a wide variety of graphs to illustrate geographical data. Computers are used well for research and presentation but their use to handle and present data is less developed.

145. Leadership and management of the department are good and have led to a significant improvement since the previous inspection. The procedures for assessing pupils' work and checking their progress are good. However, there is no subject specific plan, with targets, to guide the development of geography and this is a weakness.

## HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Pupils achieve well from their starting points.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in Years 7-9 is good.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have positive attitudes to learning and behave well.

### Areas for improvement

- In Years 7-9, pupils' work and progress are not monitored thoroughly enough to provide essential information for curriculum planning.
- The provision of homework is inconsistent.

146. Standards of work are below average Year 9. Nevertheless, this represents good achievement for these pupils in comparison with their well below average starting points on entry to the school. One of the strongest features of the work is the way in which pupils of all levels of attainment write at length, particularly when empathising with the condition of people in the past, for example soldiers on the Western front during the First World War. Higher attainers are beginning to analyse sources of information, for example to assess their reliability or usefulness. However, the work of average and below average attainers tends to be limited to description and inference. Pupils generally can select information appropriately from a good range of sources of information, which represents an improvement since the previous inspection when pupils' experience in this respect was limited. Pupils' capacity to compare different historical interpretations of events is weak because they have little opportunity to practise this key historical skill.

147. A small number of pupils currently in Years 10 and 11 have chosen to follow a GCSE course in history in contrast to the situation at the time of the previous inspection when numbers were too few to make the provision of a course viable. Overall standards of work in Year 11 are below average. Pupils achieve well overall but higher attainers could do even better. They are not stretched sufficiently. Standards of work are close to average in Year 10, as demonstrated by pupils' steadily increasing knowledge and understanding of the history of medicine. Pupils select information well and use it

effectively in writing at length, for example to describe the embalming process used by the Ancient Egyptians.

148. Pupils who have special educational needs and those who are at a relatively early stage of learning English make good progress when they receive additional support in lessons. Effective liaison between their history teachers and support staff contributes to the good overall achievement. In some lessons, particularly in Years 7 and 8, where a significant minority of the pupils have special educational needs, the progress is not as good because the teacher, although aware of their individual needs, cannot provide the amount of one-to-one attention that is needed. Throughout the school, the study of history contributes well to pupils' personal development.

149. The majority of pupils have positive attitudes to learning but in a few lessons in Years 7-9 the behaviour of a small minority of pupils, though generally well handled by the teacher, slows the overall pace of learning.

150. The overall quality of teaching in Years 7-9 is good and has improved since the previous inspection. Lessons are generally well planned to ensure each of the key historical skills received due attention although pupils have relatively little experience in seeing how there can be different interpretations of the same event. Relationships are good and most lessons provide interesting activities, which are well matched to pupils' capabilities. A common feature of good lessons was the way in which previous learning was revised at the start and the new learning reinforced through questioning at the conclusion. Learning was particularly good in a lesson on the development of railways where the teacher, returning from sick leave, had carefully evaluated the pupils' previous work on the topic. This ensured that continuity was maintained and that learning activities provided a good challenge. In lessons observed in Years 10 and 11 the quality of teaching and learning was good but the analysis of pupils' work indicates that the higher attainers in particular are not being sufficiently stretched. Marking is regular, accurate and supportive but does not give the pupils sufficient indication of how they can improve their work. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Throughout the school computers are used well to support pupils' learning in history, for example to present their ideas and the results of their investigations or to search for and select sources of information from educational websites. A programme of visits to historical sites and museums for example, the Imperial War Museum North, enhances the curriculum. The provision of homework is inconsistent and so does not contribute effectively to pupils' learning and progress.

