

INSPECTION REPORT

Highcrest Community School

High Wycombe, Bucks

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 133514

Headteacher: Miss Shena Moynihan

Lead inspector: John Carnaghan

Dates of inspection: 20th - 23rd October 2003

Inspection number: 258658

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Other secondary school
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll;	597
School address:	Hatters Lane High Wycombe Bucks
Postcode:	HP13 7NQ
Telephone number:	01494 529866
Fax number:	01494 472850
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Miss Julia Wassell
Date of previous inspection:	Not previously inspected.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Highcrest Community School is a small 11 to 16 secondary school, serving the town of High Wycombe. Pupils in the area are selected in terms of ability and the highest 40 per cent go to local grammar schools. The school opened as a 'fresh start' in September 2001, adopting pupils of the former school on this site. The area it serves has some extremes of deprivation and is, overall, below average in background. The standards of attainment of pupils as they enter the school are very low and in the lowest 5 per cent nationally. The numbers who take free school meals is above average. Over half of the pupils are from ethnic minorities and over 20 per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language, although few are at an early stage of learning English. There are no travellers or refugees and a very small number of looked-after children. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is well above average and there are more than usual numbers of those with statements of educational need. The school behaviour support unit is financed by the school to promote inclusion. The numbers of pupils who join or leave the school during the school year are high.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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23080	Rob Isaac	Team inspector	English
3643	Derek Jones	Team inspector	Mathematics
31159	Clive Simmonds	Team inspector	Science
3555	Carol Emery	Team inspector	Design and technology
33170	Julie Winterman	Team inspector	
4223	Garth Collard	Team inspector	History
20767	Jerry Royle	Team inspector	Information technology Music
31685	Val Girling	Team inspector	Art and design
3534	Ann Braithwaite	Team inspector	Citizenship Physical education
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

Highcrest is a good and effective school. The school was established as a 'fresh start' in September 2001. Since then it has been transformed by the impressive improvements that have occurred. Pupils' standards are below the national average, but their achievement is good. Teaching and learning are good overall and very good in Years 10 and 11. The way the school nurtures pupils and fosters their personal and academic development is very good. Pupils are enthusiastic and proud of their school, keenly pointing out the great improvements that have been made. They are closely involved in many aspects of school life. The school is very well led and managed, maintaining a very strong emphasis on raising pupils' expectations and improving standards. Governance is generally good. The school is more expensive per pupil than most other schools but it gives good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The leadership and management of the school are very good and lead the drive to continued improvements.
- Pupils achieve well in their time at the school.
- Teaching is good with a number of very good elements, so pupils learn well.
- The way the school supports individual pupils is very good. In this caring and inclusive environment, pupils flourish.
- Pupils behave very well and there are very good relationships which have a strongly beneficial effect on learning.
- Governance of the school is good.
- Standards of pupils' work are below national averages and below those of similar schools. Nevertheless, standards are improving rapidly in virtually all subjects.
- Pupils are very grateful for the rapid improvements that have been made; they know that they are valued and important members of the school.
- Provision and achievement in drama are very good.
- Provision and standards in geography and music are unsatisfactory.

The school is relatively new so has not had a full inspection. Thus, improvements cannot be reported.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2000	2001	2002	2002
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	N/a	N/a	E	D

Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average

For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.

Pupils' achievement is good but their current standards are below average. Results in Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations showed a marked rise in 2003. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are below the national average but given the very low standards that many pupils have on entering the school their achievement is good. Overall, current standards in Year 11 are also below the national average but pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good. Pupils' achievement is well above average in drama, it is better than average in English, mathematics, design and technology, science, ICT and physical education. It is well below average in music. Low numbers of pupils taking tests and the newness of the school mean that there are no significant identifiable differences between the performance of boys and girls or different ethnic groups.

Pupils' personal qualities and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very good. Attitudes and behaviour are very good and there are warm relationships throughout the school. Development of spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is very good and a strong factor in the way behaviour and attitudes have improved. Attendance is good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching and learning are good. Over three-quarters of lessons seen were good or better. Teaching is best in Years 10 and 11 where many lessons were very good. Teaching and learning are good in most subjects, they are very good in English and satisfactory in modern foreign languages. They are unsatisfactory in geography. Pupils participate enthusiastically in their learning and are receptive to teachers' consistently high expectations. Teachers are knowledgeable and confident so pupils feel secure in their learning.

The school curriculum is satisfactory. However, the schemes of work for French and geography are incomplete. Opportunities for pupils to develop ICT skills in other subjects should be developed. There are good opportunities for enrichment through extra-curricular activities. Guidance to help pupils improve is good because assessment provides the school with valuable information, which is then used to set improvement targets for pupils. Pupils are closely involved in the running of the school. Their views are regularly canvassed and acted upon which makes them feel valued and involved in school life. The school has good links with the local community and other schools and colleges.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The headteacher is an excellent leader and brings a powerful sense of purpose to the school. This vision is widely shared by staff, pupils, parents and governors. The school is very well managed. Methods of self-evaluation are thorough and effective and the school takes vigorous action to tackle any perceived weaknesses. The rate of school improvement since its establishment two years ago is very impressive. The governing body understands the schools' strengths and weaknesses and challenges and supports the school in its drive for improvements. Governance is good, overall.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are satisfied with the school and are happy that its transformation is recognised in the local community. Almost all reported that their children liked school. They have no significant concerns, but a minority of parents are concerned about bullying or racial abuse. The inspection finds no evidence to support these concerns. Pupils are very content with the school. All of the 520 pupils who responded to the questionnaire thought it a good school. A minority of pupils reflected concerns about bullying in their questionnaires. However, when interviewed, pupils said that it is uncommon and the school deals with such incidents very well.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are:

- Improve provision and raise standards in geography and music.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils' achievement across the school is good, given very low standards they show on entry to the school. The standards pupils currently attain are below the national average.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in the end of Year 9 tests and in GCSE examinations in 2003 showed marked improvements on 2002. In both cases, the school exceeded its targets.
- Pupils' achievement in their time at school is good.
- Standards were well below the national average in tests and examinations in 2002 and well below average in comparison with similar schools.
- Drama achieves above average standards.

Commentary

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	31.2 (29.8)	33.3 (33.3)
Mathematics	31.3 (30.1)	35.3 (34.7)
Science	31.3 (29.1)	33.7 (33.3)

There were 93 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2002

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	20 (n/a)	49.9 (48.4)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	91 (n/a)	90.9 (90.9)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97 (n/a)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	26.5 (n/a)	39.8 (39)

1. In this new school there are no long-term trends in examination results to analyse. While there are nationally comparable figures for 2003 results at the end of Year 9, at the time of writing the report there were no average figures available for secondary schools in selective areas. As a result, no comparison with similar schools can be made for 2003. The school's results in tests at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were well below the national average, in comparison with similar schools they were also below average. Results in 2003 improved markedly, but were still well below the national average, overall. However, in comparison with the very low standards of these pupils when they entered the school, the 2003 Year 9 test results represent very good achievement. This is because of the school's success in ensuring consistently good teaching and the strong focus on raising pupils' expectations. Girls performed better than boys in the 2003 examinations and pupils from an Asian background performed less well than other ethnic groups. The school set rigorous statutory targets for the Year 9 2003 tests and surpassed them comfortably in all areas.
2. The 2002 GCSE results were well below average in comparison with all schools nationally and with similar schools, both in terms of average points and the percentage of pupils who

gained 5 or more A*-C grades. The school was more successful in the percentage of pupils who gained more than five, or more than one grade at A*-G at GCSE where the results were in line with the national average. In comparison with similar schools these results were well above average and above average, respectively. These figures represent good achievement. Again, there was a clear improvement in results in 2003 but there are no nationally comparable figures. Girls performed better than boys in English, but in mathematics and science this position was reversed. In terms of ethnic groups, pupils of an Asian background did better than others in English and science. In mathematics pupils from an Afro-Caribbean background lagged behind other ethnic groups. Again, the challenging GCSE targets the school set for 2003 were easily exceeded.

