

INSPECTION REPORT

THE MEADOWS SCHOOL

Oldbury

LEA area: Sandwell

Unique reference number: 132231

Headteacher: Miss A Duncan

Reporting inspector: Mrs P Potheary
21765

Dates of inspection: 24th – 27th March 2003

Inspection number: 255116

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Maintained Special School
Age range of pupils:	11 to 19 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Red Lion Close Tividale Oldbury
Postcode:	B69 1TP
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Ms W Dugmore
Date of previous inspection:	Not applicable

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
21765	Mrs P Potheary	Registered inspector	Art and design Modern foreign languages	What sort of school is it? The school's results and pupils' and students' achievements How well are pupils and students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9619	Mr R Miller	Lay inspector		Pupils' and students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils and students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
27409	Mrs S Hunt	Team inspector	English Geography Special educational needs English as an additional language	
10781	Mr R Thompson	Team inspector	Science Information and communication technology Post-16 education	
25377	Ms L Brown	Team inspector	Mathematics Music Physical education Educational inclusion, including race equality	
20024	Mr P Wright	Team inspector	Design and technology History Religious education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils and students?

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
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' and students' 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	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	12
The school's results and pupils' and students' achievements	
Pupils' and students' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS AND STUDENTS TAUGHT?	14
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS AND STUDENTS?	15
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS AND STUDENTS?	18
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	20
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	20
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	23
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	24
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	28

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Meadows is a maintained special day school for 120 girls and boys aged 11 to 19. There are currently 124 pupils and students on roll, 81 boys and 43 girls. Of these, 88 are of white British origin, 12 are of Indian British origin, 17 of Pakistani British origin and seven pupils are from a range of other Black and Asian British and mixed-race groups. Six pupils, all but one in Year 6, remain in Key Stage 2. Almost 40 per cent are students in the sixth form. Twenty pupils and students speak English as an additional language at an early stage of acquisition. Over half of pupils are eligible for free school meals and 4.8 per cent are looked after by the local authority. Fifty-six pupils and students have severe learning difficulties, 35 have profound and multiple learning difficulties, five have severe communication difficulties, nine have a physical disability and 20 have autism. Many of the pupils and students have a range of complex needs, such as additional autism, cerebral palsy and behavioural difficulties, and various medical conditions in addition to their primary difficulty. The school currently occupies two sites, but is shortly to move into one purpose-built site. The catchment area is from the seventh most deprived in the country. The school is involved in a number of national and local initiatives including the Gifted and Talented project, Excellence in Cities and the Healthy Schools Award and achieved Investor in People status in 2002. The school is in the middle of the process of amalgamation, changing from six schools into one secondary special school to serve the whole of the local education authority.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The Meadows is a new and rapidly developing school, which is providing a good quality of education for its pupils and students. The quality of teaching is good, pupils and students make good progress in a wide range of subjects and they love coming to school. Leadership and management are very good and the school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils and students are well taught and make good progress in a wide range of subjects and very good progress in their personal and social development. Their enthusiasm for school is excellent.
- Provision for students in the further education centre is very good and they are supported very well to develop independence.
- Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good and leads to very good behaviour and relationships from pupils and students.
- Pupils are well cared for and are helped very well to become mature and play a full part in developing the school community and the new school building.
- Leadership by the headteacher is outstanding and is pivotal to the rapid development of a high quality provision, where staff are enabled to contribute effectively, develop their management skills and work well as a team.

What could be improved

- The rate of progress made by a minority of pupils and students with significant additional needs.
- The specialist teaching techniques, communication aids, equipment and curriculum approach to pupils and students with significant additional needs, so that they can more easily access the work in lessons.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED

This is a new school. The improvements and developments from the culture and practices inherited in the early days have been very good. Improvements since the local education authority inspection in July 2002 include a much higher percentage of good and very good teaching, some very fast initial progress

by many pupils, a greatly improved curriculum, and a very strong commitment and ability to continuous improvement. A flagship new building has been designed and overseen by the teachers and pupils and students in partnership with the local authority. The move to the new building is imminent and will resolve many of the current constraints on further school improvement. The capacity for continued improvement is good.

STANDARDS

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

Progress in:	by Year 6	by Year 11	by Year 13	Key
speaking and listening	A	A	A	very good A
reading	B	B	B	good B
writing	B	B	B	satisfactory C
mathematics	B	B	B	unsatisfactory D
personal, social and health education	A	A	A	poor E
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	A	A	A	

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

There was some very rapid initial progress during the last academic year (2001-2002) for almost all pupils and students in the subjects of the National Curriculum, in their sixth-form studies and in their personal and social development. This is because many were catching up after a period of a more restricted educational provision in some of the previous schools. This has now steadied to good progress overall but with significant areas where very good progress continues. The first whole-school targets were set over a two-year cycle to enable the school to develop well-assessed and moderated performance. An interim report in July 2002 showed that considerable progress has already been made on these targets, which predicted gains as measured by the 'P' Scales¹ in all subjects.

Pupils and students achieve well and now make good progress in almost all of the subject areas including English, science and mathematics. Their achievements and progress in speaking and listening, personal and social development and personal targets are very good. The most able pupils and students throughout the school also make very good progress in most subjects. For some of the pupils and students with significant additional difficulties, such as profound and multiple learning difficulties, sensory impairment and physical difficulties, progress is usually steady rather than good due to a lack of well-developed provision. In addition to their good overall progress, pupils and students achieved very good accreditation in a wide range of subjects, basic skills courses and life- and work-related skills in July 2002.

Pupils and students with English as an additional language, boys and girls and the majority of those with significant additional needs, such as autism and behavioural difficulties, all make good overall progress and achieve well.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' and students' attitudes to learning are very good and their enthusiasm for school is excellent. They are very keen to do well in their work.

¹ A national scale with eight levels to measure performance leading up to National Curriculum Level 1.

Behaviour, in and out of classrooms

Pupils usually behave very well in lessons and around the school. It is a pleasure to watch how pupils and students work hard, try their best and show respect for others and the school environment.

Aspect	Comment
Personal development and relationships	Very good personal development and relationships is evident as pupils and students willingly help one another and their teachers and also take part in whole-school decision making. There is an air of growing confidence about pupils and students who used to be nervous.
Attendance	Attendance is well above national averages for similar schools.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 1 – 6	Years 7 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Good

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

The quality of teaching is good overall; it is good in roughly one half of all lessons and very good or excellent in a further third, the rest is satisfactory. The quality of teaching is good in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science as well as personal, social and health education. Teaching is good in almost all other subjects and is very good for the most able pupils and students. This represents a very good improvement since the school opened and since the local education authority inspection eight months ago. The school teaches literacy and numeracy well and ensures that all subjects plan good opportunities to extend these basic skills. Communication is generally well taught and speaking and listening are very good throughout the school. The main weaknesses in teaching are concerned with addressing the needs of pupils and students with more complex difficulties, such as physical disability, visual and hearing impairment and profound and multiple learning difficulties. This is due largely to very limited specialist input from associate services and inaccurate initial statements from long ago, resulting in limitations in staff knowledge, a lack of appropriate strategies, inadequate equipment and weak communication systems for a few. Progress for these pupils is slowed as a result. The high quality staff knowledge of pupils and students and careful planning mean that, despite these shortcomings, overall progress is usually satisfactory and sometimes good for these pupils and students. Generally, lessons address the different needs of pupils and students very well, especially those with behavioural difficulties and autism. This has resulted in pupils and students with autism being able to ask for what they want and significant improvements in behaviour for some pupils and students. There are many strengths in teaching, including good planning and subject knowledge, very high expectations and very good assessment of what the majority of pupils have learned. This leads to well-ordered classes where pupils' and students' behaviour, effort and eagerness to learn are very good. The work of learning support practitioners is of a high quality and they contribute significantly to the way pupils and students are able to make the most of lessons.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is good overall and is improving all the time; it meets statutory requirements. The provision for students in the further education centre is very good. There are some shortfalls in the adaptations necessary to serve the special needs of a few pupils and students and these are gradually being addressed. Accreditation is very good and developing well.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The needs of pupils and students with English as an additional language are well provided for, despite a lack of specially funded support. The use of ethnic minority learning support practitioners is supporting pupils and

	students well in understanding their work.
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Aspect	Comment
Provision for pupils' and students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. The school has a rich variety of activities and opportunities for pupils and students to develop this aspect of their learning very well. Planning to make sure all subjects support pupils' and students' growing independence, confidence, behaviour and tolerance of others is very good.
How well the school cares for its pupils and students	The school cares well for pupils and students. It keeps them safe and happy and measures how well they are doing so that very good guidance can be given to help them develop personally and academically. The effectiveness of the school's links with parents is good and the school is successful in involving parents more in the work it is doing.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership by the headteacher is excellent and has ensured a thriving, successful and rapidly improving school. The work of key staff in managing the school and leading other staff is very good and provides effective structure and coherence to the work of the school.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The governors fulfil all statutory duties and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school very well. They have overseen and helped to steer a complex and difficult beginning very well. They are now poised to develop further skills in observing the way subjects are taught.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has developed a very good structure for assessing, analysing and monitoring the quality of teaching and pupil and student success. This is translated into an understanding of where the weaknesses are and effective action to improve further.
The strategic use of resources	The system for managing the school's resources is excellent. This leads to highly effective and pragmatic development of the currently sound staffing, resources and accommodation for maximising the opportunities offered to pupils and students. The school provides good value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pupils and students like school • Teaching is good and pupils and students make good progress • Expectations are high and pupils and students are helped to become mature and responsible • The school works closely with parents and keeps them well informed • The school is well led and managed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework provided • The quantity of extra-curricular activity • The accuracy of assessment of achievement for pupils and students with the most complex and profound difficulties • The appropriateness of the curriculum for those with the most profound and complex difficulties

The inspection team agrees with the views of parents. Pupils and students like school, they make good progress and teaching is good. Expectations are high and this leads to pupils and students becoming

more mature and responsible. However, this high expectation has not yet translated into good adaptations of the curriculum and assessment for a minority of those with the most profound and complex difficulties. Provision remains satisfactory for this group, except for the limitations in specialised equipment, explained in the report. Much good and very good work is still done with these pupils and students. The school works closely with parents and the school is very well led and managed.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' and students' achievements