151. Improvement in history since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Good progress has been made in some areas. There is now a head of department and subject development is beginning to take place. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Schemes of work ensure that pupils now have appropriate opportunities to develop their skills in the use of evidence. An effective curriculum link has been established with performing arts. Good progress has been made in enabling pupils to understand what they need to do reach appropriate levels of the National Curriculum for history but is too recent to have any significant effect on standards. Some of the history is taught by non-specialist staff. This, together with some long-term teacher absence, has affected the continuity of learning for some pupils despite effective support from the department. In Years 7-9, pupils' work is not currently being thoroughly assessed and their progress monitored, so teachers do not have essential information for use in future curriculum planning.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Strengths**

- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Teaching and learning are very good in examination classes in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils make good use of the extra support that is provided at lunchtimes and after

school.

Areas for improvement

- There is significant variation in the quality of teaching in Years 7-9.
- Greater emphasis could be placed on contributing to the development of pupils' literacy skills.

152. Pupils enter the school with varying experiences in using ICT, but, overall, standards are well below average. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were well above average. The quality of work in the current Year 10 indicates that pupils are building on this level of performance. Current assessments indicate that standards in Year 9 are below average. These standards are confirmed by evidence from the inspection.

153. No public examinations have been taken in ICT prior to 2003. Standards of work in the current examination classes in Years 10 and 11 are above average.

154. The standard of work seen in Years 7-9 was variable. However, overall, achievement is satisfactory considering pupils' prior attainment. The more able pupils in Year 9 can plan and evaluate the work they undertake. They sequence procedures accurately, such as when they design information sheets on holiday destinations for a specific audience as part of a unit on public information systems. Skills are developed through a well-structured scheme of work, which, besides focusing on basic ICT skills, encourages pupils to plan, assess and improve their work through the completion of a series of unit booklets. In Year 7, pupils satisfactorily devised questions in preparation for the development of a questionnaire. Skilful questioning by the teacher indicated that pupils were beginning to understand the importance of the phrasing of questions and the style of their presentation. However, pupils' overall understanding of the breadth of the work involved was insecure. Similarly, Year 8 pupils' work on the design of a web site was limited by their poor literacy skills.

155. In Year 11, the standard of work of pupils taking GNVQ/ GCSE courses is above average. The majority of pupils are making very good progress. They plan and analyse their work accurately, both orally and in writing. Pupils set up and use relational databases to produce queries and reports and graph outcomes. They produce business documents of a high quality and successfully test and validate the information systems they devise. Pupils are encouraged to work independently, using a range of knowledge and skills appropriate to the requirements of their course. Their coursework is of a high quality. Satisfactory provision is made for pupils not taking examination courses to consolidate their ICT skills. They make satisfactory progress overall but learning for some is limited by poor literacy and numeracy skills. Their standard of work is below average.

156. Pupils with special educational needs or for whom English is a second language make satisfactory progress overall but support is not always immediately on hand when needed in classes where the teacher is the only adult in the classroom. This slows down these pupils' learning.

157. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall in Years 7-9 and very good in examination classes in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7-9, the schemes of work, adapted from national schemes, are appropriate and make good use of the time available. In the lessons observed, teaching was good. Lessons were well structured with prompt starts. High expectations were established at the beginning of the lesson and the aims made clear. There was a good balance between taught elements and the tasks that pupils were required to complete. The work set was appropriate to pupils' ability so each was able to make progress. Good order, and a purposeful working environment were maintained despite some potentially poorly behaved pupils in Year 7. The setting of high standards, the use of praise and encouragement and the challenging of poor behaviour were key features of these lessons. Scrutiny of assessment data and pupils' work in classes not observed during the inspection revealed that teaching in Years 7-9 is inconsistent between classes. This has an impact on pupils' learning. In those classes where there has been a lack of continuity in teaching due to staff changes, or where there are inexperienced or non-specialist teachers, pupils' achievement over time is unsatisfactory. The school is alert to the situation and is endeavouring to

recruit suitably qualified and experienced teachers of ICT. The teaching of GNVQ, GCSE and other ICT courses in Years 10 and 11 is generally very good, and at times excellent. It is based on very good subject knowledge and understanding of course requirements. A step-by-step approach to the syllabus is followed and pupils' progress and performance are monitored rigorously. Expectations are very high and assessment data is used to set challenging targets. Pupils know what is expected of them and what they need to do to improve to gain good grades in their relevant courses. Encouragement and the frequent use of praise ensures high motivation. Pupils take advantage of the extra support that is provided at lunchtimes and after school. Consequently their learning is very good.