3. At the end of Year 9, pupils' current standards are generally below what is expected nationally, although they are well below average in mathematics, music and geography. This demonstrates that the rising trend in standards is continuing, promoted by the good teaching. Pupils' standards as they start secondary education in Year 7 are very low. The rapid improvement in standards indicates that current pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good. The strengths in the school's assessment procedures enable teachers to set realistic but challenging targets to actively encourage pupils and teachers to make improvements.
4. At the end of Year 11 pupils' current standards are below national standards. However, they are in line with the average in physical education and above it in drama and Urdu. They are well below the average in mathematics, history, modern foreign languages and geography. Pupils' achievement in subjects in Years 10 and 11 is generally good and it is very good in drama. In modern foreign languages, geography and history it is satisfactory. The variations between standards in subjects are linked to slight variations in the standard of teaching in subjects, however, the very good teaching overall in Years 10 and 11 is continuing to drive up standards.
5. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good. The commitment of the senior management team, the special educational needs co-ordinator and all staff to making good provision for these pupils ensures that they are productive in lessons and make good progress. Regular testing of pupils' spelling and reading levels informs the setting of targets on individual education plans and supports achievement. Teachers use individual education plans well to guide their teaching. A variety of activities support the development of pupils' literacy skills and their progress overall. These include before school and registration classes and group work for targeted pupils in Years 7 and 9. Emerging systems for tracking the achievement of pupils with special educational needs are beginning to offer the school a clearer picture of pupils' progress.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes to school are **good**. Overall, behaviour is **very good** in lessons and around the school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **very good**. In particular, pupils' willingness to take responsibility within the school community is **excellent**. Attendance and punctuality are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils develop an outstanding sense of responsibility within the school community.
- Pupils behave very well and form very good relationships with others.
- The personal development of pupils is very good.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning and to school are good.
- Attendance is above the national average.
- The level of fixed term exclusions is high but is reducing.

Commentary

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	92.4%	School data:	0.2%
National data:	91.0%	National data:	1.2%

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Exclusions

Ethnic Background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	597	54	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean		17	0
Mixed – White and Black African		1	0
Mixed – White and Asian		1	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani		20	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean		17	0
Black or Black British – African		2	0
Any other ethnic group		4	0

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

6. Pupils are proud of their school and very willing to take responsibility. Pupils strongly appreciate the many opportunities they have to take responsibility and influence the development of the school community. Their willingness to contribute is outstanding and a significant factor in the school's success.
7. Behaviour throughout the school is very good. Almost all pupils respond very well to the high expectations staff have of their behaviour, so that they learn well. They listen very well, are polite and very willing to help others. Incidences of bullying are rare and are dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils form very good relationships with their peers, teachers and other adults. The school is a very harmonious community in which every individual is known and valued.
8. Pupils' personal development is very good. The school fosters pupils' self esteem and confidence very well so that they develop into thoughtful young people who take a full part in the life of the school. Pupils appreciate the wide range of activities and events that are organised outside lessons. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong, taking very good care of their own and the school's property. They value the many opportunities they have in lessons, assemblies and other activities to reflect on their experiences. These actively promote good achievement. The school offers a wealth of opportunities for pupils to find out about their own and other cultures. In particular, pupils speak enthusiastically about the 'international day' held last year. All cultures represented within the school community are valued and celebrated in a way that develops understanding and contributes well to the racial harmony in the school. Pupils have a positive attitude to learning. They are willing to work and take a pride in their achievements. Pupils listen well to their teachers and to one another. They concentrate well in lessons and try hard to achieve their best.

9. The school monitors and promotes attendance well. Parents are strongly encouraged to ensure their child's regular, prompt attendance, and attendance at the school is good. Most pupils arrive on time in the morning and to lessons.
10. The level of fixed period exclusions is high. However, the number of days lost to exclusion this year is less than half the number over the same period last year. Most exclusion is for one or two days and it is very rare for any pupil to be excluded for longer than five days. No pupil has been permanently excluded.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Teaching and learning

Overall, both **teaching and assessment are good**. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and is very good in Years 10 and 11. Pupils respond well to teachers and they learn well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have high expectations of their pupils and consistently challenge them to improve.
- Planning of lessons is thorough, ensuring that pupils of all abilities learn effectively.
- Pupils are well managed, so that there is a positive atmosphere in lessons. They are encouraged and engaged by their teachers and participate enthusiastically in learning.
- Assessment is thorough and is generally helpful in indicating where improvements should be made.
- In a number of subjects, teachers do not use ICT sufficiently.
- Teachers are knowledgeable, which engenders pupils' confidence so that they learn well.
- Marking of pupils' work has some inconsistencies; in some areas it gives too little indication of what pupils should do to improve.
- Resources are well used to engage pupils' interest and help them learn.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 95 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2 (2%)	24 (25%)	46 (49%)	17 (18%)	6 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.

11. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. In Years 10 and 11 the teaching is significantly more effective and is very good. There is a consistency in teaching that is a result of close monitoring and the sharing of good practice amongst teachers and teaching assistants. For the school as a whole, three-quarters of lessons are good or better, and in Years 10 and 11 almost nine out of 10 lessons are in this category. Teachers' and pupils' close attention to examination requirements ensures that lessons for these older pupils have a very clear focus on raising standards and the requirements of the examination. The close support many older pupils receive from learning mentors has a positive impact on their learning. The quality of teaching came as no surprise to the school, because its monitoring of classroom practice is very effective and the school acts vigorously to address any perceived weaknesses
12. Planning of teaching is effective. The impact of the introduction of the Key Stage 3 Strategy¹ has been considerable. The school has adopted many of the developments in this initiative to improve teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 wholeheartedly. Teachers make good use of learning objectives, 'starter activities' and plenary closing sessions. Another key area of the

¹ The Key Stage 3 National Strategy aims to raise standards by strengthening teaching and learning in all secondary schools for pupils in Years 7,8 and 9. This National Strategy now affects all subjects.

strategy, the effective use of assessment, is a further strength. Partly because of the quality of assessment information, the varying needs of pupils are well catered for. Teachers know the individual education plans of those pupils with special educational needs and support staff make a good contribution to the learning of these pupils by supporting them in the classroom.

13. Relationships in the classroom are good. Pupils behave well and help one another in their learning. Teachers know pupils well and help them when required. Lessons usually have good pace with a mixture of interesting activities. This engages pupils' interest so that they work productively and learn well. Most lessons have a positive atmosphere and pupils are constantly encouraged to do their best. They work hard to live up to the teachers' high but realistic expectations. Teachers work hard to develop pupils' independence as learners and as they move up the school they show growing aptitudes in this area.
14. There are some weaknesses in teaching. Not all subjects use ICT sufficiently and schemes of work do not always indicate opportunities where the development of ICT skills can be incorporated into lessons. Marking is not always thorough enough. It sometimes gives too few indications to pupils on what they need to do to raise their standards. Some lessons are dull, with a lack of enthusiasm from the teacher and routine note-taking activities, neither of which promote good learning. Some lessons rely too much on the slavish following of textbooks and work sheets. These lessons are in a range of subjects.
15. Supported by the special educational needs co-ordinator and teaching assistants, teachers design and adapt teaching materials to good effect to meet the requirements of pupils with widely differing abilities and needs. This means that pupils with special educational needs are challenged to make good progress. Teachers receive good information about the specific needs of their pupils and their planning reflects their ability to respond positively to this information. The work of learning mentors effectively supports pupils' achievement by eliminating barriers to learning. An example of this is the good work done to support pupils as they transfer from primary to secondary school.