1. There was some very rapid initial progress during the last academic year (2001-2002) for almost all pupils and students in the subjects of the National Curriculum, sixth form courses and in their personal and social development. This is because they were catching up after the more restricted educational provision in some of their previous schools. Progress recently has steadied and is now good overall. Pupils in all age groups and students make good progress and achieve well in the majority of subjects, including the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The most able pupils and students make very good progress in the majority of courses. Pupils and students make very good progress in their personal and social development. Pupils' and students' achievements, compared to their own previous performance, and in achieving their individual targets are usually very good in all year groups. A minority of the pupils with more complex needs make steady rather than good progress in mobility, communication and personal and social development due to the lack of suitable equipment, strategies and associate staff support mentioned above.
2. For those pupils and students with English as an additional language, progress is also good, despite a lack of specially funded support. Boys and girls make equally good progress, as do the majority of those with significant additional needs such as autism and behavioural difficulties.
3. The school had made significant progress towards the targets set by the end of the first year. The headteacher and governors set a two-year cycle of targets for the first year of operation for pupils and students to make progress in all subjects of the curriculum. These were reported at the end of the first year (July 2002) as interim results and showed that rapid progress was made in almost all subjects and all age groups during this period. These targets were quite global, due to the lack of reliable previous information on the pupils and students and the newness of the moderation process, although they showed very high expectations. With the new electronic system in place and better moderated and assessed work now being produced, the targets set for 2003/4 should be more refined and will be able to predict performance by different groups of pupils and students.
4. Pupils and students currently make good progress and achieve well in English. The use of well-implemented systems such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and signing has supported a very good development in speaking and communication for the majority. Pupils have also made rapid initial progress in learning to write where achievement and progress are now good and there is good achievement in reading. These developing literacy skills have been used to great effect as pupils and students wrote letters and helped to design parts of the new building. As with all subjects, some pupils and students with more complex difficulties do not have sufficiently suitable systems or equipment to help them make more than adequate progress. This is particularly pertinent to communication, where a lack of specialised advice from speech therapists has meant that several pupils and students lack the augmentative communication aids that would help them express their needs and ideas more clearly.
5. In mathematics, pupils and students make good progress in all areas. Those with more complex needs make satisfactory rather than good progress because they lack the

sufficiently specialised approaches seen in other subjects. Pupils and students do particularly well in using their number and measuring skills in practical situations, such as shopping and cooking.

6. Pupils and students achieve and make good progress in science; teachers build on their natural enthusiasm to help them understand how their own bodies work and what happens in the natural world around them. They are encouraged well to test their ideas and ask questions.

Pupils' and students' attitudes, values and personal development

7. The attitudes and behaviour of the pupils and students are a significant strength of The Meadows School. The vast majority of parents say their children love coming to school and agree that the behaviour in school is good. They state that many of their children enjoy the learning experiences that are provided for them. Students mainly agree that behaviour is good in the Further Education Centre.
8. Pupils and students have very good attitudes, most are highly interested in their learning and their enthusiasm for school is excellent. A key feature of their approach to learning is that they are able to work creatively and productively with one another, and some without too much adult assistance. Many of the pupils and students demonstrate a keenness to learn because they find their work stimulating and it captures their interest.
9. Their behaviour is very good and they interact and work well together, learning how to co-operate. They show their understanding of the need to look after the classrooms, helping to keep them tidy and organised by collecting books at the end of the session, for example. Some pupils and students are overcoming difficult behaviour, and learning, with skilled help, to calm down and find acceptable ways to show their feelings and express their needs. The pupils and students show respect for each other during discussions and clearly understand the difference between right and wrong. They evidently understand that what they do may affect others. Pupils and students are very polite to each other and adults. One student took the trouble to tell the teacher that she had done extremely well in helping them with their artwork, indicating the mature and confident nature of their relationships. In several lessons they demonstrated much pleasure in helping others with their work. There have been no exclusions in the past year.
10. Pupils and students throughout the school make very good progress in their personal and social development. In the last year many have blossomed, begun to make eye contact, learned to move about freely and enjoyed a mature relationship with staff and each other. They are used to helping to make decisions that effect the way the school is run, operate a school council and have a big say in the design of the new school building. Pupils and students display initiative in a number of ways, for example by being involved in their own target setting, acting as school prefects and returning registers to the school office. The very good relationships in the school are a result of the provision for the pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is the underlying foundation for the positive ethos of the school and the very good learning environment.
11. Attendance at around 95 per cent is well above the average for all similar schools and is very good. Punctuality for most pupils and students is very good. Because of the split-site, lessons do not always start and finish on time, but this will be rectified when the new building opens later this year.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS AND STUDENTS TAUGHT?

12. The quality of teaching is good for pupils and students of all ages, regardless of ability, gender, ethnicity or mother tongue. It is very good for the most able pupils and students post-16. Teaching is excellent in three per cent of lessons, very good in 32 per cent, good in 49 per cent and satisfactory in 16 per cent. This represents very good improvements since the school opened, when many practices within teaching were unsatisfactory. By July 2002, teaching was already satisfactory in half of lessons and good in almost half according to the local education authority. Therefore, even during the last eight months, the quality of teaching has improved significantly and these improvements are set to continue.
13. The main weakness within teaching, which accounts for many of the lessons which are satisfactory rather than good, affects a few of the pupils and students with significantly different needs such as profound and multiple learning difficulties, physical disabilities and sensory impairment. This is because the teachers and learning support practitioners do not have sufficient specialist knowledge, strategies, equipment but, above all, specialist associate staff support to fully engage the pupils and students in lessons and help them do as well as they might. The original statements were also misleading in a number of cases, which led initially to slow development of the right approaches.
14. Many staff have an intuitive and experienced understanding of how to involve these particular pupils and students and a very good knowledge of each individual pupil and student and their needs. This means that, except in a few examples, lessons do enable them to make satisfactory or even good progress overall. However, the lack of specialised approaches and equipment sometimes has a negative effect on mobility, physical closeness to the lesson action, hearing and, in some cases, the ability to communicate. Where pupils or students have profound and multiple learning difficulties, lessons occasionally cover too much ground for them and do not adjust pace and methods sufficiently to help them respond and gain recognition or understanding.
15. The school is aware of this shortfall and is systematically and successfully working to address the needs of all pupils and students. For example, a range of communication aids is already used very effectively in every lesson, especially for pupils and students with autism, who confidently ask for what they want. This has reduced difficult behaviour in lessons significantly. Staff are keen to develop their skills even further. In a discussion about one pupil with physical difficulty, for example, the staff tried out some ideas right away and reported enthusiastically on the positive results. In the next lesson, that pupil was obviously excited to be able to communicate 'yes' or 'no' and was much more involved as a result. The school is likely to be part of a national trial of communication aids when the new school opens and this will address many of the problems observed.
16. Literacy and numeracy are well taught and, in every subject, great care is taken to give pupils and students as much opportunity as possible to practise these basic skills. All lessons have very good links with other subjects and plan very well to promote pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Teaching is good in almost all subjects including the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and personal and social education. In geography, teaching is sound. Teaching is also good in information and communication technology (ICT), but lessons in other subjects do not yet use this technology to its full advantage.

17. In the good lessons for the majority and very good lessons for the more able pupils and students, teachers use very good planned opportunities to involve all pupils and students, and make lessons exciting. In these lessons, due to universally good subject knowledge, very high expectations, pace and humour, pupils and students are fully engaged in what is happening and show a very mature response and attitude to their work, obviously wanting to do well. In one mathematics lesson, for example, pupils very quickly succeeded in learning how to substitute numbers for letters and write mathematical problems using algebra. The fact that they used each other as examples brought humour and energy to the lesson and kept their interest very well.
18. The very high quality of relationships and pupil/student management, which is evident in most lessons, means that pupils and students are able to explore ideas and confidently express their wishes and so learn more quickly. In almost all lessons the work of learning support practitioners is of a high quality. They often lead lessons to a high standard and, through one-to-one and small group teaching, help pupils and students of all ages and abilities really become involved. The way that the pupils and students talk about their learning at the end of lessons is effectively handled and pupils and students show that they appreciate what others have done and listen respectfully. One evident improvement, in a previous weakness identified by the school, is that the majority of teachers now plan to focus on outcomes as well as what is taught. This enables them to keep accurate records of what pupils and students have learned and assess this learning very well to plan the next lesson to greatest effect. This is contributing well to the good pace at which pupils and students learn. For those pupils and students with profound and multiple learning difficulties, however, teachers do not yet have an effective way to measure the much finer steps in the learning taking place. This makes it difficult to set small, achievable targets in some lessons.
19. The use of homework is currently satisfactory. Homework opportunities are planned well in each lesson, although this is not consistently applied and so parents are not able to help their children consistently at home.

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

20. The curriculum offered to pupils and students is good. The whole school has been involved in developing a secondary curriculum, which is specialist led and is suitably broad and balanced and offers a good range of accredited courses. This represents a very good improvement since the early days, when practices inherited from the previous schools did not include specialist teaching and a full age-related National Curriculum. Teaching and support staff are divided into four curriculum teams: humanities; communication; sciences; and performing arts, and these areas provide a clear, effective framework for planning. These teams give a good focus and balance to the learning opportunities the school provides. They also further guide teachers in their use of the National Curriculum subjects so that relevant learning can occur. There are good policies and schemes of work for all subjects. The curriculum is well monitored and planning to improve it further is well advanced. The very good curriculum for students in the further education centre supports their increasing maturity and prepares them very well for life after school. Statutory requirements are fully met. The individual education plans of pupils and students contain appropriately challenging targets, and their progress is frequently monitored.
21. The development of specialised approaches and adaptations to the curriculum for pupils and students with additional special educational needs is satisfactory. Due to the

inaccurate description in some statements of pupils' and students' needs, it has taken time to match the curriculum to the real needs of a few pupils. The use of multi-sensory tasks for pupils and students with profound and multiple learning difficulties is one example of how this is being addressed. However, this multi-sensory approach is not well embedded within lessons and the curriculum does not take sufficient account of the pace and developmental level at which these pupils and students learn. For this reason, a few pupils with complex and profound difficulties make satisfactory rather than good progress. In addition, there is insufficient support for specialised curriculum approaches from associate services. The headteacher has worked extremely hard to increase support from speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists. This has resulted in the recent appointment of an occupational therapist, and improvements to the mobility of some pupils and students from increased physiotherapy. The majority of pupils and students throughout the school do have good quality learning experiences that are well matched to their special educational needs. The school has worked hard to meet the needs of pupils and students with autism, for example, and they are accessing the curriculum well. Careers education is very good and is appropriately taught to all pupils and students.