158. Given the difficulties of staffing in the department and the issues with ICT at the time of the previous inspection, the leadership and management are excellent. In two years, with energy and focused dedication, the series of weaknesses identified in the last report have, for the most part, been resolved. Adequate resources now underpin the provision for ICT enabling it to be firmly located in the curriculum throughout the school. In 2002, ICT was the most popular option in Year 10 and GCSE and GNVQ courses were established. Pupils' work is assessed regularly through a structured system. Their progress is accurately monitored and recorded against National Curriculum levels. Evidence of good practice in ICT is effectively displayed throughout the school. The use of ICT in all subjects of the curriculum is closely monitored and is developing well, although faster in some subjects than others. For all these reasons, improvement since the previous inspection is good.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in modern languages is **good**.

### Strengths

- Leadership and management are very good.
- Pupils achieve well in French.
- Lower-attaining pupils make very good progress in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils have excellent awareness of their progress, because teachers link lessons clearly to National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades.
- The department makes a very good contribution to the development of pupils' literacy skills.

### Areas for improvement

- The proportion of GCSE A\*-C grades could be increased.
- The French accents of all pupils could be improved.
- Learning opportunities for higher-attaining pupils could be enhanced, especially in the mixed ability groups in Year 7.
- Foreign language opportunities could be extended in Years 10 and 11.

## French

159. All pupils study French in Years 7 - 9. Since September 2002, pupils have chosen whether to continue with French in Years 10 and 11. In the current Year 10 this has resulted in a decline to approximately one quarter of pupils choosing to continue French to GCSE. In 2002, the results in French at GCSE were well below the national average. However, all those entered attained a grade and most achieved well considering their prior attainment. The boys gained better results than the girls, compared with the national averages for boys and girls. Although results in French have been below average overall over recent years, there is an improving trend, which was especially evident in French results in 2001. Results in 2002 were adversely affected to some extent by staffing problems, which had disrupted the continuity of learning of some of these pupils. These have now been resolved.

160. Standards in French are below average in Year 9. This represents good achievement from entry in Year 7. Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that all pupils make good progress in writing. The teachers' clear emphasis on accuracy of spelling and grammar supports pupils' overall development in literacy very well. The higher-attaining pupils describe, for example, holiday events and future plans using the present, past, and future tenses confidently; middle-attaining pupils write with reasonable accuracy but require help from support sheets. Lower-attaining pupils write sentences confidently in basic language because they are given good guidelines on which to base their work. In listening, most pupils make good progress; they understand short recordings of native speakers using familiar language. Middle and low-attaining pupils sometimes have difficulties in prolonged listening, especially towards the end of lessons; this is due to the short concentration span many pupils have. In Years 7 - 9 most pupils are confident in understanding French texts on topics they are studying. In speaking, pupils make good progress overall; higher-attaining pupils speak quickly, recalling and re-using language they have learned. Lower and middle-attaining pupils respond well in paired conversations, using cards or sheets to help them form sentences.

161. Standards in French are below average in Year 11. Overall, achievement is good. The achievement of lower-attaining pupils is very good. The written coursework of higher-attaining pupils reaches average standards overall; pupils can express themselves confidently using a range of tenses and an extensive topic-based vocabulary, when, for example, writing about school, leisure activities, and health. Middle and lower-attaining pupils write in simpler language and are more dependent on sheets to help them recall what they have learned. In speaking, most pupils confidently undertake speaking tasks for examinations. In both speaking and writing, lower-attaining pupils make very good progress. In reading and listening, all pupils recognise topic-based vocabulary appropriate for their ability. In all years, pupils have few opportunities to converse naturally, for example, with native speakers. This particularly deprives the higher-attaining pupils of valuable opportunities to fully develop their speaking skills. Many pupils speak with poor French accents.

162. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language make good progress because teachers identify them and provide well for their individual learning needs. Boys and girls make equally good progress; higher-attaining boys use French confidently to answer the teachers' questions, and boys generally respond positively to the well-structured lessons. The department contributes occasionally but effectively to pupils' basic arithmetic, for example, in shopping transactions in French. Foreign cultures are strongly promoted through events and displays.

163. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good; pupils are well behaved and co-operative in most lessons. In some lessons in Years 7 - 9, learning declines when the teacher plans prolonged speaking and listening in the second half of lessons.

164. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teaching is good in Years 7 - 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Almost all the teaching seen was good or very good and there was no unsatisfactory teaching. All teachers link their lessons systematically to National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades, so that the pupils have excellent awareness of their learning and consequently contribute knowledgeably to target setting. Teachers plan their lessons very well and deliver them in clear stages; they have clear aims that are shared with pupils and reviewed at the end of lessons so that pupils know how much progress they have made. Imaginative resources are used effectively; coloured cards and overhead transparencies are used skilfully to hold pupils' attention and enable them to make sentences in French, based on clear language models. Written work is marked regularly and pupils have clear records of progress. In planning for lessons in Years 7 - 9, teachers provide well for the learning needs of lower and middle-attaining pupils, for example by providing simpler tasks and fuller information. However, although teachers provide extended tasks for the higher-attaining pupils, these are not sufficiently challenging. They do not contain enough motivating and independent learning experiences, especially in the mixed ability groups in Year 7.

165. In spite of the teachers' ability to teach at least two foreign languages, opportunities for studying foreign languages at the school are limited. Only a single foreign language course is on offer to pupils in Years 10 and 11.

166. Leadership and management are very good. The strong commitment and enthusiasm is evident in all aspects of the departmental administration and in the good and rapid improvement that has taken place since the previous inspection. The monitoring of teaching and learning is regular and systematic. Pupils' achievement and behaviour are now good and learning resources have improved. Appropriate targets for further improvement are: continuing to increase the numbers of pupils gaining A\*-C grades at GCSE; and revising the schemes of work for Years 7 – 9 to enhance existing provision for higher-attaining pupils.

## MUSIC

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

### Strengths

- Pupils' achievement is good
- The attainment of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is in line with the national average.
- Boys' attainment in the GCSE examination in music was higher than that of boys nationally
- The curriculum for pupils in Year 9 is innovative.
- A very good range of extra-curricular activities enriches pupils' personal development

### Areas for improvement

- Some aspects of the curriculum for younger pupils and for those with special educational need refining.

167. In 2002, results in music at GCSE were close to the national average. The trend over recent years has been broadly similar to the national trend. Pupils' attainment in music is significantly higher than their attainment in most other subjects, boys' attainment is higher than that of boys nationally, and, contrary to the national picture, boys' attainment is better than that of girls. More boys than girls choose music as an option, and numbers entered are greater than is usually found.

168. Teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 in 2002 indicated that standards were above the national average. These findings were not reflected in standards of work in the current Year 9, where standards are average, principally because previous assessment systems had not been linked sufficiently closely to the criteria for National Curriculum levels.

169. The attainment in music of the majority of pupils on entry to the school is below average. In Years 7-9, pupils' achievement is good and their creative efforts are high. Although relatively few pupils learn to play an instrument, they are encouraged to develop their natural musical instincts of rhythmic response and musical memory to a good level. Their study of protest songs over the past thirty years has led to some lively composing in a variety of appropriate genres from verse and chorus to rap. When using sound to create atmosphere, pupils show their understanding of variety and unity. Pupils of higher ability interpret their ideas sensitively. Pupils have particularly well established ensemble skills and most perform confidently. They listen critically and are prepared to persist in order to improve the quality of their performances. They know simple musical vocabulary but their responses to music they hear are restricted because of their earlier, limited experience of making and listening to music. However, their written analyses of the text of a number of songs show perception and an ability to identify with the plight of people under oppression. All pupils in Year 9 have already been entered for the GCSE examination in expressive arts and the indications are that they will achieve well.