The curriculum

The overall quality of the curriculum is **satisfactory**. It is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. The difference lies in some limitations in schemes of work for older pupils. Good learning opportunities make a key contribution to standards, achievement and personal development of all pupils. Provision for enriching the curriculum through activities outside lessons, is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are sensitively grouped, and timetabling is flexible and efficient.
- Many schemes of work are much improved and this has extended opportunities and helped raise standards. There is some provision for vocational education and work experience.
- Critical evaluation of the curriculum by senior and middle managers keeps it close to the needs of pupils and teachers.
- There is a broad and exciting range of enrichment outside lessons.
- There is insufficient coverage of programmes of study in geography and music. There is not enough time for practical work in design and technology in Year 7, and in science in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

16. Many parts of the curriculum have been overhauled over the last two years and many schemes of work are of good quality. This has successfully extended opportunities and helped raise standards. The curriculum is adapted well to meet the needs of individual pupils, including those who are less able and those who are gifted or talented.

17. The school uses its curriculum as a flexible and dynamic instrument for promoting the learning of all pupils, and there are a number of good features. Timetabling, for example, is flexible enough to allow pupils a good range of option choices and allows departments to group pupils according to their preferred approaches to teaching. The needs of pupils who require additional learning support for any reason are effectively met, both by well-organised and efficient specialist teaching and by individual programmes that include work placements for pupils who most need them. A thoughtful choice of themes in many subjects, particularly English and drama, allows work across the school to contribute to personal development, racial harmony and citizenship. The use of the cognitive assessment in science helps pupils to develop their analytical skills. This is complemented by effective programmes of personal, social and health education and careers education, and ensures that pupils are prepared for the next phase of education in areas such as making informed choices for continued education or employment. Evaluation of the curriculum takes good account of the views of pupils and teachers as well as assessing the impact of arrangements on standards and personal development.
18. Weaknesses in the leadership and management of music and geography mean that planning of schemes of work fails to ensure thorough coverage of the appropriate curriculum. In design and technology in Year 7 and science in Years 10 and 11 insufficient attention has been paid to ensuring that there is enough time to teach the schemes of work in full.
19. Opportunities for learning outside the school day are extensive and the participation rate is good. There are many lunchtime and after-school clubs, and regular and effective homework clubs, as well as a well-attended breakfast club. There is good extra-curricular provision for drama. Other activities include an art club, a gardeners' club, an orchestra, a steel band, and a dance club. Sporting activities include football, rugby, girls' cricket, athletics, basketball, kickboxing, trampolining, netball, and rounders. There are some opportunities for musical performance.
20. The curriculum offered to pupils with special educational needs is good. The willingness of the school to review and respond to pupils' needs, with adaptations to the curriculum means that pupils have timetables of study, which are increasingly relevant.
21. Senior managers have worked hard to ensure that the school is mainly staffed by well-qualified specialists. They make full use of their contacts with teacher training institutions, and provide effective support for teachers and teaching assistants, some of whom work to a standard above that expected of qualified teachers in their fields. Pupils had high praise for teachers' expertise. Inspectors agreed, and found that younger teachers were adapting well to the demands of their profession. Teaching assistants provide good support for teachers and pupils but there are not enough of them. Administrative and all other associate staff, including lunchtime assistants, kitchen staff, caretaking and cleaning staff keep the school buildings and grounds in good order.
22. The accommodation is satisfactory. It is arranged and decorated with displays of work and posters that create a positive learning atmosphere. The school has advanced plans for a new sports hall, library and drama workshop, all of which are much needed. Currently, the indoor accommodation for physical education is very limited, and the library is much too small to meet students' needs. The library is very well managed and books are well chosen, but inspectors agreed with pupils, who said there were too few books. Learning resources are satisfactory. Teachers use what they have available well to present exciting lessons. They create good learning resources to meet the needs of pupils with additional learning needs. There are some useful resources for gifted and talented pupils. However, the resources for science are adequate at best.
23. The school has increased its budget for the support of pupils with special educational needs and is committed to doing so further. Funding is used for staffing (teaching and support), curriculum modification and the targeted support of individual pupils. Arrangements for the annual review of pupils with statements of special educational needs are thorough and meet

requirements. The number of teaching assistants is insufficient for the needs of the school and the school has plans to increase this number. Teaching assistants are used to good effect and there is a clear understanding of their role within the classroom.

Care, guidance and support

The school's **procedures to ensure pupils' care, welfare, health and safety are very good. Pupils receive very good support**, advice and guidance throughout their time in school. **The way the school involves pupils through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is excellent**, especially through the school council.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school seeks, values and acts on pupils' views so that they make an outstanding contribution to the life and improvement of their school.
- Pupils receive very good support and guidance because there are very effective systems in place and teachers' knowledge of pupils' individual strengths and weaknesses is very good.
- The school provides a very safe, caring environment in which pupils feel secure because the staff know them individually.

Commentary

24. The school pays very close attention to the views of pupils and involves them in improving their school. As a result, pupils take a pride in the school and know that their views and contributions make a very significant difference to school life. From the outset, pupils' ideas have been used most effectively in creating the school's identity and ethos. For example, after consulting all pupils, the school council chose the school name, colours and badge so that pupils have a sense of pride in and ownership of their school. The school council provides an excellent forum for pupils to discuss their views and guide improvement. A pupil survey into teaching and learning styles resulted in staff training to broaden pupils' experiences in the classroom. While listening carefully to pupils' views, the school expects pupils to work towards making the improvements they want to see. For example, pupils are helping to raise money for lockers and the school council will be responsible for allocating them.
25. Systems in place to monitor and support pupils' academic progress and personal development are very strong. All staff share a commitment to the care of pupils and work hard to ensure that they reach their potential. Academic reviews take place twice a year so that pupils are involved in setting their own targets. Pupils receive very clear support, guidance and advice throughout their time in the school. This ensures that they achieve well. There is a wide range of strategies and support available to all pupils. For example, pupils experiencing barriers to their learning may be referred to, amongst others, the behaviour support base, learning mentors or trained peer mentors. The wide range of options for support means that pupils are very unlikely to fall through the net. Individual needs are very well met either within the school or through the involvement of external agencies, such as the education welfare service.
26. The school works hard to promote very high standards of care for all its pupils. It provides them with a clean, safe environment in which they feel cared for and can learn well. Procedures for child protection are comprehensive and known to all staff. Very good provision is in place to meet the medical and dietary needs of pupils, and to ensure that health and safety requirements are met. Relationships throughout the school are mutually respectful and based on trust. Pupils know staff have their best interests at heart and are therefore willing to share any problems they may have, safe in the knowledge that these will be taken seriously.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Partnerships with parents, links with the local community and other schools are **good**. The school has **very good** systems in place to ensure that pupils are well supported when they join.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents and the local community recognise and appreciate the school's transformation over recent years.
- Arrangements for pupils' transition from primary schools are very comprehensive and effective.
- The school provides parents with a wide range of good quality information about its life and about their child's work and progress.
- The school works well with other local schools to improve opportunities for children.

Commentary

27. Parents are supportive of the school and speak highly of it. Parents and other members of the local community value the improvements achieved by the school since it was opened. In particular, they appreciate the rising standards of academic achievement and of behaviour. Parents state that their child makes good progress because the teaching is good and teachers expect hard work and encourage pupils to become mature young people. The school is approachable and parents' concerns are dealt with effectively.
28. The school has a wide range of very good procedures in place to support pupils' transition from primary to secondary education. There is a very good system of visits from staff to the primary schools, resulting in pupils being well known before they enter Year 7. Pupils also have very good opportunities to get to know their new school and some of the teachers while in Year 6. The systems in place are very responsive to the needs of individual pupils and their parents so that, for example, pupils who are anxious are offered additional visits to allay their fears. Parents appreciate the considerable care that goes into these arrangements.
29. The school keeps parents well informed. The prospectus and newsletters give parents a clear picture of the school and its expectations. Parents are involved at an early stage if their child is causing concern in any way. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are well informed and involved in decisions about their child's education. Parents of pupils in Year 9 are well informed and involved in the process of choosing options. Pupils' reports identify their strengths in each subject and indicate where improvements are needed.
30. The school has good links with other local schools and the community that extend pupils' learning. Pupils help with sports coaching in local primary schools and the school hosts a sports event for Year 6 pupils. Although staff organise this, Year 10 pupils are largely responsible for running the event. The school is using the Excellence in Cities programme well to work with partner schools in developing a range of initiatives for gifted and talented pupils, and to promote pupils' self esteem and confidence.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **very good**. The leadership of the headteacher is excellent and the school is very well managed. Governance is good and very supportive. The school has made remarkable improvements since its fresh start two years ago. The way the school self-evaluates and uses this information is, in particular, very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership of the head teacher is excellent. Her sense of purpose, strategic planning, commitment to inclusion and concern for the needs of individuals are notable.
- Strategic planning is excellent and a major factor in the school's improvement.
- Approaches to financial management are excellent but management of the budget is complicated by factors outside the governing body's control.