22. There is already a very good and developing range of accredited courses. These include the Certificate of Educational Achievement and eight other types of accredited courses in basic skills, skills for living, science, the arts, French and work related study. Pupils and students achieved very well in the full range on offer in 2002. All pupils and students have a wide choice in which courses to follow to best suit their needs, and two students gained a GCSE in art and design at college last year.
23. Strategies for learning and numeracy skills are good and effectively used in a range of activities. There is a very good emphasis on developing pupils' and students' communication skills through opportunities to discuss issues, use signs and symbols and use the Picture Exchange Communication System which helps pupils and students with autism express their needs. However, the use of other communication aids such as switches and electronic talkers is still underdeveloped, which means that a minority of pupils and students are unable to develop effective communication and take full advantage of the curriculum on offer. There are no formal programmes at lunchtime for pupils and students with profound and multiple learning difficulties and complex physical difficulties to help them learn how to eat. Staff do their best to help which ensures some progress, but a lack of specialist input from associate services means that progress is slower as a result. This is closely associated with the ability to speak and so has a direct impact on developing communication skills.
24. There is a good length to the teaching week, which allows for good subject coverage, but time allocated for practical art lessons is too short. This limits the amount of progress pupils can make in developing artistic skills and knowledge. Learning is extended and enriched through a good programme of visits and residential experiences. For example, pupils and students have been given the opportunity to visit the Isle of Man, Valkenburgh and the Isle of Wight. The school provides an extensive programme of visits into the local community and invites visitors into school to make contributions in lessons, for example on road safety awareness, and to support religious education. These visits are closely linked to the aims of lessons and to the objectives in the schemes of work. Although opportunities to enrich learning during lessons are good, there is a more limited range of activities at breaks, lunchtime and after school. Opportunities are limited by transport arrangements, and the school has identified this as an area for development.

25. The provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is very good. All staff make a very strong contribution to the development of the pupils' and students' personal and social skills in many lessons. The content of what is taught in personal, social and health education is suitable for pupils' and students' ages. Citizenship is taught well throughout the school, both as a separate subject and through personal, social and health education lessons. The very good quality provision includes important and relevant areas such as rights and responsibilities, community and the media. The development of a sense of personal worth, responsibility, and respect for right and wrong in moral and social development are very good and are key strengths of the school. The governors have approved an appropriate syllabus for sex education. Drug abuse is sensitively taught and the legal requirements for religious education are met very well.
26. There are good opportunities for students in the further education centre to gain work experience in supported internal placements and provision in this area continues to develop. Links with local colleges are very good, especially in preparing students for taking more college courses. This means that students are achieving well and often very well in a broad range of relevant courses.
27. The school's programme of educational inclusion is currently sound and enables two pupils to attend a local mainstream secondary school. In addition senior students attend link courses at local further education colleges. In its turn, the school provides help and training advice to a range of schools in the areas of curriculum and management of specific pupils with complex needs. There is funding for further development of links with mainstream school for other subjects such as English and technology in addition to art and design in the new financial year. Equality of access is a high priority for the school and great care is taken to make sure girls and boys, pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and the majority of those with different abilities are equally well provided for. Through one-to-one support and careful curriculum organisation this is generally achieved well. The exception to this good inclusive provision is for a few pupils with significant additional needs, where they are hindered from taking a full part in lessons because of a lack of suitable adaptation.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

28. Provision for pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.
29. The very good provision for spiritual development includes assemblies, when, for example, the very special place of mothers and carers in our lives was well prepared for and allowed pupils to reflect. Visits to churches and the study of world religions add to pupils' and students' growing appreciation of others' beliefs. Pupils in one class listened to Asian music as they talked about 'Holi' the Festival of Love. Another group handled objects connected with Buddhist monks and were given good opportunities to pause and reflect on what they meant. Within lessons, pupils and students often discover something to amaze them and are given the chance to value the moment and the experience. In one science lesson, for example, pupils completed an electrical circuit and found the light came on 'As if by magic! The pupils' excitement at learning new things and their excellent enthusiasm for school is a testament to this spiritual element of their learning.
30. The moral development of pupils and students is very good. There is a consistency of expectation throughout the school and behaviour is maintained at a very high standard. The reward system being introduced in some classes is very effective in helping pupils

to understand how to behave in class. Consequently, pupils know what is expected of them and behave very well. Behaviour support plans are followed well by staff and are leading to improved behaviour for pupils and students with the greatest difficulties. Pupils and students are taught the meaning of respect and compassion for each other and the right way to treat others particularly well through morning assemblies. They understand the concept of Fair Trade and run a weekly tuck shop themselves with the proceeds going to support food producers in the Third World. They also raise funds for Comic Relief through healthy eating projects.

31. The provision of social education is also very good. The Meadows Project, in which pupils and students have been closely involved with the building of their new school, has created a sense of pride and community as they worked with staff, architects and builders. In lessons, pupils and students work very well together in pairs and groups and co-operatively in activities such as playing in the football team. Pupils and students discuss social issues in English lessons and in health education, for example they consider the effects of drugs on the individual and the community. They support each other very well and show patience and approval of something well done. For example, in one class, pupils waited patiently for one very shy pupil to sign his introductions and say, 'Je m'appelle ...' This was clearly a major breakthrough as the rest of the class spontaneously applauded him. All pupils and students take some responsibility within the class group, such as cleaning the board or tidying up the room, and everyone has a vote in electing the head boy and girl. The developing school council is another strong element of provision, which is beginning to allow pupils' and students' voices to be heard on a number of issues.
32. The provision for cultural development is very good. The performing arts team ensures a rich experience of music, art, drama, literature and the media for all pupils and students. Pupils and students also develop a positive approach to cultural diversity as they encounter and celebrate it through areas of the curriculum such as art, music, French and geography. Pupils from different religious backgrounds are supported well by staff and fellow pupils to express their views. There is recognition and celebration of pupils' and students' national cultures within the school and the awareness of different foods eaten by people from various parts of the world.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS AND STUDENTS?

33. The school provides a very caring and supportive environment. All the staff know the pupils and students very well and are aware of child protection procedures. The monitoring of pupils' and students' academic performance and the support and guidance given to them are very good. Assessment is used consistently and well to plan work to meet the needs of most pupils and students. Parents, pupils and students are very pleased with the care the school offers.
34. There are appropriate systems in place for safeguarding pupils' and students' health and safety and they are supported in a dignified way throughout. There are, however, insufficient standing frames, hoists and mobility aids available to support all those pupils and students requiring them. This is due to insufficient support from specialist associate staff in assessing pupils' and students' needs frequently enough. The result is potential difficulties when adults have to manually move large pupils or students and limits to the pace at which some pupils or students are able to develop improved mobility. This is being addressed and a new occupational therapist begins work soon. There are regular safety inspections by the governors and site manager, and potential hazards are dealt with effectively. Suitable first-aid arrangements are in place for

dealing with accidents and illness and there is adequate adult supervision at lunchtimes and break periods.

35. There are very good procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance and punctuality. There are excellent links with the transport providers and escorts who receive regular bulletins from the school. Registration and follow-up procedures are well established and the completion of registers meet statutory requirements.
36. Very good arrangements for promoting high standards of behaviour, including measures to prevent bullying, are in place. There are simple rules for pupils and students, rewards for good behaviour and appropriate responses for dealing with difficult behaviour. These rules are consistently applied by all staff, are well known to pupils and students and have a significant impact on maintaining very high standards of behaviour at the school. Any incidents of inappropriate behaviour are dealt with effectively and teachers manage pupils and students very well. All staff act as very good role models for pupils and students, which further helps them to behave very well. The school is very effective in ensuring that the environment is free from bullying, racism and sexism. There are no exclusions as a result.
37. Pupils and students with special educational needs, who have identified behaviour difficulties, are well managed in class and during breaks. Teachers, learning support practitioners and mid-day supervisors support them very well. The school ensures that they are fully included in the life of the school and that their behaviour is not detrimental to their own learning or that of others.
38. Procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' and students' personal development are very good. Behaviour targets are set where appropriate and these are monitored closely to help pupils and students improve. Any progress is carefully noted and adjustments are made to individual education plans so that future lessons meet their needs. The personal development targets are always linked to the teachers' planning in lessons and mean that pupils and students make regular improvements.
39. The procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' and students' academic progress are very good. The two co-ordinators have established a coherent and effective approach to assessment which is strictly adhered to across the curriculum. New pupils are assessed on arrival to the school and annually every May in line with the 'P' scales² or National Curriculum levels. The school has begun to introduce pupil and student self-assessment forms and this is working well in subjects such as English and French. Annual reports are very clear, with good detail for every subject. The headteacher and key staff work effectively to ensure that annual and transition reviews of pupils' and students' statements are carried out as required. Parents, carers and some external professionals attend the meetings and translators are provided when necessary for reviews for parents who do not speak English. All pupils and students attend their reviews and take part in the decision making, which has a positive impact on their personal development and self-worth.
40. Assessment of progress and its use to help teachers plan the curriculum is good overall. Staff now moderate pupils' and students' work and assessment is more reliable as a result. However, for a few pupils, where their original assessment is inaccurate or out of date, provision and therefore assessment is less reliable³. For others with

² A national scale with eight levels used to measure performance leading up to National Curriculum Level 1.

³ The headteacher is gradually bringing pupils' and students' statements in line with their current needs through the annual review process.

profound and multiple difficulties, the assessment does not record small enough steps within the early 'P' Scale levels. The result is that, for these pupils and students, progress and achievement are not so effectively tracked and are often measured in terms of experience. Each pupil and student has individual targets and these are usually clear, achievable and linked well to lessons. However, for a few pupils and students these are not sufficiently specific or measurable, which makes work in lessons less effective.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

41. Parents, carers and pupils and students consider The Meadows to be a very good school. A small number of parents remain unclear about homework arrangements and the school has identified the need to implement the policy consistently. Inspection findings, however, are that homework provision is good.
42. Parents and carers are kept well informed about the school's events and curriculum matters through good quality regular newsletters. These are well written and informal and give parents information about day-to-day life in the school. The home-school homework diaries give opportunities for dialogue between parents, carers and staff. The school has its own website that effectively gives parents further information about the school's work and the activities that their children undertake while at school. The governors' annual report to parents and school prospectus both meet legal requirements and contain helpful information.
43. Very good help is given to include all parents, and attendance at parents' meetings has increased from 18 to 80 per cent. Bilingual support staff are on hand to carry out home visits and act as translators, where necessary, for families from ethnic minority groups. Consultation meetings with class teachers about progress take place and are well attended by parents and carers. Pupils' and students' annual reports suitably identify areas in which they could improve and parents comment that the reports clearly show how well their children are making progress. Annual review meetings, to formally review progress of individual education plans, are also well attended. Where parents are unable to make the appointment, staff carry out home visits. Many parents are kept up-to-date by having a regular dialogue with teachers much more often than this.
44. Parents' involvement in the work of the school is satisfactory. The 'Friends of The Meadows' group actively raises funds for school resources. The school has, however, identified the need to more actively encourage parents to help in school. Some parents contribute to their children's learning at home but others find this difficult.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

45. Leadership by the headteacher is excellent. She has achieved a remarkable change in the school, which inherited some very difficult problems from the old establishments. Many members of staff and governors testify to some outstanding achievements. These include providing a clear vision of very high standards in every way; valuing and caring for each pupil, student and every member of staff personally; and developing the confidence and skills of people to take significant responsibility in all areas of the school, far beyond their own expectations in some cases. The sheer volume of school development needs already addressed is impressive, but, above all, is the detailed involvement in building a state-of-the-art new school in conjunction with Sandwell Local Education Authority, the pupils and staff. Her positive 'can do' attitude has overcome many obstacles of staffing, time, services, accommodation and resources, all within a year and a half. This clearly ensures that the school fulfils its aims very well, providing a

confident, purposeful environment where pupils and students do well. This headteacher was the regional winner for a secondary school leadership award.