170. Standards of work in Year 11 are average. Pupils' overall achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good. By building on established, intuitive musical skills pupils readily explore ideas, and their final pieces are well structured. Higher ability pupils compose extended pieces with some memorable features; less able pupils are prepared to experiment and develop their ideas in an original way. One pupil showed a

flair for piano improvisations on the blues scale, producing attractive, evocative work. Most pupils care about producing high standards of performance, and more able pupils perform with good levels of sensitivity. Because pupils have difficulty in retaining factual information and relating this to music they hear, their listening responses are insecure. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds make similar progress in music, and boys from Black African and Afro-Caribbean traditions make very good progress; they show a flair for rhythmic and melodic invention with which they are prepared to experiment, developing their ideas well beyond the origins of the stimulus. Although the numbers taking music are relatively few, girls work confidently and independently, and achieve well.

171. The progress of pupils with special educational needs in Years 10 and 11 is good. Because the emphasis of the curriculum at this stage is on practical skills, pupils develop their intuitive musical abilities to a satisfactory standard. However, there is not enough provision, either of specific material or of support, for pupils in Years 7-9 with learning or behavioural difficulties, to enable them to make better than satisfactory progress. Pupils who are gifted and talented make good progress because they are given more challenging tasks.

172. Most pupils adopt positive attitudes to music; they are prepared to settle to work, and to co-operate with one another and with their teachers. They handle equipment responsibly and control levels of noise in a considerate manner. When required to work independently, most pupils in Years 10 and 11 use the available time well, avoiding the temptation to distract other pupils unnecessarily. Some classes in Years 7 and 8 have significant numbers of pupils who, because of their special educational needs, have great difficulty in concentrating, undermining learning opportunities for themselves and others.

173. The quality of teaching and learning, which is good overall, has a number of very good and, at times, excellent features. All teaching is well planned, lessons are well organised, and relationships prosper in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Teachers provide excellent role models for pupils; their expectations are high, and pupils respond well. Lessons are conducted at a good pace, time is well used, and aims are clearly explained; as a result pupils know what is required of them and how to proceed. Pupils are taught to value and build upon their own ideas and abilities, and are enabled to develop their innate musicianship.

174. The management of the department is good, and has a number of very good features. The quality of teaching is regularly monitored and the team approach established in the department enables teachers within the performing arts area to observe each other's lessons in order to spread good practice. The assessment system is now more closely related to national criteria and the information contained in pupils' annual reports is improving. The curriculum for pupils in Years 7-9 has undergone a radical and innovative review. Topics studied are frequently linked to work in other subjects. For instance, links with history led to the study of the development of Jazz, giving pupils the opportunity to reflect on the moral implications of the slave trade in the 18th century, and of unemployment as a human predicament. However, some other cross-curricular links for younger pupils do not provide sufficient consolidation of intuitive musical abilities. Provision for ICT in music, at present unsatisfactory, will be remedied when the recently installed music technology room is inaugurated. Other resources are good. Present staffing is well matched to the requirements of teaching within both the National Curriculum and the syllabus for GCSE in music, and plans are in hand to expand provision for instrumental teaching, which at present is restricted to guitar and drum-kit lessons. Music rooms, although in good decorative order, are in separate buildings; there are no separate spaces adjacent to classrooms suitable for group work.

175. Opportunities for music-making outside normal school hours are very good. Several ensembles are developing in size and expertise and are given frequent opportunities to take part in important events, both within the school and in the local community. The choir recently sang at the local education authority's conference for school governors. Pupils regularly take part in large events, in venues such as the Bridgewater Hall and the MEN Arena. Links with music from other cultures are very good; current plans include a visit from a group of Zulu musicians and for pupils to take part in a workshop with a Chinese composer, creating music for an interpretation of a Chinese legend.



176. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Numbers taking GCSE have increased. The quality of teaching has improved, and the curriculum has become increasingly innovative and relevant. The department is well placed to support the school's vision of enhancing opportunities for all its pupils, raising their self-esteem through steadily improving achievement.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Teaching is good and many lessons have very good features.
- Most pupils have positive attitudes to their work.
- The indoor specialist facilities for the subject are good.
- Most pupils achieve well.
- The subject offers a very good range of extra-curricular activities.