- Staff performance management is very effective in bringing about improvement.
- Leaders inspire, motivate and influence staff and pupils very well.
- The governing body is good. It is effective in its support and challenge of senior managers.

Commentary

31. The leadership of the headteacher is excellent and she has many great strengths. She has a powerful vision, sense of purpose and high aspirations for the school. The deputy head teacher and two assistants share this vision and provide very good support. The quality of leadership and management provided by the senior management team is very good. They have established a strong educational ethos where pupils are responsive and eager to succeed. The headteacher's vision for the school is to make it the best in the area and a first choice school for parents deciding on a secondary place for their children. Long term plans for specialist college status are being formed. Very good curriculum leadership has established effective courses that meet pupils' needs, extend their opportunities and help raise standards. Parents, governors, staff and pupils have all been closely involved, so that a strong sense of working as a single team has been created. The promotion of equality and concern for the needs of individuals is excellent.
32. The management of the school is very good. Management structures are effective and communications are good. The school has placed the highest possible priority on appointing effective staff for the fresh start. It has been largely successful. Strategic planning is excellent and a major factor in the school's very good progress since then. Pupils' performance is monitored well. The school has a wealth of data and is beginning to use it effectively to promote higher standards, particularly in English, mathematics and science. The school has a very clear understanding of pupils' progress, within and across year groups. It is inventive in using resources to reward pupils for their work. The building programme has suffered delays that adversely affect long term planning. Delays are not always communicated well to the school. Staff performance management is very good, linking targets for all staff to the development plans of the school. The continuing development of staff flows from this. Teachers new to the school are supported well, although the quality of the support is better for newly qualified teachers. Management of subjects is good overall, very good in science, art, design and technology and physical education, but unsatisfactory in geography.
33. The governing body shapes the vision and direction of the school well. Its priority of appointing teachers of quality has enabled the headteacher to make very good progress in her plans for the school in a short time. Governors are very committed to, and very supportive of, the school. They have had to establish the large variety of policies for the school required by law. The committee structure is good and well focused in its support of the vision and direction for the school. The finance and personnel committee has an excellent approach to financial management. The budget is in deficit due an unresolved matter concerning rent for adult education premises and an unexpectedly large entry of pupils in Year 7. These external factors have been unhelpful to the management of the school. The governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They challenge the senior management team well.
34. The leadership of special educational needs is good. There is a clear vision for development of systems of support for learning. This, coupled with the school's preparedness to attract funding to initiatives, means that the school's capacity to make further improvements is good. The clarity of the communications, guidance and training provided by the leadership team and the special educational needs co-ordinator prepares staff well to teach pupils with special educational needs. In addition, the close working of staff leading on initiatives to support inclusion ensures good provision for pupils with a range of needs. The work of the new behaviour support base is a valuable addition to the school's provision and offers effective guidance to pupils and staff. Systems for the monitoring and review of the individual achievement of pupils with special educational needs are well established. However, the

review of targets on individual education plans is not strong enough to record patterns of achievement accurately.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	1,921,058	Balance from previous year	54,198
Total expenditure	2,043,578	Balance carried forward to the next	- 68,322
Expenditure per pupil	3511.30		

English as an additional language

Overall provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A new head of area provides good leadership and management.
- The achievement of pupils who speak English as an additional language is equal to other pupils' achievement.
- Formal procedures and policies for supporting learning need considerable development.
- There is no monitoring of the consistency of practice across departments.
- The quality of in-class support is very good.

Commentary

35. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are not disadvantaged in their learning and achieve as well as their peers. This is largely due to the support they receive from both subject staff and learning assistants. Teaching and learning are good, overall. Learning support staff have good knowledge of pupils' needs and ensure that their questions and explanations enable learners to make progress and understand what is required. In many lessons, these pupils are clearly identified and catered for by both subject teachers and support staff. Occasionally, less satisfactory progress takes place when pupils' needs are not identified and, as a consequence, work is not adapted to meet pupils' needs. Generally, pupils appreciate efforts made on their behalf and respond positively, giving of their best.
36. Leadership and management are good. The new head of department has the vision and technical expertise to effect progress in the future. Departmental documentation is undergoing considerable re-assessment and rewriting and all members of the team feel part of the drive to raise standards. The head of department is well aware of the need to establish systems for the testing and tracking of pupils' level of English. There is too little monitoring across the different departments to ensure a systematic sharing of good practice. The department has access to interpreters and translators and their services are used sensitively in order to make all families feel included in the work of the school. There is also a strong peer support system, which encourages individual development and understanding within the classroom.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English and modern foreign languages were inspected in full. Twelve English lessons were seen. Ten modern foreign language lessons were observed, eight in French and two in Urdu.

English

Provision in English is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are below average but improving fast. Overall achievement is good and achievement in English literature is very good.
- Teaching is very good. Lessons are well-planned and teachers have a thorough knowledge of their subject. As a result, pupils learn quickly and share their ideas freely.
- The subject is very well led and managed.
- The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 is very good and has helped raise standards significantly.
- Overall, assessment procedures are good, but there are some weaknesses in marking.
- The library has too few books to support independent reading and research.
- The promotion of literacy in other subjects is inconsistent: in some subjects it is promoted well, but in others it is underdeveloped.

Commentary

37. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE are below average but are improving at a good rate. Girls do better than boys throughout the school. Standards during the inspection were also below average in Years 9 and 11. Pupils achieve well in their time at school. Those with special educational needs achieve well overall. Those with English as an additional language make good progress in the early stages of learning English, but their progress in the more advanced aspects of English is held back because there are not enough teaching assistants and some marking does not point out grammatical issues that they need to address. Girls of an Asian background achieve well in Year 11.
38. Teaching is very good both in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and confidence. They exert strong discipline maintaining a sharp focus on the task, and planning is thorough. Relationships are good and pupils are eager to learn from their mistakes and enjoy discussions of high quality. This is because teachers know and make clear exactly what they want them to learn. Teachers develop pupils' knowledge through informed questioning and help them to focus clearly on their work by setting out the learning goals clearly for each lesson. Teachers usually use final summary sessions well, to draw conclusions and establish what has been learned. The match of work set to the needs of individual pupils is usually very good, helped by careful grouping of pupils according to the standards they have reached and their learning needs. Assessment procedures are effective, but some marking is superficial and does not encourage pupils to pay enough attention to improvements in their writing. Teachers do not often use ICT in lessons, but a good contribution is made to number work.
39. The English department is led and managed very well. The department has a clear sense of its educational direction, which comes through clearly in its handbook, schemes of work and lessons. The schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 are good, whilst the schemes of work for Years 10 and 11 are satisfactory but require further refinement. Links between the department and senior managers are very good. The department provides very good support for new staff. Accommodation is satisfactory. The library has been audited and many out-of-date books removed. Books are generally well chosen, but there are far too few of them.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

40. Strategies for teaching literacy skills in a broad range of subjects are satisfactory. Key words are displayed in many classrooms, and pupils are encouraged to use specialised vocabulary. Teachers encourage pupils to read texts as part of lessons. There are some opportunities for pupils to make their own notes and to use word processing or writing frames to present their writing, for example, in science and design and technology. Teachers also are beginning to focus pupils sharply upon the key words that are used in various subjects. This is further enhanced by useful references in pupils' planning diaries to specialist vocabulary. On the other hand, marking in several subjects does not do enough to encourage pupils to pay attention to detail, or to improve on their first draft.