46. Delegation and the contribution of key staff are also very good. The leadership group operates effectively on two sites, but the strong team spirit gives coherence to a whole-school approach to curriculum, pupil and student care and improvements in the quality of teaching. They are highly committed to their roles and are full of ideas for continued development with the move to the new school imminent.
47. The new governing body is highly committed, fulfils all statutory duties and understands the strengths and weaknesses of the school very well. Governors play a key role in supporting the headteacher in developing the school and clearly feel and act as part of the school team. They already keep informed of curriculum developments by coming into school to observe teachers and pupils and students, but agree that this aspect of their role could be increased. This would give them a clearer picture of the day-to-day business of the school and help strengthen their already good ability to support and steer its work. They have overseen some very difficult and complex issues very well since the school opened.
48. The school has embarked upon the first phase of managing school performance. This is very well implemented and is already ensuring a climate of strong pupil and student progress, as well as supporting some very good improvement in staff skills. The culture of observing teaching has had to be established from scratch. This has been very well developed to ensure that senior staff acquire the skills first. Subject co-ordinators do not yet observe their subject being taught by others. This means that they do not yet have a clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses of their subject. Now the school is poised to develop these skills to further strengthen the role of co-ordinators. In tandem with this, the school data is analysed nationally and is now based upon more accurate and well-moderated assessment. A new computer program to allow for flexible analysis of trends for groups and individuals is currently being installed.
49. The school has accurately identified priorities for its development and the work undertaken to achieve these successfully is excellent. The most striking example of this is the new building, which has taken considerable time and effort, but is likely to be among the best in the country. This is just one example among many of initiatives designed to improve the lives and achievements of the pupils and students. The school's capacity to improve further is also excellent, mainly because the staff work together as a team with a shared vision of what is to be achieved. Everyone is clear that the imminent move is the turning point towards very high quality performance.
50. After establishing a culture of success, the major problems the school has had to face are linked to its main weakness. Firstly, the statements of several pupils and students were inaccurate. Those with profound and complex difficulties were described as needing less intensive provision, others were given labels which meant that some of their provision was insufficient. This is now being addressed, but caused serious initial problems in meeting pupils' and students' needs. Linked to this was an absence of supporting services, including speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, sensory impairment support and nursing. This situation is being addressed tirelessly, but many pupils and students are still without the speech therapy, physiotherapy, communication and mobility aids that they so obviously need. This in turn means that staff skills cannot be developed alongside the specialists to fully address pupils' and students' needs effectively. The limited funding when the school opened further hampered efforts to train staff and buy in expertise. Despite this, the

overall quality of teaching and learning is good, which testifies to the dedication and commitment of the staff to provide as well as they can for pupils and students.

51. The induction of staff and the provision for the training of teachers are very good. New staff are made welcome and supported very well by a system of 'buddy' mentors as well as the more traditional handbooks. Learning support practitioners play a pivotal role in the induction of new staff. There is one student currently being trained and unqualified teachers have the opportunity to gain qualified teacher status.
52. Financial planning is excellent. The school's annual income is limited because it is not based upon the higher dependency needs of pupils and students with the most complex difficulties. This is due to the inaccurate assessments from some time ago. This in turn has led to an unavoidable deficit during this complex year of rapid development and transition to a new school building, while pupil and student needs are reassessed. The current budget, therefore, is very carefully assessed against detailed projections of fixed and anticipated costs. Regular statements ensure that everyone is aware of the spending patterns and financial control is very strong. Recommendations in the latest auditors' report (October 2001) have been fully implemented. Governors are kept fully informed by a very efficient finance administrator and use this information to monitor and evaluate spending.
53. Financial procedures are very well monitored and the day-to-day running of the school is very efficient despite the split site. The range of grants and other donations received by the school is carefully, and successfully, linked to other spending. In this way there is a very good level of coherence between the different strands of spending. The principles of best value are understood and applied by the school very successfully. The school has a complete list of the pecuniary interests of governors and all staff members.
54. Very good use is made of new technology in school administration, financial accounting and planning, indicating the positive attitudes of the school to financial planning and efficiency. Taking into account the high educational standards provided by the school and the current funding difficulties, the school gives good value for money.
55. Staffing is satisfactory overall. The school has appointed a well-qualified staff development manager to oversee staff performance management and professional development. This manager, who is not a teacher, is highly effective and the school has recently gained Investor in People status. This appointment also releases teachers for their main tasks of teaching in the classroom. There have been difficulties in attracting sufficient well-qualified staff, but the school has been very creative in its approach and a mixture of subject specialists, unqualified teachers and highly skilled learning support practitioners now meet the needs of pupils, students and the curriculum well. The school has 'grown its own talent' and is nurturing skills to meet its own unique demands. Training opportunities for staff are good with on-site, whole-staff courses and very good opportunities for individual staff to develop. For example, some learning support practitioners are taking teaching degrees while others are trained in signing. Due to the inaccurate description of pupils' and students' initial needs, however, some lack the individual staff to support them in class that they so clearly need.
56. The current school buildings are unsuitable for a variety of reasons and impact adversely on the ability to deliver the curriculum effectively. The school is divided into two sites some driving distance apart. There is no central resources area or library. Some classrooms are too cramped for the number of pupils and students. Corridors

are too narrow and prevent wheelchairs being able to pass each other. There are few specialist rooms. The external play areas at both sites are unsuitable for the number of staff and pupils and students using them. This situation is fully resolved with the stunning new building and, in the meantime, the school team is successful in delivering a high quality of education to its pupils and students despite these circumstances.

57. The school's resources have improved since the school opened in 2001 and are now satisfactory. There are obvious difficulties in providing resources for two sites for all subjects, which the school has worked hard to overcome. Subject co-ordinators have budgets to spend on resources but there are storage difficulties. For example, the science resource needs are known, but there is nowhere to store fragile and breakable equipment until the move. There is a growing, but still limited, bank of ICT resources to support learning in all subjects and the school has identified this for further development. There are insufficient technological aids, for example switches, talkers, roamers, concept keyboards, interactive whiteboards and beams which would allow pupils and students better access to the curriculum, particularly in the area of communication. The high quality of learning support practitioners is an important human resource and contributes effectively to maximising the achievements of all pupils and students.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

58. To further improve the quality of education offered by the school, the headteacher and governors should:
- (1) Improve the rate of progress made by a minority of pupils and students with significant additional needs.
(paragraph nos: 1, 4)
 - (2) Increase further the specialist teaching techniques, communication aids, equipment and curriculum approaches to pupils and students with significant additional needs, so that they can more easily access the work in lessons.
(paragraph nos: 13, 21, 57)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	95
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	37

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	3	30	47	15	0	0	0
Percentage	3	32	49	16	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 and students on the school's roll	No of pupils and students
Number of pupils and students on the school's roll	124
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	59

English as an additional language	No of pupils and students
Number of pupils and students with English as an additional language	29

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	3
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.2

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.06

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

Ethnic background of pupils and students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils and students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	88	0	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	12	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	17	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	3	0	0
Black or Black British – African	1	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0
Any other ethnic group	0	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Financial information

Qualified teachers and classes: Y6 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	15
Number of pupils/students per qualified teacher	8.3
Average class size	7

Education support staff: Y6 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	42
Total aggregate hours worked per week	1344

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	1,852,103
Total expenditure	1,876,773
Expenditure per pupil/student	15,639
Balance brought forward from previous year	56,658
Balance carried forward to next year	31,989

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	23
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	2
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3
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	125
Number of questionnaires returned	117

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	72	15	12	0	2
My child is making good progress in school.	58	18	20	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	58	16	19	1	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	33	25	21	9	11
The teaching is good.	69	15	13	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	78	9	11	0	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	82	4	11	3	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	78	9	9	3	2
The school works closely with parents.	69	17	12	1	1
The school is well led and managed.	73	12	9	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	73	12	10	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	54	15	21	2	9

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

Parents think that their children like school, that they make good progress and that teaching is good. They feel that teacher expectations are high, leading to their children becoming mature, confident and responsible. They also feel that the school works closely with parents and that the school is very well led and managed. However, parents are concerned that homework is not consistently given and that there are too few extra-curricular activities. These views are supported by the inspection.

Other issues raised by parents

A few parents of children with the most profound or complex difficulties feel that some reports over estimate what they can do. They also feel that the curriculum is not sufficiently adapted to the needs of this group. These views are supported by the inspection but, nevertheless, a great deal of good and very good work is achieved with these pupils and students. These difficulties are recognised by the school and are being addressed.

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

FURTHER EDUCATION CENTRE (Post 16)

59. Provision for students over the age of 16 is very good. It offers a relevant curriculum that matches students' needs very well. Students have positive views of the provision they receive and the way it prepares them for life beyond school. Teaching is of a high quality with several very good and excellent lessons. The guidance given to students is very good. Consequently, students make good and often very good progress and achieve well. Because students who have additional learning difficulties or for whom English is an additional language receive such effective consideration and help, they make the same progress as other students.
60. Students' needs are more complex in the further education centre (FEC) and the very high-quality provision caters for students who are not yet ready to take up places at colleges of further education. There is a great emphasis on the development of key skills and life skills. The courses are deliberately designed to enhance students' self-esteem, self-confidence and ability to mix in groups and work with others. Independent learning skills, communication, problem solving, application of number and increase in literacy skills are encouraged. A good range of learning opportunities are offered, such as ICT, religious education, home skills, problem solving, leisure activities, creative arts, vocational studies, personal, social and health education, including citizenship, sex and drugs awareness and life skills.
61. All students follow courses to improve their speaking and listening, reading and writing and number work. In addition to these regular literacy and numeracy sessions, there is effective planning for them to improve their communication skills through use the Picture Exchange Communication System to increase their communication skills, and a range of ICT switches and touch screens. However, for a very small number of students, the inaccurate assessment of their needs from long ago, and insufficient specialist support for staff and students, mean that the lack of mobility and communication aids as well as appropriate strategies slows them down. This is being addressed and the high quality of achievement is testament to the very good work undertaken by staff to ensure that everyone makes progress.
62. Students have links with two colleges within the local area to enhance the school curriculum. Students are offered a good range of accredited courses, such as catering and photography. There are also taster courses in a wide range of subjects in an attempt to plan for full-time attendance after the age of 19. By the time students are ready to leave school they, and their parents, are in a position to make a more informed choice as to which college or further education provision to go for. While students are at the colleges they have opportunities to mix freely with mainstream students and adults during breaks and lunchtimes. They have opportunities to extend their social and personal skills by queuing for meals, making choices and paying for their own purchases. This complements the work they do in school and puts it into a real -life situation. As a result, students' self-confidence and self-esteem grow, they achieve well and take great pride in attending college and the work they do there.
63. There is good communication between the FEC department and students' homes. Parents are involved in students' annual reviews, home-school diaries (where necessary) and communication, telephone calls and annual reviews and reports. Open evenings are held and parents are encouraged to visit the school. The careers service is fully included in student reviews and contact is made as early as pupils' transition

reviews at age 14 plus. This continues through to the FEC department. Staff from the colleges attended by students also attend student reviews. Parents are kept well informed of students' progress. This is good practice and enhances the FEC provision.