### Areas for improvement

- The condition of on-site outdoor facilities could be improved.
- More use could be made of information gained from assessment procedures.

177. Attainment on entry to the school is below average in physical education, in line with most other subjects. Levels of physical fitness are variable and only some pupils have reached National Curriculum Level 4, the expected level for their age, at the beginning of secondary schooling.

178. By the end of Year 9 standards have been raised and are average overall, in line with expected national levels. Teachers' assessments for 2002 confirm this and pupils currently in Years 7 and 8 are showing the good progress that is required to reach similar levels in the future. There is still some weakness in physical fitness in Year 7, for example a minority of girls are not yet well co-ordinated in their movements. In some athletic activities progress is good, for example in relay baton passing most pupils have improved their skills quickly within the lesson and have a clear understanding of this important piece of teamwork. The improvement in standards in this age group, 11-14 years, represents good added value from entry. There is clear evidence of good achievement over time and within lessons.

179. Overall standards at the age of 16 are average, though this judgement is drawn from few observations in this age group. Pupils achieve well overall in Years 10 and 11. The strength continues to be overall standards of personal physical fitness demonstrated by the majority of students. The strength amongst boys continues to be in playing soccer; in both Years 10 and 11 there are groups of boys who show high standards of individual ball playing skills both in small-sided games and in matches. For the current Year 11 team, the 4-0 victory in the district cup final competition completed a remarkable record five victories in each of their five years in school.

180. GCSE results for 2002 were below the national average at A\*-C grades compared with all schools. This represents good achievement for the 47% of pupils who achieved grades C and above. The trend over recent years has consistently been upwards and work seen in practical and theory lessons indicates that current Year 11 pupils are making progress in line with previous year groups.

181. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in physical education and especially in Years 7 - 9. Their success in practical physical work boosts their self-confidence which in turn encourages them to tackle more difficult tasks.

182. Most pupils display a positive attitude towards their work in physical education lessons and in the extra-curricular programme of sports and games. These activities are popular and well supported by pupils in all years. Specialist staff and teachers from other departments all show great commitment to this strong feature of the school. Most pupils behave well and are eager to do well in the subject.

183. Overall the quality of teaching and learning is good, and in many lessons there are very good features. Where this is so, the teachers know their subject specialism very well and this enables them to plan, devise and manage activities that are designed to challenge for improvement. The activities engage the interest and attention of most pupils who then know exactly what to do in order to improve. The

learning aims are made very clear in most lessons and pupils have a clear understanding of how assessments within lessons enable them to see the progress that is being made. For example, in an athletics lesson for girls in Year 8 measurements of time for a relay baton change were made at suitable intervals; each time there was clear improvement as a result of effective teaching and successful learning.

184. The department is well led and managed. The day-to-day programme is well organised and based on a good standard of documentation. Assessment procedures are good and meet the school's needs though there are areas for development. The use of assessment information needs to be extended further to provide better and more regular checks on pupils' progress, the effectiveness of the teaching and indeed of the work of the whole department. More use could be made of statistical data to ensure that pupils are on track to meet their predicted targets. The indoor facilities for physical education are good though this is not the case outdoors. The condition of outdoor grass and other surfaces is unsatisfactory and restricts the range of activities the department can offer. This has not been improved since the previous inspection.

185. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. Teaching is further improved, as are attendance at and participation in lessons. The department has the capacity and commitment to improve further in future.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are good.
- Pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11 and standards are improving.
- Most pupils in Years 10 and 11 have positive attitudes to their learning.

### Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient time in Years 7 - 9 to teach the Agreed Syllabus in the required depth and breadth.
- The shared curriculum arrangement with PSHE in Years 7 - 9 adversely affects standards and learning.
- The quality of some aspects of the teaching in Years 7 - 9 could be improved.