Modern Foreign Languages

Provision in French is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 11 are well below the national average. However, current achievement is satisfactory.
- The head of department provides good leadership and is working hard to improve the school's provision for French.
- There is some good teaching, but also some unsatisfactory teaching due to inexperience and under-staffing.
- In most lessons, pupils behave well. They respond positively to their teachers, are keen to participate and collaborate well.
- Although pupils with special educational needs benefit from a course of French studies which helps them to improve basic skills, the school does not teach enough elements of the language.

Commentary

41. GCSE results were well below the national average in 2002. They were no better in 2003, when only 17 per cent of the 30 pupils entered for German achieved a grade C and 29 per cent achieved the same grade in French. No pupils achieved an A or B grade. Achievement in French is currently satisfactory across the school. Although standards are below average by the end of Year 9, pupils are now making satisfactory progress. They have a satisfactory grasp of basic language structures. Progress is evident from one year to the next, although the small amount of time allocated to French in Year 7 means that pupils find it difficult to remember what has been taught in previous lessons.
42. Teaching is satisfactory. The head of department provides a good example to her colleagues, but there is some unsatisfactory teaching in the department due to inexperience. This has not been helped by the recent departure of a teacher, leaving the department under-staffed. Full-time language teachers plan their lessons well, including an appropriate variety of activities, which are linked to clear learning objectives and seek to be relevant to the pupils and their needs. In most lessons, they use a good variety of resources well and maintain a good pace. In some lessons, however, teachers provide some activities which are over-elaborate and not clearly understood by the pupils which results in slackening of pace and some loss of motivation. Teachers provide an appropriate balance between speaking, listening, reading and writing activities. Pupils have a good understanding of what they need to do to achieve the next level, and targets are set to raise pupils' awareness of what they need to do to improve. However, pupils' written work is not always marked as helpfully as it could be or with reference to the targets, which they have been given. Teachers' relationships with pupils are good. As a result, pupils generally respond positively in lessons, which has a positive impact on learning. In most lessons, pupils behave well and are keen. Pupils of all backgrounds work well with each other, and there is also good collaboration between boys and girls, helping to make paired work an effective way of practising and consolidating pupils' speaking and listening skills.

43. Since her appointment just over a year ago, the head of department has worked hard to improve provision for French. A scheme of work has been developed and the department's documentation now reflects school policies, providing clear guidance for staff and ensures maximum opportunity for all pupils. Classroom displays present an attractive learning environment.
44. In the light of previous poor performance, the school's senior management team has taken some major decisions regarding the school's provision for modern foreign languages. French is now the only European language offered to pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 and as an option for GCSE. The school has sought to be innovative in developing the curriculum by offering pupils with special educational needs in Years 7 to 9 the option of taking French studies instead of French. This course has been successful in motivating these pupils and in helping them to develop their literacy, communication and social skills. However, in this respect, the school is not completely meeting requirements for modern foreign languages.

Urdu

Provision in Urdu is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Staff have an excellent command of the language and make very good use of it in lessons.
- Assessment, feedback and support in lessons are good.
- More able learners do not receive sufficient challenge to attain the higher grades.
- There are too few opportunities for the use of ICT.

Commentary

45. Due to the very small number of pupils entered for GCSE in Urdu in 2002, it is not possible to comment on overall standards. In work seen, standards were above average in Years 10 and 11. This represents good achievement. Urdu is not taught in Years 7 to 9.
46. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The staff have excellent knowledge of the language and make good use of it to provide pupils with models for their own work. Pupils are well supported by learning assistants who also have excellent command of Urdu and who support students by working closely with individuals. The assessment and tracking of understanding and learning are good and as a result pupils have a good grasp of their target grades and what needs to be done to achieve them. Where learning is less successful, the tasks are too constrained by text book activities and do not inspire extended or imaginative speaking and writing pieces. As a result, the more able pupils are not challenged to achieve the very highest grades. ICT is currently not used to develop language skills. Staff encourage pupils to share their own cultural experiences and to support each other in extending their understanding of both the language and culture concerned.
47. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Urdu is fully included in departmental documentation. Assessment and target setting are well managed, as is the analysis of data. The Urdu teacher is also included in professional development activities in the department.

MATHEMATICS

Mathematics was inspected in full. Ten lessons were observed.

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well, with higher attaining pupils reaching the higher levels at GCSE.
- Leadership and management are good, effectively promoting improvements.
- Teaching is good overall, but lesson planning has some weaknesses.
- Standards are well below average, but are improving.

Commentary

48. In the 2002 National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9, results were well below average. Performance in mathematics was similar to English but not as good as science. Results improved in 2003. In comparison with similar schools in 2002 results were well above average. In the 2002 GCSE examination the percentage of pupils with grades A*-C was well below the national average. A notable feature was the percentage of pupils earning an A*-G grade in 2002, which was above the national average. Boys' performance was slightly better than girls in 2003. Pupils from an Afro-Caribbean background lagged behind other ethnic groups.
49. Standards seen in the inspection reflect the rising trend of the examination results but remain well below average. High attaining pupils' achieve very well with an increasing number of pupils preparing for the higher levels of GCSE. Basic concepts are not secure and they have difficulty in remembering earlier learning gains. Not all pupils know their tables, for example. Inspection evidence indicates that overall achievement is good when standards on entry to the school are taken into account.
50. Teaching and learning is good overall and some is very good. There is a small element of unsatisfactory teaching. In the very good teaching, very good planning of lessons formed the framework for the very good learning seen. Lessons begin and end with short, crisp activities that challenge pupils' thinking skills very well. In lessons that are satisfactory or unsatisfactory, the planning of lessons is unsatisfactory and does not do enough to promote a continued rise in standards in mathematics. Teaching in Year 7 is not as good as in other years because the teachers have more difficulty in meeting the needs of all the pupils. Teachers have good subject expertise. Their encouragement of pupils is good. Pupils have very good attitudes and respond to the teaching very well, persevering even when the work for them is difficult. ICT is not used effectively to develop pupils' computer skills and improve standards in mathematics. Standards in literacy are below average. Pupils with special educational need make good progress because of the good support for their learning. Similarly, pupils who speak English as an additional language progress well because they receive good support. Lessons are fully inclusive for all the different groups of pupils, boys, girls and ethnic minority pupils.
51. Leadership of the department is good, providing a very good and clear vision for its development. Management is good, using assessment well in determining the teaching arrangements. The department's arrangements to try to improve the GCSE grades of average attaining pupils in Year 11 have yet to impact on standards.

Mathematics across the curriculum

52. Provision overall is satisfactory, with strengths in design and technology and science and weakness in geography. Standards overall are below average. Pupils in science draw accurate graphs, collect, tabulate and analyse data in practical work. In design and technology pupils measure and weigh accurately. Spatial awareness is developed well in art.

Teaching is good, the teaching of graphs in science, for example, is supporting the teaching in mathematics well. Numeracy is supported well by the good planning of lessons in physical education. In some subjects, such as history, the use of numeracy is under-developed. The school has a numeracy policy and this is reflected in departmental policies.

SCIENCE

Science was inspected in full. Eight lessons were observed.

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good; the sharing of good practice is helping to raise standards.
- Examination results at the end of Year 9 improved in 2003. Pupils across the school achieve well.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- There is increased use of assessment to identify underachievement.
- There is good provision to improve literacy skills levels.
- There is insufficient curriculum time in Year 10 and Year 11.

Commentary

53. Results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were well below the national average in 2002. They improved considerably in 2003 and the proportion achieving the higher level 6 or above are very high compared to similar schools. In 2002 GCSE results were well below the national average. They improved significantly in 2003. Boys achieved much better than girls.
54. Standards in the current Year 9 are below national expectations. This represents good achievement for all pupils in relation to their standards when they entered the school. Good strategies are employed so that pupils of all abilities show increasingly good literacy skills, which support their understanding of science. This was demonstrated in a Year 9 class of pupils with special educational needs who discussed reactions of metals with water using appropriate scientific language. Standards in the current Year 11 are below average. This represents good achievement for most pupils who entered the school with standards, which were significantly below average. This includes pupils with special educational needs and English as an additional language. Practical coursework is affected by insufficient curriculum time reducing the opportunities to do the investigations required.
55. Teaching is good. Teachers have high expectations of learning and behaviour. The challenge provided by incisive questions stimulates pupils to think about science more deeply. As a result of this they learn more. Teachers share innovative ideas and this helps to raise standards. The interactive white board adds a new dimension to learning and the use of ICT generally has improved. Assessment procedures are well developed and areas of underachievement have been identified. However, there are inconsistencies in marking that does not always inform pupils how to improve.
56. The leadership and management of science are very good. The subject co-ordinator has welded together inexperienced teachers into an effective team who share good practice. Observation and evaluation of lessons are helping to raise standards by identifying areas where teaching may be improved, therefore improving learning. However, the shortage of curriculum time in Years 10 and 11 reduces opportunities for practical work and raising standards in this area.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

ICT was inspected in full. Six lessons were observed.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Provision in information and communication technology is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers use their good specialist knowledge effectively to promote pupils' learning.
- Good procedures for assessment contribute positively to pupils' progress.
- Pupils show positive attitudes to the subject.
- Standards are below average at the end Years 9 and 11. However, pupils have good understanding of how to present information.
- Knowledge and understanding of control technology is under-developed.

Commentary

57. Results in the 2002 GCSE examination were well below the national average. Girls performed better than boys, overall. Results improved in 2003. In the examination for business communications systems boys' achievement was better than girls. Results in 2003 indicate good achievement.
58. Current standards in Year 11 are below average. Achievement, however, is good. The reason for this is the very detailed assessment of pupils' work. This high quality assessment informs pupils of their attainment detailing how they can improve and contribute positively to their achievement. Pupils develop a good knowledge of handling data. Pupils understand how to use a spreadsheet but knowledge is not in the depth required for the GCSE examination. Pupils' standards at the end of Year 9 are below average. This is partially due to inconsistent teaching in recent years, inadequate coverage of all the programmes of study and continuous problems with the computer network. Staffing difficulties have now been resolved and achievement is now good because of the school's adoption of the clearly defined units of study based on the national ICT strategy together with pupils' positive attitude to the subject. Pupils' understanding of the use of ICT in its wider sense beyond the school is too narrow, few being able to give examples of where it might be used.
59. Teaching is good. Teachers have good relationships with pupils and use their strong subject knowledge effectively to engage interest and attention. Teachers have good discipline, dealing promptly with any misbehaviour, allowing lessons and learning to move with pace. Although lessons finish with sessions to ascertain learning, these closing sessions are often brief with inadequate opportunities for pupils to present and talk about their own work. Pupils have good attitudes to the subject and generally behave well and this has a beneficial effect on their learning, which is also good.
60. The management and leadership of the subject are good. The head of department has had responsibility for the subject since the beginning of the term. During this short period he has had a positive impact on standards and achievement. Because of his clear vision and high level of commitment, the subject is well placed for future developments.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) across the curriculum

61. The overall use of ICT in other subjects in the curriculum is satisfactory. Subjects have made provision in their schemes of work, but its use is inconsistent. This is partially due to difficulties of access to the ICT suites and the lack of resources within departments. Good use, however, was seen in a science group where pupils used a simulation program to create ideal conditions to grow tomatoes and increase profit. From this, pupils gained an understanding that to increase the heat, light and carbon dioxide to the maximum did not

stimulate growth. This gave pupils an insight into the processes of natural and intensive farming techniques. The use of ICT in other subjects to support pupils' learning is developing and is satisfactory, except in mathematics where it is unsatisfactory.

HUMANITIES

History, geography and religious education were inspected in full. Six lessons were observed in geography, seven in history and four in religious education.

Geography

Provision in geography is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is inconsistent and unsatisfactory. There is too little challenge for high attaining pupils.
- The curriculum is unsatisfactory; it is not properly planned in Years 10 and 11 and pupils have too few opportunities to undertake fieldwork.
- Standards of work are well below average, GCSE results declined in 2003.
- Literacy, numeracy and ICT are not sufficiently promoted in geography teaching.
- Assessment is not sufficiently used to promote higher standards.
- Fewer and fewer pupils are choosing to follow the geography course in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

62. At the end of Year 9 standards are well below average. GCSE results were well below the national average in 2002 and below that of other subjects in the school. GCSE results fell in 2003. Standards of work during the inspection were well below expectations at the end of both Year 9 and Year 11. Given that pupils enter the school with standards, which are very low, this indicates that pupils' achievement is satisfactory during their time at school.
63. Teaching and learning is unsatisfactory overall. Teaching is inconsistent because there are four teachers, only one of whom - the head of department - is a geography specialist. Non-specialist teachers have some weaknesses in knowledge and understanding of the subject. Too much teaching is uninspiring and resources used are often dull. There is insufficient focus on setting and meeting sufficiently challenging learning objectives. Although all marking is completed up to date, pupils do not pay sufficient attention to the guidance teachers give on how to improve and so books tend to be scruffy. Pupils have too few opportunities to use ICT and to develop numeracy skills. The promotion of literacy is inconsistent, depending on the teacher. The promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural themes is satisfactory. Some good lessons were observed. The best teaching ensures that pupils learn at a good pace by planning a series of brief, interesting activities, which ensure their continuing interest. In these lessons, pupils are managed well and actively encouraged. Some teaching uses innovative methods so that all pupils are fully engaged. Pupils have positive attitudes to their work and work well together or independently, as required.
64. The curriculum is unsatisfactory. There are good schemes of work in Years 7 to 9 but none in Years 10 and 11. Pupils do virtually no fieldwork in Years 7 to 9 and too little in Years 10 and 11. This is depressing their standards. Pupils' work in Years 7 to 9 is regularly assessed but the results, while recorded, are not acted upon to drive up standards. For example, where the National Curriculum levels achieved by individual pupils falls over time, the action the department takes is often sporadic and ineffective.
65. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The school has strongly promoted the professional development of the subject leader. However, GCSE results have fallen and there has been insufficient development of the curriculum. The numbers who choose to do

geography in Years 10 and 11 are in decline and too little has been done to reverse this trend.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good across the school, with some strong features in Years 10 and 11.
- Positive relationships create a good working atmosphere.
- Assessment in Years 7 to 9 does not provide enough guidance on how pupils can improve.
- Standards in Year 11 are well below average. The proportion of higher-grade passes in GCSE is too low.
- There is no subject leader to give a clear sense of direction and to raise standards.

Commentary

66. The A*- C pass rate at GCSE was well below the national average in 2002, but good systems of assessment and closer monitoring of students' coursework are now raising standards in Years 10 and 11. Standards of work seen during the inspection are below the national average in Year 9 and well below in Year 11. There are no significant differences between the performance of male and female pupils or ethnic groups.
67. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Evidence indicates that standards are beginning to rise because teaching is good and pupils' positive attitudes contribute to good learning. Pupils are encouraged to play an active role in their learning and respond enthusiastically to new challenges. Weaknesses in literacy skills restrict the quality of their written work. Pupils' achievement in relation to standards on entry at the start of Year 7 is good in Years 7 to 9. They acquire many of the skills required for the handling and interpretation of sources. There are no significant differences in the achievement of students with special educational needs or of those with English as an additional language.
68. Teaching and learning are good, with some very good features in Years 10 and 11. This good teaching is a key factor in raising standards. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject, plan lessons well and set clear learning objectives. Good relationships contribute to pupils' progress because they are sufficiently confident to participate in class discussion and take more responsibility for their own learning. These features are most apparent in Years 10 and 11. Some teaching in Years 7 to 9 is only satisfactory because lessons are too teacher led. Although there are satisfactory end of unit assessment systems in place, student achievement in Years 7 to 9 is restricted by the lack of specific teacher guidance on how individuals can improve their work. This is apparent in the lack of such comments in student books and is recognised by the new faculty head.
69. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Policies to raise achievement are in place but the current lack of a subject leader has restricted their implementation. Staff practice is too variable. The school recognises this and has plans in place to address the problem.

Religious Education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The department is well led. Good teamwork and the sharing of effective practice ensure that pupils are achieving well.
- Suitably challenging targets are set for pupils so that they achieve well.
- Teachers value the contributions that pupils make, which leads to the development of a sense of personal identity, self-worth and the valuing of pupils and staff.

- Pupils' are limited in their ability to write at length using appropriate language and providing reasoned justification for a point of view.

Commentary

70. Standards are below average. In the short course GCSE examination results in 2002 were well below average. Although results improved considerably in 2003 from the previous year, they were still low. The work of current pupils who are following the short course mirrors these standards. Pupils in Year 9 produce work that is below national expectations. A major weakness is pupils' inability to draw together ideas into a coherent well-argued piece of writing, using a wide vocabulary. Although standards are below average, pupils do better than expected and achieve well, given their standards when they start at the school. There is no difference between the achievement of boys and girls and ethnic minority pupils are well integrated into lessons. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported.
71. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers invariably adopt a calm, supportive manner that helps to settle classes and encourages pupils to concentrate on their work. Lessons move along at a brisk pace and, when taken in conjunction with the considerable expertise of teachers, lead to good progress. Pupils show a lively interest in the subject and they show positive attitudes to the study of religions which are not their own. Teachers convey a strong sense of valuing individuals and the contributions that they make. This strength plays a pivotal role in the formation of the positive relationships that exist in lessons.
72. Leadership is good and the head of department has built successfully upon the secure foundations laid by her predecessor in the short time that she has been in the school. Teamwork is a great strength and has led to the sharing of effective practice, the setting of challenging targets for pupils to reach and a thorough system for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology was inspected in full. Nine lessons were observed.

Design and Technology

Provision in design and technology is **good** with some very good features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good with appropriate arrangements in place for improvements.
- Standards are below average. However, achievement is good and pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and strive to do well.
- Teaching is good, with very well planned lessons linked carefully to assessment. This helps pupils to learn effectively, improve their work and make good progress.
- The use of ICT is constrained because pupils have insufficient access to equipment for control technology in Years 7 to 9, and for computer aided design and manufacture in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

73. Standards are below national averages at the end of Years 9 and 11. The number of pupils taking GCSE examinations in 2002 was too small to make a valid comparison with national figures. In 2003 standards are still low, but the numbers taking GCSE and obtaining A* to C grades has improved significantly. Pupils enter Year 7 having variable experiences and low levels of skills and knowledge and understanding. In all years pupils are given good opportunities to use a variety of materials and develop confident and competent skills using a range of tools and equipment. They develop a good understanding and application of a design brief, developing specifications and planning and organising their work. Achievement

in Years 7 to 9 is good. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have had a more variable experience in previous years and their depth of knowledge and understanding are below what is expected. However, the department has policies and procedures in place to enable pupils to improve and gain higher standards so pupils are achieving well in their projects. Pupils' skills and application of ICT is limited. Pupils have insufficient access to the appropriate equipment for control technology in Years 7 to 9. There is too little computer-aided design and manufacture in Years 10 and 11 to help raise attainment in this subject.

74. Teaching is good with examples of very good teaching. There is a consistent approach to teaching, with very well-planned lessons linked effectively to assessment to help pupils improve their work. Teachers support the development of literacy skills well and give good support to individual students to help them make progress in lessons. Pupils develop a good understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to obtain higher grades. Relationships are very good and pupils have positive attitudes towards learning creating a safe and productive working environment. These positive factors ensure that learning is also good.
75. Leadership and management are very good with a strong team of teachers and support staff who demonstrate a shared direction for the future of the department. The strengths and weaknesses have been clearly identified and procedures are in place to secure further improvements.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design, drama and music were inspected in full. Three lessons were observed in each subject.

Art and design.

Provision in art and design is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching motivates pupils so that they are enthusiastic learners.
- Good relationships between pupils and teachers create a harmonious working atmosphere.
- Art and design makes a good contribution to spiritual, moral and cultural aspects of the curriculum.
- Written work, particularly annotation, is of insufficient quality and quantity, especially in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

76. By the end of Year 11, pupils are working at a level below that expected nationally. The proportion of pupils achieving an A*-C grade in 2002 was well below average, many achieving better in other subjects they took than in art. However, in 2003, standards rose steeply, and those taking art achieved better than in other subjects. Pupils arrive at the school with well below average abilities in art. By the end of Year 9, although their standards are still below average, they have improved significantly and, for these pupils, achievement has been good. Those with special educational needs achieve similarly to their classmates. Pupils gain an understanding in the basic skills of drawing, using colour and pattern in a variety of materials and learn about the work of artists and craftspeople in Europe and abroad. Pupils of all abilities achieve well in Years 10 and 11 due to high quality individual care from teachers.
77. Teaching and learning are very good. Planning is a particular strength of teaching, ensuring that the needs of all pupils are met, allowing them to develop to their full potential, with more challenging work provided for higher attaining pupils. This consistent high standard of teaching has raised standards in the very short time the school has been open. The full

effects are not yet in evidence in exam results, but learning in lessons is very good. Pupils show interest and enthusiasm for their work, answer questions eagerly and thoughtfully and listen to one another's opinions with respect. Pupils share their achievements at the end of the lesson, celebrating success and sharing problems with their peers, successfully raising self-esteem. ICT is used as a research tool but not to develop ideas in a variety of creative ways. Writing does not adequately support work in sketchbooks or record the development of ideas sufficiently in Years 10 and 11.

78. The department is very well led and managed. An effective team has been created, with support provided for part-time members in the form of extensive discussions as well as planning, standardising and moderating work to ensure consistency. Assessment is used well to inform pupils about how to improve, with constructive comments provided in marking related to National Curriculum levels in Years 7 to 9 and to the assessment objectives in Years 10 and 11. In Year 10 feelings and beliefs are explored well, resulting in powerful posters declaiming terrorism, pollution and drug abuse. Aspirations for a harmonious school ethos have been successfully explored in a two-day sculpture workshop provided for gifted and talented pupils and led by a visiting artist. Pupils in the school appreciate extensive displays of artwork around the building, which celebrate the creativity of their peers, raise self-esteem and make them happy to be at Highcrest.

Drama

Provision in drama is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is knowledgeable, well-informed and very good. Achievement is very good.
- The subject is very well led and managed.
- Pupils are given many opportunities to make their own decisions about character and performance and they gain maturity as a result.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to their learning.
- Pupils make insufficient use of literacy in drama classes.

Commentary

79. Standards are average by the age of 16 but pupils achieve very well. Their overall standards of performance are good. They are knowledgeable about drama skills and incorporate their ideas sensitively into their performances. Pupils' speech is usually audible, and occasionally has good expression, although a minority speaks indistinctly and with a limited vocabulary. Their body language is good because they are at ease with themselves and confident in performance. Their timing and use of silence are good. The best work is perceptive and successful in giving a personal response from a dramatic standpoint. Pupils have a good understanding of the impact of key moments in a play on the audience.
80. Drama makes an important contribution to pupils' spiritual development and their sense of citizenship when they engage in studies relating to racism. Pupils become engrossed in unpeeling the inner motivations of characters they play as they react to events planned or unplanned. Their participation in "hotseating" sessions, which examine the motives of characters is passionate and committed. Pupils' attitudes are very good. They get on very well with each other and with their teachers. They co-operate harmoniously to achieve good group performances. Pupils understand the importance of empathy when supporting fellow-actors in improvisational pieces.
81. Teaching is very good. Lessons are planned with a clear idea about what the pupils need to learn and the skills they need to develop. Overall, there is limited use of computers in drama lessons and insufficient references to the technical aspects of drama. Development of the subject is enhanced by much extra-curricular work. The school has put on many productions, which combine drama and music.

82. Leadership and management are very good. Pupils receive very good tuition and are generally on course to do well. Drama accommodation is shabby but adequate. Plans are well advanced to develop new, purpose-built accommodation.

Music

Provision in music is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well below average and achievement is unsatisfactory.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge is used effectively to ensure good learning. The music chosen appeals to pupils.
- Pupils have a positive approach to the subject.
- The profile of the subject has recently improved significantly.
- There are limited opportunities to develop composition skills.

Commentary

83. Current standards are well below average. Pupils join the school in Year 7 with little previous musical experience and by the time they reach Year 9 attainment is still well below the level normally seen. Achievement is unsatisfactory. These low standards are due to the lack of specialist teaching in the past. However, since the appointment of a temporary teacher who is a subject specialist, achievement is improving and progress in lessons is satisfactory.
84. With the emphasis on developing basic skills, pupils are beginning to gain knowledge of notation, accurately naming the notes on the musical stave. Increased opportunities to develop keyboard skills contribute to pupils' performance. Pupils have too few opportunities to compose their own music; as a consequence creative skills are underdeveloped. Although pupils listen to different styles of music, few identify the main features accurately or recognise instruments being played.
85. Teaching is good. Good subject knowledge is used effectively to interest and motivate pupils. This was most noticeable during a Year 9 singing session. Here the teacher provided a sensitive piano accompaniment to a song that added quality to the overall performance. Although the curriculum is too narrow, a particular strength of the teaching is in the planning, the teacher selecting music that has instant appeal. This approach has successfully raised pupils' interest to a point where they now regard it as a worthwhile subject. Lessons have a variety of activities to sustain pace and interest. However, teaching does not always do enough to consolidate skills and improve performance.
86. Leadership and the management are satisfactory. The head of faculty has worked hard to maintain some stability in the subject during a period of staffing difficulties. She has provided good support for the present temporary teacher, helping with planning and advising on curriculum content. With the present specialist teacher the subject has good capacity for improvement.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education was inspected in full. Eight lessons were observed.

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership and management are driving up standards.
- Good teaching and very good attitudes of pupils are promoting good achievement.
- Assessment is used very well in planning for individual improvement.

- Accommodation is unsatisfactory and limits achievement in some activities.
- The use of ICT is under-developed because of the lack of resources.

Commentary

87. Standards in general physical education lessons in Year 11 are average. GCSE results in 2002 were well below average. However, results in 2003 show an improvement. Standards in Year 9 are average. Pupils' attainment in Year 9 is above average. The school recognises the need to check these assessments more rigorously.
88. Pupils enter Year 7 with below average standards. Their experience of activities differs widely. Pupils achieve well and both boys and girls reach average standards in Year 9. They achieve equally well in performance, in planning and evaluating their work and in understanding the need for a healthy lifestyle. In general physical education lessons in Years 10 and 11 pupils' achievement is also good. They make good gains in skills, knowledge and understanding. They sustain their very good attitudes of earlier years and levels of participation and involvement are very good. In GCSE classes, achievement is good. All pupils taking the examination in 2003 gained an A*-G grade and the proportion reaching higher grades is improving. Throughout the school, pupils with special educational needs and English as an additional language make good progress. Talented pupils in physical education benefit from good support and access to local and regional competitions.
89. Teaching is good. A noticeable feature of the good teaching is the very good planning for individuals. This means pupils of all abilities are challenged. Teachers manage pupils very well. They have high expectations for good behaviour and involvement. Pupils respond well to this. Their very good attitudes and behaviour contribute very well to their learning, which is also good. Teachers have good relationships with pupils and give good individual support that helps pupils of all abilities. Lessons are interesting and productive because teachers use a good range of practices that carefully build skill and confidence. In the very small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching, pupils were not well managed, learning was limited because of unsatisfactory behaviour, and tasks were not well-planned or matched to pupils' abilities.
90. Very good leadership and management have ensured rapid improvements. There is a strong team of teachers committed to raising standards. Monitoring and support of teaching are key elements in this process. Assessment is used well in planning and in checking the progress the department is making. The lack of resources means that ICT is not used sufficiently in Years 7 to 9. Accommodation is unsatisfactory and limits achievement in some activities.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

The department offers GCSE and applied business courses in Years 10 and 11. These were both sampled during the inspection.

91. Documentation and examination results were analysed, and two lessons were observed, one at GCSE and one applied business class. Standards in 2002 at the end of Year 11 were well below national averages. The department has experienced some staffing difficulties and this has had an impact on standards. Standards of work seen in lessons and in books were average, but too many students have insufficient depth of knowledge of business concept and their application to business organisations.
92. Teaching observed during the inspection was satisfactory with good relationships between teachers and pupils and positive attitudes towards the subject. Pupils work well together to explore ideas and gain a better understanding. When teaching was good, subject knowledge was shared effectively with pupils and good lesson structure enabled them to work collaboratively and develop responsibility for planning and organising their work.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship was inspected in full. Five lessons were observed.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Whole school support and development of citizenship are very strong.
- Good planning of personal and social education programmes complements work done in subjects.
- Teaching is not yet monitored to ensure consistency and quality.

Commentary

93. Pupils' achievement is good. They have a satisfactory understanding of key principles such as democracy. This understanding is acted out in the daily life of the school. The school council is a significant body in the life of the school and pupils feel their views are taken seriously. The council played a significant part in the way in which the school helped students understand the issues surrounding the recent war in Iraq. Pupils are developing satisfactory skills of discussion and debate in a number of subjects and their personal and social education lessons. They have many opportunities to contribute to and be involved with organisations outside school.
94. Teaching is good when the contribution of the subjects as well as personal and social education lessons is taken into account. Teachers have carefully identified how they can contribute to the opportunities provided for pupils. This planning covers the required content as well as the necessary skills to enable pupils to take part in a meaningful way. In many lessons there are plenty of opportunities for discussion and working with others.
95. Leadership is good. There is a clear vision of the importance of this aspect of pupils' personal development. Management and co-ordination across the school are good. There is careful identification and co-ordination of contributions from subjects and other areas of school life. These have been drawn together into a good plan. Assessment of pupils' standards is established and reports are made to parents as required.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	8
Value for money provided by the school	3
Overall standards achieved	5
Pupils' achievement	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	3
Attitudes	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	3
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	4
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	3
Accommodation and resources	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	1
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	3
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	1
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	2

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).

EXAMPLES OF OUTSTANDING PRACTICE

It is a cornerstone of the school's development as a 'fresh start' institution that pupils are strongly involved in many aspects of school life. This enfranchisement of pupils has continuing strong benefits in terms of attitudes and behaviour and does a great deal to raise pupil expectations.

The school is committed to finding out and acting on the views of pupils so that they are actively involved in improving their school. All pupils have the opportunity to raise issues through the school council. Council representatives report between their form group and the council in a democratic way, so that the majority of pupils support council initiatives. The school council has its own small budget. Pupils' ideas are taken seriously and, when they are put into action, pupils take a high level of responsibility in carrying them out. For example, pupils in Years 10 and 11 are currently organising a fun run for those in Years 7 to 9 in order to raise money to replace worn carpet in the drama studio. The school council is willing to call staff, including the head teacher, to account if in its view progress is insufficient. For example, a senior member of staff was challenged to defend inconsistencies in the school's policy on healthy eating. Staff take these enquiries seriously. The reasons behind decisions are explained to the council, so that pupils gain an understanding of the complexities and financial constraints in running a large organisation. The school council is a very mature and responsible group, confident that they make a significant contribution to the improving quality of school life. They take justifiable pride in their roles and achievements, for example initiating the change to a "deli system" in the canteen. Pupils strongly appreciate the many opportunities they have to influence the development of the school community. Their willingness to contribute is outstanding and a significant factor in the school's success.