64. The department is well staffed with teachers and support staff. Teamwork is very good and enhances the progress and achievement of students. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Lessons are well planned and all staff included in planning. The quality and work of the teachers and assistants is of a high order, and the degree of sensitivity to the needs of students ensures they have positive learning experiences. As a result of these very high aspects of quality teaching, relationships in class are very good, students respond very positively and their attitudes and behaviour are very good. Students enter into learning with very good attitudes, tolerance and excellent enthusiasm. There is a purposeful working atmosphere; praise and encouragement are used well. Staff use humour very effectively to encourage students to persevere and complete their work. Staff questioning ensures students understand what is required of them. Resources are well organised in advance, easily accessible, appropriate to the age and ability of students and used well. However, the lack of suitable communication aids and mobility equipment for a very small minority hinders even better progress.
65. Students make very good progress in their personal development, including spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Sex education is well developed and students make good progress in their understanding. Personal, social and health education, including citizenship, is well supported through the curriculum and residential experiences. Students have taken part in residential educational trips to the Isle of Wight, the Isle of Man and to Holland. FEC students are well represented on the school council.
66. In literacy, students achieve well and make good progress in listening and communication skills. The most able communicators are confident and comfortable with visitors and ask pertinent questions, such as, 'what are you doing here?' and 'are you coming to college with us?' Students listen well to each other, take turns talking and listening, and have a good awareness of others. They read social signs and in the home skills lessons, read menus and the list of ingredients on packets and tins.
67. In numeracy, students make good progress. They show an understanding of money, time, measurement and temperature. They use these skills in a practical way in their home skills and problem-solving lessons. At the end of lessons, students are asked to self-evaluate their achievement. This is good practice and works well.
68. The FEC co-ordinator organises the department well, links regularly with the governing body and gives presentations and reports on a regular basis. This is good practice and gives the FEC well-deserved kudos within the school.
69. The quality and range of learning opportunities are good and have a positive effect on the achievement of students. Support from the community is steadily building and becoming established. Shopping in the community is establishing links with local shopkeepers and staff who welcome students into their establishments. Student progress is tracked very well in a cumulative record of achievement. Key skills in literacy, numeracy and personal development are appropriately stressed and follow on consistently with their earlier work in Key Stage 4. Staff and students are looking forward to the transfer to their new school and the department is well placed to develop the FEC provision even further.

ENGLISH

70. Achievement and progress in English is now good for the majority of pupils and students. During the first year after the school opened, progress for most pupils and students was rapid, with exceptional gains in speaking, listening and writing. This was due to the narrow range of skills pupils and students brought from some of their previous schools.
71. Progress in communication skills is very good for all but a very small minority. This has been due to high quality teaching, but also the introduction of several symbol and signing systems such as the Picture Exchange Communication System to help pupils and students with autism make requests. This results in very good achievements in speaking and listening overall despite a lack of sufficient speech and language support. Progress in reading is good owing to a good use and concentration of reading skills in lessons. New varied reading schemes including reading recovery programmes have been introduced; however, the co-ordinator recognises the need for a greater concentration on reading throughout the school to improve reading even further. From a very low baseline, progress in writing generally has been very good; on occasions pupils and students use computers to reproduce work and they are no longer reluctant writers. However, pupils and students with more complex physical difficulties are often hampered in learning to communicate and write by a lack of proper assessment and support from external agencies. This results in a lack of special strategies and equipment, such as electronic communication aids and even trays on wheelchairs. The good knowledge staff have of these pupils and students means that they do help them make progress, but at a slower rate than their peers. There is very good accreditation for older pupils and students in a wide range of courses in basic skills, communication and literacy. Pass rates are very high, for example the seven students who entered, passed the Certificate of Educational Achievement last year.
72. By the end of Year 6, the very good progress and achievement in speaking and listening is seen as pupils pay attention and respond very well to others. They learn to communicate using a variety of appropriate systems, such as eye pointing, signing, symbols, and other aids such as 'Boardmaker' and PECS. A more able Year 6 pupil, listening to a tape on sounds, announces 'That to me sounds like a very buzzy bee'. Another pupil indicates he knows the sounds by using his symbols depicting bees, thunder, rain and fireworks. During a Year 7 lesson, pupils were listening to pop music extracts with great enjoyment and identifying with lots of enthusiasm the identity of the pop singers – 'That's Abba and the first one was West Life' one pupil announced. By the time they are in Year 9, many pupils have built up a good repertoire of signs, have increased their understanding of language and respond to requests. During a Year 8 lesson about Narcissus, one pupil looked in the mirror and said 'I have fallen in love with myself.' Year 9 pupils had very good recollection of the characters from the book 'Rocky at School'. By the end of Year 11, this very good progress continues as pupils enjoy a puppet play of 'There was an old lady who swallowed a fly', and pupils joined in the singing of the song, miming and imitating the various animals the old woman had eaten!
73. Pupils' and students' achievement and progress in reading are good throughout the school. The National Literacy Strategy has been well adapted to meet the needs of all pupils and students. By Year 6, pupils appreciate and understand a variety of books such as 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar,' some with the use of puppets. Pupils match flash cards of characters and words from a reading scheme, identify key words and recognise their own names. Year 7 pupils enjoyed a shared reading session based on 'The Little House By The Sea'. During this session, all pupils were well catered for,

particularly pupils with physical difficulties using special book rests. However, during a Year 9 literacy session on 'the Country Mouse and the Town Mouse' a pupil with complex learning and physical difficulties was not able to fully understand the story because his objects of reference were not used. By Year 11, pupils' good progress is seen as they find information to write about, some using symbols. During one session, pupils found out about Greece and one pupil with complex communication problems looked up Greek recipes and traced the different ingredients needed for them.

74. The good progress in writing skills is seen in Year 6 as pupils draw, write, track, sequence and copy over words. Some pupils copy under or over a model, making horizontal, vertical and circular lines and, with support, they make and complete patterns. They progress well from scribble within a letter shape to colouring within the shape. By the end of Year 9, the most able pupils write familiar words from memory, recognise letters of the alphabet by name, shape and sound, recognise the initial sounds of letters and begin to write separate words. By the end of Year 11, some pupils write independently about 'World Book Day' held on the 7th March in school. Some Year 11 pupils have written their own family trees with support and gained accreditation in identifying initial letter sounds. They are currently working towards a current affairs certificate. Because of the lack of switches and voice boxes pupils with both physical and communication difficulties are not always able to use switches to indicate preferences so that the support staff can scribe for them. This means that their progress, although satisfactory overall, is slowed as a result.
75. Literacy skills are taught well throughout the curriculum, this is despite the poor support from the speech and language service. For example, there was good signing during a Year 9 history lesson and very good discussion took place during a Year 11 careers session. In a Year 7 geography lesson, more able pupils could discuss the new layout for their new school and describe exactly what their choices of equipment would be. The new co-ordinator has worked extremely hard at implementing strands of the National Literacy Strategy despite a lack of formal training.
76. Teaching is good overall with several very good lessons. In Key Stages 2 and 3, the majority of teaching in English is very good. In all lessons teachers plan well and clearly identify what they expect pupils to learn. They select work to suit the majority of individual needs and use the resources in an imaginative way. This grasps pupils' interest and they respond by working hard and showing high levels of enjoyment. None of the teaching seen was less than satisfactory and the majority of the teaching was good or better. Effective strategies are underpinned by good assessment of the pupils' and students' progress, which ensures that activities are in the main well matched to their ability. In one exciting drama lesson, the wide variety of activities, as pupils worked puppets to play different animals in a story, met the needs of a very challenging group. Pupils' and students' individual targets are sometimes not sufficiently specific, but the good knowledge staff have of pupils and students ensures that work is usually well matched to their needs. Teachers and learning support practitioners manage pupils and students very well, using a great deal of praise and encouragement. Their knowledge of the pupils and students and the strong relationships they have with them ensure that they get the best from them. All teachers and learning support practitioners consistently use pictures, photographs and symbols effectively to gain the attention of those with communication difficulties. However, sometimes the needs of pupils and students with profound and multiple difficulties, visual and hearing impairment and physical difficulties are not well met. This is partly to do with a lack of suitable equipment and strategies, but mainly a lack of associate services support for assessment of pupils and students and the training of teachers and learning support

practitioners. However, the aids that are used, such as switches, 'big Macs'⁴ and voice boxes, are not always available in classrooms, which further limits the progress that can be made.

77. The subject is very well managed to ensure a consistently high standard of approach. Assessment is used very well to help teachers plan appropriately. However, the refinement for pupils working at the very early stages is insufficient to show the good gains in learning being made. The good curriculum is rich and varied and English contributes very well to the pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through the contents of its lessons. Drama, which is well taught, makes a particularly strong contribution to pupils' developing communication and performance skills. Timetables, with pictures and symbols around the school provide a successful structure to the school day and enables pupils and students to understand what will be happening next. A lack of programmes at lunchtime to support pupils and students with the most complex difficulties eat their food hinders their communication development, because it is closely associated with the ability to speak. Resources and accommodation are satisfactory but there is only one very small library on one of the sites in a room which doubles as a parents' room and a sensory room. However, this will soon be resolved when the school moves to its new site in September

MATHEMATICS

78. Overall the provision for mathematics is good. Pupils and students make good progress in all key stages and at post-16. The most able pupils and students continue to make very good progress. Very good progress was made during the first year as pupils and students caught up with their skills and understanding. The National Numeracy Strategy is implemented well throughout the school and teaching is of a high quality. There is no difference between the progress of boys and girls and there has been a very good improvement since the last inspection.
79. By Year 6, good progress is evident as the most able pupils count up to 18 in multiples of three, while most can join in counting songs and can count up to ten with some help. Pupils recognise shapes and know that a box has rectangular sides. Pupils with the greatest learning difficulties can use their tactile senses to touch numbers written in different textures, and can listen when the adults tell them the number.
80. By Year 9, pupils continue to make good progress. They learn to use and apply numbers and recognise shape and size. The most able pupils can count to 20 backwards and forwards. They understand even and odd numbers and can count up to 20 in multiples of two and in tens up to one hundred. Many pupils count up to five objects independently while others use touch screens and a computer program to match numbers with pictures of animals and insects. Pupils with profound difficulties handle objects representing numbers while the support staff sing them counting songs. They learn their number bonds through chants, such as 'Two, four, six, eight, who do we appreciate?', followed by the name of the pupil, which makes some of the pupils look or smile with pleasure.
81. Pupils continue to make good progress by Year 11. The most able learn to use fractions and algebra, for example. Pupils with complex difficulties use a touch screen to match the numbers of fruit to the appropriate number. Others, when learning about shape, space and measure, share out real food into four equal portions and tell the time in hours. Pupils receive support to complete their tasks very well. Some pupils achieve

⁴ A machine for recording a simple message which can be activated by pressing.

very good accreditation by the end of year 11. Students in the further education centre continue to make good progress and achieve well in their external examinations.

82. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Lessons are very well planned and build upon what the pupils and students have already learned. Teachers know their pupils and students very well, work closely with the learning support practitioners and prepare lessons imaginatively so that the interest of all pupils and students is engaged. They use resources well. For instance, in a Year 7 class where pupils were learning the positions 'on', 'under', 'forwards', 'backwards', 'above' and 'below,' pupils used three dimensional objects to indicate relationships, as well as pictures, symbols and switches. Those with wheelchairs moved themselves around the classroom and went outside to the playground to practice positioning and so increased their understanding and involvement very well. The support staff are very experienced in encouraging and motivating the pupils and students.
83. Pupils and students with behaviour difficulties are well managed and they concentrate and work well as a result. Pupils and students have a good attitude to their work and enjoy the lessons. Younger pupils particularly like to show off their counting skills and sing their counting rhymes. Older students tell with pleasure what they do during different times of the day as they complete their diaries. They enjoy working together on tasks and are happy to share equipment with each other. They behave well and pupils show great tolerance of each other. They anticipate pleasure and one pupil looked forward eagerly to break time when he would be allowed to sell snacks in the tuck shop. Pupils and students work very well together in pairs and small groups. They share their equipment and take turns very well. When moving around the room they step aside courteously to avoid accidents.
84. Literacy is well taught and language used very effectively to communicate, directly through words or else through signs and symbols. ICT, which is available, is also well used, but limited in its provision. There are insufficient communication aids, for example, which would assist pupils and students with additional difficulties to have greater access to learning for more of the time. In addition, there are insufficient support staff to ensure that all pupils and students can learn as well as they might. As a result some pupils with the least independence have to wait until an adult can attend to their learning needs on individual tasks. This means that when limited staff are available, the pace of learning is adversely affected. Numeracy is well developed through all the subjects and is a positive feature of lesson planning throughout the school. For instance, pupils in a Year 6 history class making a model of a mediaeval castle were able to estimate size and describe the building as a rectangle.
85. The leadership of the department is very good. Good teamwork between the teachers has resulted in very good planning and assessment as well as a reflective and evaluative attitude to the subject, leading to constant improvements in teaching. The department has already identified some of the areas which could be improved. The department plans very well in making a positive contribution to spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Resources are well used and staff are imaginative in their creation of them, but there is a need for additional computer programs which would assist pupils beyond the more basic stages. Pupils and students in wheelchairs sometimes lack suitable equipment and furniture to enable them to work in comfort. The department is aware of the limits to staffing and is supportive of the school's efforts to train more learning resource practitioners. Homework is given where possible and practicable and reports to parents are clear and informative.

SCIENCE

86. Achievement is consistently good across all years. Pupils make good progress in their scientific knowledge and understanding, and in investigative skills. This is due to the high quality teaching and learning across the school. This is very good improvement since the school opened in 2001.
87. The school has successfully developed plans showing what pupils will learn at each stage based on the National Curriculum and modified and matched to pupil need. Pupils benefit from the way that teachers encourage scientific enquiry by becoming more curious about things around them. The subject is well established in the curriculum and pupils makes consistent gains in aspects of scientific knowledge and understanding. There is no discernible difference between the achievement of boys and girls. Pupils with English as an additional language and those with additional complex learning difficulties make as good a progress as other pupils.
88. By the end of Year 6, the lower attaining pupils use scientific equipment, such as a microscope, and make good progress. They draw diagrams of their experiments and write up their results with one-to-one support. Higher attaining pupils often progress very well as they carry out a range of experiments such as investigations into water, solids and gases, soluble and insoluble materials. They draw conclusions and record findings. Pupils investigate how a foetus grows and changes, how the womb protects the foetus and what protection the baby will need when it comes out of the womb. As a result of teachers using correct scientific language, pupils show good understanding and use the correct language in discussions.
89. By the end of Year 9, the good progress continues as pupils investigate the effects of exercise. Pupils with complex difficulties, particularly physical difficulties, try very hard and persevere to participate fully in the exercise required to stimulate heart rate. Their effort and determination are excellent. Higher attaining pupils carry out similar experiments, take measurements of the increase in heart and pulse rate, record their findings and draw conclusions. All pupils make working models of their lungs using card for the ribs and balloons for the lung. This particular experiment was very successful and illustrated the function of ribs and lung very clearly.
90. By the end of Year 11, lower attaining pupils inquire into how sounds are made. They feel sounds through vibrations and look at a variety of sources of light. They make loud and quiet noises with their voices or objects. A group of pupils with profound learning difficulties carried out an experiment to taste a range of fruit and drink and express a preference. This went particularly well. One pupil reached out and grasped a fruit and held this for several seconds. Success indeed for this pupil. Another indicated quite positively his likes and dislikes by demanding more grapes and refusing to have a second taste of other fruit. Higher attaining pupils understand that mixing materials causes change, some are reversible and some are irreversible. They understand that chemical changes are not easily reversed.
91. The quality of teaching and learning in science is consistently good and on occasions very good. The best lessons are very well planned around the topics or themes to ensure that they are interesting and carefully matched to pupils' abilities. The range and consistent use of practical activities mean that pupils learn very effectively as they broaden their scientific knowledge. Assessment is very good and used well to predict the next step in learning. Achievement is recorded very well and complemented by the use of digital cameras. Teachers provide many opportunities that reinforce and

consolidate literacy and numeracy skills, although few pupils can write freely about what they have done. Teachers and support staff work well together with enthusiasm and high expectations of pupils' achievements. As a result of this high quality teaching, pupils want to learn and use their time well. They are keen to learn and their attitudes and behaviour are very good.

92. Literacy and numeracy skills are well promoted in science. For example, pupils count, time and measure. Teachers use signs, symbols, objects of reference and picture exchange cards to help pupils understand. However, the technological aids, which would further enhance pupils' communication during their science lessons, are insufficient for a few pupils. This slows their understanding at times. Learning resources are adequate for the curriculum taught, but the co-ordinator has clear plans for the improvement of these resources when they move to the new building.
93. Science is well managed. The co-ordinator is available for informal support. At the moment, she has insufficient time to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning across the school. This is planned for when the school moves to new premises. Science makes a very positive contribution to pupils' spiritual development. In a Year 8 lesson on electricity and magnetism, when one boy completed his circuit and the bulb lit up, his reaction was one of absolute amazement. Pupils share resources, work well together, take turns and support each other, positively enhancing their social and moral development.

ART AND DESIGN

94. The quality of teaching and the progress pupils make in art and design is currently good. Management is very good and the capacity to improve is very good. In the recent past, pupils have made very good progress and achieved very well because they had received limited artistic experiences and few skills in and knowledge of the subject before the new co-ordinator was appointed to the school. The majority of pupils are currently making good progress in lessons, although many are still making very good progress, especially the highest attaining pupils. For a few pupils with more complex needs, especially those with physical, sensory and more profound difficulties, progress is satisfactory rather than good, because the planning, teaching, equipment and communication systems are not sufficiently specialised to involve them more fully. This is true for pupils of all ages.
95. By the age of 11, good, and often very good, progress is usually made as pupils learn to use different techniques, including paint, collage and photography. By the age of 14, pupils have extended their drawing skills well and this year they have produced a beautiful mural for the school hall. These pupils have produced tactile picture frames, character puppets, have tie dyed cloth and learned computer painting, and made stained glass window patterns and jewellery. By the time they are 16 years old, pupils have also worked very well with clay, and experienced etched printing. They learn about festive art, sculpture and have produced masks in the style of the Aboriginal and African cultures. All pupils are introduced to the work of different artists; they have recently worked very effectively in the style of Andy Warhole's mixed media portraits, Jasper Johns and David Hockney. Art and design contributes very well to pupils' cultural and multicultural development through the activities described above.
96. Teaching in art and design is good overall. For the most able pupils of all age groups, and for those in the further education centre, teaching is very good. In one inspirational piece of teaching in Key Stage 4, a pupil with autism who did not engage willingly in the work, was skilfully encouraged to produce some fine printing, choosing different colours

and patterns. In another excellent lesson in the further education centre, to a background of Jazz music, the students maturely discussed their work on Matisse from the previous week and produced some very creative pieces using rollers and paint, successfully cutting and turning them to fit the work on a Jazz theme. Work is adapted well to the learning needs of most pupils. For a very few pupils and students with the most profound learning difficulties or physical disability, not all lessons are adapted sufficiently well to let them join in easily and make the most of the lesson. Progress is hindered in some lessons by a lack of suitable trays for pupils and students with wheelchairs, and sometimes chairs are placed so that they cannot do the work on their own, which in some cases is just satisfactory or even unsatisfactory. Not enough time is always planned to allow these pupils and students to explore the task in depth and give a response.

97. The good and very good teaching, which is evident for most pupils in every lesson, is characterised by good clear planning for the majority, engaging and lively presentation and well organised support for individuals. The class teamwork is always very good and learning support practitioners add significantly to pupils' learning. In addition, the very high quality of relationships and consistent use of signing help most pupils to feel confident to try out new things.
98. The management of art and design is very good. The new co-ordinator has an excellent knowledge of and passion for the subject, and is highly committed to helping pupils and students achieve their very best. This has ensured a very high quality and rich curriculum range to extend pupils' and students' experiences well. This is evident because the school is full of lovely works of art by the pupils and students. He works closely and effectively with his colleagues in the department and produces a very good range of ideas to extend pupils' and students' experiences. Assessment is very good and links very well to pupils' and students' individual education plans. As with all subjects, the co-ordinator does not yet observe teaching to gain a clear view of how well the subject is taught to support development further. The length of lessons are too short for pupils and students after preparation and cleaning up, to practise, consolidate and extend their learning which, coupled with the lack of an art room, makes it harder for the high quality of curriculum planning to extend pupils fully. Accommodation is very poor; there is no designated art room. Resources are satisfactory, but lack the full range of specialised equipment to fully support learning within this exciting curriculum. However, this situation is fully resolved by the imminent move to the new school with purpose-built facilities and equipment.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

99. Teaching is good in design and technology, in both the use of resistant materials and in food technology. Pupils of all abilities make good progress and achieve well. The most able pupils often make very good progress. Practical skills, knowledge and understanding about food and hygiene, and challenges to think and act independently, are key areas of learning to prepare pupils for life after school. There is a good quality appropriate curriculum for both design technology and food technology. Food technology is an important part of the sensory curriculum and provides valuable opportunities to taste many ethnic foods and to reinforce the personal and social skills and cultural understanding of pupils and students. A comprehensive policy statement and scheme of work support the teaching of this important aspect of the curriculum. Displays of work around the school and photographic evidence illustrate the good range of work covered.

100. In lessons seen and from teachers' planning and records, the quality of teaching is good overall. Where teaching and learning are at their best, teachers have very clear knowledge of both the subject and their pupils' individual needs. Teachers make the objectives of the lesson clear. This helps pupils to remember and make the relevant connections between different parts of their work. For example, during a very good Year 9 lesson the teacher arranged demonstrations so that all pupils could have a clear view and encouraged pupils to ask appropriate questions. Where the teaching was slightly less successful, the time allowed for the activities was too long for pupils with more complex needs. In food and design technology, opportunities for word and symbol reading key words and for reinforcing number work, such as weighing ingredients, were missed.
101. Teachers have a good understanding of the individual needs of most pupils and they plan and prepare lessons well. This enables all pupils to be fully included in lessons and they work hard as a consequence. Overall, teachers make very good use of learning support practitioners and work well as a teaching team. They are very patient with pupils, ensuring that all are involved in the lessons at the appropriate level. By the end of Year 6, pupils are using their manipulative skills to make puppets and masks. Higher attaining pupils use glue and scissors. They use different materials to make cards, collages and prints. Pupils with complex difficulties are helped to progress well by responding to the sensory elements of food. For example, pupils in a good Years 10 and 11 class compare food with different textures and indicate the types of food they prefer. Pupils with complex needs made their likes and dislikes known clearly, by sign, facial expressions or utterances. The very good relationships in classes motivate pupils and they work hard to carry out the planned lesson objectives. These relationships also make the lessons very relaxed and enjoyable. Pupils enjoy design and technology. They respond well to their teachers and work co-operatively. Some are able to concentrate for long periods of time; their behaviour is good and they can be trusted to use the equipment sensibly. All staff take care to ensure that pupils wear appropriate protective clothing and are careful to observe safety guidelines when using tools.
102. Design and technology is well led and managed. Pupils across the school are offered a good curriculum that ensures pupils have a good range of different experiences. Teaching, planning and pupils' work are checked regularly. However, insufficient thought has been given to the use of ICT and the school is aware that this is an area that requires further development. The present accommodation for food technology is unsatisfactory: there are no adjustable sinks, cookers or tables to accommodate wheelchairs; the room has no extraction facilities; the flooring is unsuitable and some of the cupboards are unsuitable for storing food. All of these issues will be successfully addressed when the school moves to its new site. The subject, and the caring way in which it is taught, makes a good contribution to pupils', spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

GEOGRAPHY

103. The quality of teaching and the progress and achievements of pupils in geography are satisfactory. The subject co-ordinator is very new to the role and, therefore, leadership and management of the subject are currently sound and developing. The co-ordinator has a clear vision for the subject and is the only teacher to teach the subject. A suitable action plan is in place which shows how the subject will develop over the next year. It is only taught to Years 6, 7, 8 and 9, and a Key Stage 3 scheme of work has been developed using national guidelines. Resources are satisfactory in quantity and range and the co-ordinator has completed an audit of current resources in order to plan for

the future. There is a good assessment system in place based on the 'P Scales', and it is anticipated that pupils' self-evaluation sheets will be in place shortly.

104. Pupils' achievement and progress are satisfactory overall and over time and, at the present time, all classes are following the same unit of work which is based on 'Moving to our new school'. This is part of the special project, which is helping pupils and students prepare very well for the imminent move. All pupils have had the opportunity of visiting the building site of the new school, due to be completed in September, and are designing their various classrooms. During a Year 7 and Year 8 lesson, pupils thoroughly enjoyed placing pictures of furniture onto laminated white card and discussing their decision regarding layout. Year 9 pupils had a similar lesson and less able pupils are able to use symbols well to indicate their preferences.
105. In all three lessons observed during inspection week, the lessons were planned well. The teaching was never less than satisfactory and in two lessons teaching was good. However, the needs of the pupils with more complex learning difficulties were not always well met. The lack of suitable strategies, equipment and training for further understanding of the needs of these pupils prevented their progress being more than satisfactory. Through the content of the lessons geography makes a positive contribution to pupils' social, moral and cultural development.

HISTORY

106. Pupils' achievements in history are good and they make good progress over time. The quality of pictorial evidence reinforces this judgement and shows the extensive range of work that pupils cover. Teachers plan well, provide pupils with challenging tasks and organise lessons in such a way as to make sure that all have the opportunity to learn. Because pupils enjoy history lessons, they work with effort and concentration and show real pleasure in their achievements. Teachers' constant praise and confirmation of standards achieved also contribute to the pupils' pleasure and feelings of success.
107. By the end of Year 6, pupils begin to develop a good sense of the passing of time through birthdays and they show awareness of the ageing process by examining photographs of themselves and their families. Teachers encourage them well to use their timetables to find out what lessons take place in the morning or afternoon, or when their favourite activities take place. This helps them to understand the meaning of key words, such as 'before', 'now', 'after' and 'later'. They further develop their good understanding by sequencing events such as festivals, weekends and holidays.
108. During Years 7 to 9, pupils continue to progress well. They find out about people and events from a suitable range of periods from history. They learn to appreciate how living conditions have changed over the years. They develop an understanding of working conditions for children in Victorian England. Teachers take good advantage of opportunities to reinforce pupils' understanding. For example, simple time lines to identify class birthdays are constructed and understood, and pupils explore different ways of telling the time as they look at clocks, watches and calendars. As a result of visits to churches, castles and museums they have the opportunity to handle, as well as look at, old artefacts. In Years 10 and 11, teachers continue to stress the need for pupils to place events into a time sequence and extend their ability to interpret different sources. For example, higher attaining pupils independently sequence a series of cards depicting the events of the Battle of Hastings.
109. History is well led. The subject manager provides clear guidance about the level of work expected from the different groups of pupils within the school. Pupils' records provide

good evidence of what they have done and are used satisfactorily to identify the progress that they have made over time. A well-structured, long-term plan ensures that pupils, including those with more complex learning needs, develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in a systematic way. Assessment procedures are good and are in line with those in the rest of the school. Results from assessment are used well to make sure that individual work planned is suitable for the pupils, and it also has a great influence on the planning of the subject for the future. However, the provision and use of ICT to help pupils understand and experience aspects of history are too limited. This particularly impacts negatively on the progress of those with the most complex needs. There is also an insufficiently appropriate range of externally accredited examinations for higher attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11. History provides good opportunities for moral, social and cultural development through activities such as discussion about working conditions of the poor or visits to a local museum.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

110. Since the school opened in 2001 the school has made considerable effort to improve its overall provision for the subject. It has appointed an enthusiastic co-ordinator who is a very experienced subject specialist teacher with good knowledge of pupils' and students' special needs. There is now a clear policy for ICT and a recognised scheme of work; all teachers have received New Opportunities Fund information and communication technology training and learning resources are now adequate to teach the curriculum offered. This is a very good improvement in a short period of time. As a result, pupils and students of all attainment levels are making good progress throughout the school.
111. Pupils and students make good progress and achieve well in ICT. The more able pupils and students make very good progress. This is due to the good quality of teaching and learning and very good planning. Lessons are well planned and objectives are made clear at the beginning of lessons. Pupils and students find the lessons interesting and stimulating. Skilled questioning checks for understanding and enables pupils and students to recall what they already know and to explore further. As a result of very good relationships in class, pupils' and students' attitudes and behaviour are very good.
112. By the end of Year 6, lowest attaining pupils use the touch screen independently. They recognise pictures of computers and, for example, will point to a picture of the monitor and then the actual monitor. Higher attaining pupils often make very good progress; they use the keyboard, find the letter they need and enter text. They also find programs they need and activate switches independently.
113. By the end of Year 9, lower attaining pupils show good progress by using sensory equipment and switches more independently. They express choices, for example using a switch to switch on a fan or use the same switch to play music or switch on a light. By this time, higher attaining pupils improve their keyboard skills very well using a mouse to move the cursor. Pupils use compact discs and, with help, use a desk-top publisher program. They save and print their work.
114. By the end of Year 11, lower attaining pupils use switches independently, developing the use of double switches to activate devices. Higher attaining pupils use writing and art programs and create some very good posters and cards. Pupils use a digital camera to create their own photographs and record some of their work and visits. With help, pupils access the Internet. This good work continues into the FEC department where lower attaining students continue their experiences with switches and higher

attaining students use a wide range of ICT equipment, such as videos players and camera, digital cameras, a wide range of ICT programmes for text and graphics and more independent use of the Internet.

115. The subject is effectively led and managed by a well-qualified and experienced co-ordinator. She offers good support to colleagues in other subject areas; however, there is a lack of augmentative ICT aids, such as switches, beams, talkers and touch screens to enable pupils and students with more complex and profound learning difficulties to access the curriculum more easily and this is unsatisfactory. This deficiency is well recognised by the school and the co-ordinator and will be rectified as soon as the school moves to its new site and premises. At the moment, the co-ordinator monitors planning and outcomes in her subject, but there is a need to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning across the school. This is recognised by the school and will be implemented when the co-ordinator receives sufficient non-contact time to carry out this role.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

116. Provision for French is good overall, teaching is good and pupils achieve well and make good progress. Pupils made very good progress last year, which was the first year that French had been taught; almost 100 per cent gained one or even two levels on the 'P' Scales.
117. The good progress is evident as pupils learn how to greet each other, count in French and learn words for transport. In the past term, pupils have made good progress in discussing their hobbies and learning the names of other countries where French is spoken. This contributes well to developing their cultural understanding. Some more able pupils are able to match the word 'bateau' to its picture. The very good use of signs, symbols and switch communicators provides strong links to support pupils' work in English and the departments work closely and effectively together. The subject also supports number work through counting and music when familiar songs are sung.
118. Teaching is good overall and French language is used well with plenty of repetition to direct parts of the lesson. This leads to a very good use of French by pupils who speak simple phrases, such as 'oui', 'non', and 'je m'appelle', with confidence. The lively and enthusiastic teaching means that pupils usually enjoy their lessons and are keen to try and speak the language, which they do quite naturally. In one lesson, pupils were not at all self-conscious as they acted out meeting each other using French. The teacher has very high expectations which has led to such good initial progress. There is a good use of homework, for example. However, for a very few pupils the pace of this expectation is too fast and they find it more difficult to learn and so lose attention. In one lesson, there was too much noise for a pupil with visual impairment to really track what was happening and progress as a result was slow. Learning support practitioners are well deployed and are very clear about the words to be used; they contribute significantly to the progress made by the individuals they support.
119. Subject management is good, led very enthusiastically by the co-ordinator who understands well how the subject needs to develop. She seeks to keep informed of how to increase the methods and strategies necessary to continue bringing the subject alive for pupils of all abilities. Staff skills in speaking French are not always accurate and this remains a key area for further staff development. The curriculum is good with very high expectations of what pupils can achieve, which is most suited to the needs of

the more able pupils. Two pupils have already achieved accreditation and this is well established. Assessment is also good and very well linked to the individual targets of pupils. Resources are satisfactory, the co-ordinator has made many interesting activities and games, but there is a limited range of commercially suitable equipment and insufficient use of information and communication technology. This has also been identified as in need of further development.

MUSIC

120. A full-time music teacher will begin in April but at present a visiting teacher from the advisory service spends two days a week in the school and teaches pupils up to the age of 14. Another teacher takes a class on one morning a week. Pupils cover aspects of listening, performing and rudimentary composing. They also sing and have an opportunity to play percussion instruments. Some pupils also derive excellent benefits from music therapy sessions.
121. Pupils' progress and their achievements in music are good by Year 6. The younger pupils listen to songs and join in the refrain whenever possible. While those who are able sing some of the words, others with severe physical or communication are helped by the staff to clap their hands in time to the music. Pupils all use percussion instruments such as claves, maracas or bells to beat time and they know whether the music is fast or slow, loud or soft. All show good achievement as they wait in silence for the music to begin, then play in unison, accompanying the songs. They learn about musical instruments by mimicking the playing of them as they look at pictures and listen to recordings of band music.
122. Pupils continue to make good progress in Key Stage 3. By the age of 14, pupils know some of the songs made famous during World War Two. They can sing 'The Quartermaster's Stores' with a great deal of vigour, or 'Hey Little Hen,' taking great delight in playing in time with the egg-shaped shakers. They recognise that happy music is played quickly and sad music slowly. Many of the more difficult songs have accompanying actions, which pupils can do at intervals such as 'thumbs up' at certain words in 'Give me a kiss sergeant major.' All pupils make choices of percussion instruments to play alongside the singing and participate either independently or with varying degrees of support.
123. Pupils clearly have a very positive attitude to their music lessons and enjoy music very much moving their bodies in time to the sounds. When they hear music they become animated and express themselves vocally or through increased activity. They take part in the songs with great enthusiasm singing the words they know extra loudly. Their delight in singing is transferred to assemblies where they again sing with enthusiasm. Pupils behave very well in lessons, sharing the limited instruments and taking turns very well. They listen to each other and applaud when they perform well. Pupils throughout the school enjoy music when they hear it in assemblies or lessons. Those pupils having music therapy obviously derive enormous satisfaction and relief and are able to communicate with each other musically, often quite humorously, as they play notes on the piano together or in turns.
124. Music teaching throughout the school is good. Teachers have a good subject knowledge, plan work well and bring with them suitable instruments, books and resources for the lessons. The teachers' good knowledge of the pupils enables them to engage with each of them. Planning is good so that pupils build up their skills systematically in line with the National Curriculum targets. Management of the pupils is good and the special needs of the pupils are taken into account. The learning support

practitioners work well with the teacher, using signing very effectively to communicate. Teaching resources are well used and links are made with other areas of the curriculum very well. For instance, in learning the songs of World War Two, pupils also learn about evacuees, gas masks and what it meant to a child to be sent away from home. However, despite the many positive features of the curriculum, the current staffing situation limits the range of opportunities available to all the pupils and the range of resources which can be used. In addition, the lack of space means that it is not easy for tuned percussion instruments to be regularly available in the lesson.

125. Leadership of the subject is good. There is a clear direction for the subject and all concerned with its teaching are aware of its importance. The assessment of the pupils to help planning is good and the recording of pupils' successes is very well documented. The subject makes a very good contribution to the spiritual, social, moral and physical dimension of the curriculum as pupils listen to music and learn about composers from different countries and sing songs from different cultures. Pupils all work, sing or play together harmoniously. Literacy and numeracy are well planned for through the curriculum. Pupils are given opportunities to perform in public such as when they sing Christmas carols from around the world in their local church. Opportunities for whole-school musical events are limited, although pupils perform in assembly. There are few opportunities to see live music, although they do listen to visiting musicians from the Sandwell Youth Music Service. Staffing, at present barely adequate, will be resolved as a new teacher has been appointed from the start of the new term, when it is planned to extend the musical opportunities for more pupils and students in the school. Nevertheless, there has been a good improvement since the school opened.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

126. Provision for physical education is good at all stages. Pupils in all key stages have a programme of studies closely linked to the National Curriculum and their personal targets. There is a wide range of physical activities, including swimming.
127. Pupils in Year 6 have individual help given by a learning support practitioner and make good progress. In an initial warm-up activity, they move every part of their body in time to music. Ambulant pupils exercise on a mat or travel around a small area while those in frames or wheelchairs are assisted in making smaller movements of, for example, head, shoulders and arms. Safety is of paramount consideration when hoists are used for pupils with extremely limited mobility who receive massage or encouragement to reach out or kick with their legs. Pupils use 'medi-balls' to improve their balance, each aspiring to reach individually set targets.
128. Pupils in Key Stage 3 make good progress following a health and fitness programme doing aerobics. They move different parts of their body in time to the music, beginning with slower and easier movements then gradually moving on to larger and more active exercises, running on the spot, marching and jumping. The movements are increasingly complex, though each have their individual targets and provide good exercise. Cool down exercises and rest periods prepare pupils for their next lessons well. Pupils with profound difficulties visit the sensory room where they can make smaller but significant movements, moving their hands towards the light or passing a ball around the circle. All pupils also visit the swimming baths and make good progress. Those unable to swim take exercise in the hydrotherapy pool or a small pool at the leisure centre.

129. Older pupils in Years 10 and 11 make good progress. They experience a wide range of activities, including athletics, basketball, dance, gymnastics and badminton as well as football, cricket and swimming. In one badminton session, the higher attaining pupils worked in pairs using a badminton racquet to hit a balloon between them. Others threw or patted the balloon to each other. Pupils with profound difficulties handled the balloons and one managed to make eye contact with the learning support practitioner. Pupils with additional special educational needs at all stages make progress in line with their peers.
130. Students in the further education centre continue to make good progress through a variety of activities including visiting the leisure centre pool for swimming.
131. Pupils' attitudes to physical education are good so they change into appropriate kit for the lesson and obviously enjoy the lessons. They respond well to the enthusiasm of the teacher who clearly understands them well and relates well to their tastes in music. She energises them and makes them feel that they can do anything they want. They respond well to her instructions and strive to reach the targets she sets.
132. The quality of teaching in physical education is good at all key stages. Lessons are well planned and assessment of individuals is well recorded and used appropriately. There is a sense of vitality and excitement in the lessons through the good use of the voice to encourage and motivate. Pupils are valued and praised frequently with everyone being noticed. Signing is used well both to communicate with pupils with autism and with individuals when the noise of activity and the acoustics in the hall make it difficult to be heard clearly. Pupils are all encouraged to reach high standards through striving and improvement but sometimes this is at the expense of pace and variety, with some activities going on for too long as in the case of a lesson teaching badminton skills.
133. The use of literacy and numeracy is a good feature, with pupils learning words through repetition and emphasis on counting the number of jumps or passes. The subject makes a good contribution to social and moral education. For instance, pupils are praised for their work in pairs and groups. One individual was highly praised for taking a ball back to its storage area without being asked, even though he was in a wheelchair and had to push the ball ahead of him around all the mats on the floor. There is limited use of ICT at present but its increased use forms part of the physical education development plan.
134. Leadership of the subject is good. The teacher has good subject knowledge and is constantly developing her teaching skills through a range of courses. There are detailed plans for teaching in the short and medium terms and for the future development of the subject. The subject leader has a clear vision of where she sees physical education in the structure of the school. Resources for the subject are being built up gradually but effectively.
135. Although there is a football team being coached by a learning support practitioner as an after-school club, there are plans to extend the range of extra-curricular activities. The current use of the hall for physical education and games after lunch is a constraint upon provision, as time is lost in clearing the hall. The poor acoustics of the hall at the Red Lion site put a strain upon communication. However, these weaknesses will be rectified when the school moves to its new site.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

136. Pupils throughout the school are achieving well in religious education. There is a good curriculum with good learning opportunities. Although the large majority of pupils and students are at the earliest levels of attainment, their study of religious education effectively supports their acquisition of essential learning skills. However, the subject manager is aware of the need to make learning opportunities, which are currently satisfactory for pupils with more complex needs, more specific.
137. The teaching of religious education is good and due attention is paid to the locally agreed syllabus. Lessons are carefully planned so that activities are well matched to pupils' abilities and their level of understanding. This ensures that pupils of all abilities, including those with complex special needs, are effectively supported to make progress. In the best lessons, the teacher provides pupils with appropriate opportunities to look at and handle a range of artefacts associated with the religions they study. For example, in a very good lesson older students studied religious orders from around the world and arranged their own displays of religious artefacts. Aspects of all world faiths are included in lessons and pupils have opportunities to gain a good understanding of different beliefs. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 are developing an awareness of the existence of different faiths, such as Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Pupils are beginning to understand that these are represented by different symbols and their followers worship in different places.
138. By Year 11, higher attaining pupils have made very good progress studying stories from the Bible, such as the 'birth of Christ', and other stories like Rama and Sita from Hindu legends. They remember in a very general way that these stories are religious and similarly what God is. Learning is successfully reinforced when the school invites representatives from different faiths and groups into school and when teachers take pupils to visit places of worship. For example, students in Years 12 and 13 visited a 'Jesus Exhibition' at a local Pentecostal church. Taped music is very well used in religious education lessons. It is very effective in setting a calm atmosphere when it is time for a prayer or for reflection.
139. The traditions and festivals associated with different faiths are recognised and celebrated during the year. These are promoted further in the school by high quality displays in classrooms and public areas. Pupils, who keep copies of their involvement in their personal achievement files, remember these celebrations. The weekly school assemblies meet statutory requirements and also provide a good opportunity for shared worship, and are used effectively to mark the celebration of religious and other festivals.
140. Religious education is very well led and managed. Pupils and students across the school are offered the locally agreed syllabus, modified to meet their needs. The very knowledgeable subject manager has invested much time in collecting a wealth of artefacts and resources, which she freely brings into school for the pupils. She has great knowledge and understanding of customs, clothing, celebrations and food. Many of the artefacts used in lessons are genuine, and much appreciated by the pupils. However, there is a general lack of the use of computers and other technological aids in lessons. The subject manager is well aware of this and is searching for better and appropriate software programs that are age appropriate. Religious education makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development.