186. A relatively small proportion of pupils was entered for the 'short' GCSE in religious studies in 2002 after a period of time when no religious education was being provided in Years 10 and 11 because of staffing difficulties. Results were well below average, but taking into account the lack of continuity in their learning, these pupils achieved well.

187. No religious education was being taught to pupils in Years 7 - 9 during the period of the inspection. Judgements are based on a detailed scrutiny of a representative sample of pupils' work from these years. Standards are well below average in relation to the expectations of the locally Agreed Syllabus for religious education. Insufficient time is provided to teach the Agreed Syllabus in the required depth and breadth. Pupils' knowledge and understanding is therefore patchy although achievement in relation to the portion of the syllabus covered is broadly satisfactory. Pupils reach average standards in some of the topics selected for study, for example in making personal responses to difficult questions such as the possibility of life after death and in work based on a well planned 'focus' day on Sikhism. However, by the end of Year 9, pupils have not developed a coherent view of what it means to be a member of the faith communities that they study. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of aspects of belief and practice in the faiths studied is better than their capacity to make informed personal responses

to religious issues. There is little evidence of pupils expressing their ideas and the results of their investigations in writing at length or using computers to support their learning.

188. In Years 10 and 11 all pupils now take a 'short' GCSE course in religious studies. The proportion of pupils entered for the examination is increasing year on year. Standards reached by pupils currently in Year 11 are below average. Nevertheless, in comparison with their starting points at the beginning of the course, and in relation to their previous experiences in the subject, pupils achieve well. Assessment information indicates that girls outperform boys but not to a significant extent. Higher attainers reach above average standards. Knowledge is well selected in support of opinions and reference to specific beliefs, for example, Muslim and Jewish teaching on life after death, is well supported by reference to appropriate religious writings. The work of average and lower attainers tends to lack even-handed evaluative comments although personal opinions are sometimes well expressed. Throughout the school, religious education makes an effective contribution to pupils' personal development.

189. In Years 10 and 11, pupils are taught in groups of broadly similar prior attainment, which ensures that learning activities can be adapted to meet particular needs. There is little evidence of this in Years 7 - 9 where learning activities are not always appropriate to the needs of the lowest attainers and those who have special educational needs. Consequently, the work of these pupils is sometimes incomplete.

190. Evidence from pupils' work indicates that the quality of teaching and the learning that it promotes in Years 7 - 9 is satisfactory overall. The extent of coverage of the schemes of work varies between teachers and non-specialist teaching, though generally satisfactory, sometimes lacks real precision in knowledge and understanding of the subject which can be used to challenge pupils well. The range of learning activities is relatively narrow and tasks are not always well suited to the needs of the wide range of attainment found in the mixed ability classes. Marking is regular but tends to consist mainly of supportive and encouraging comments rather than showing pupils how to improve their work. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is good. Teachers have good relationships with pupils, which they capitalise on well, for example to ensure that lively classes remain focused on their work. Learning activities are interesting, provide a good level of challenge and involve all pupils, helped by the fact that pupils are taught in classes of broadly similar prior attainment. These factors combined well in a Year 10 lesson which compared the teaching of different faith communities on marriage and the family. Pupils worked well in groups investigating individual faith communities. They confidently shared the results of their investigations with the rest of the class and were quick to identify similarities and differences in the teachings. The teacher's sharp questioning ensured that all relevant points were aired and consequently the class made good progress. Pupils' work is marked regularly and provides a clear indication of the standards reached. However, there is seldom sufficient indication of how a pupil can, for example, improve an answer of GCSE B grade standard into one which is worth an A grade.

191. Since the previous inspection, when the provision of religious education in Years 10 and 11 was identified as a key issue for consideration, improvement has been good because all pupils now follow an accredited course in religious studies, and because the subject is now managed satisfactorily. However, the less than average time made available for teaching religious education in Years 7 - 9, together with the shared curriculum arrangements with PSHE, adversely affect the continuity of learning and have a negative effect on both standards and the quality of learning. Arrangements for assessing and reporting pupils' progress in Years 7 - 9 do not meet the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus