

INSPECTION REPORT

ST MATTHEW'S RC HIGH SCHOOL

Moston, Manchester

LEA area: Manchester

Unique reference number: 105577

Headteacher: Mr B McNulty

Lead inspector: Mr D J Thompson

Dates of inspection: 17 – 20 May 2004

Inspection number: 258778

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1,205
School address:	Nuthurst Road Moston Manchester
Postcode:	M40 0EW
Telephone number:	0161 681 6178
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Reverend A Denny
Date of previous inspection:	September 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Matthew's RC High School is a larger than average mixed comprehensive school with specialist technology college status and 1,205 pupils on roll. It is situated on the outskirts of Manchester and serves a catchment area which contains six primary contributory schools; almost all pupils are Roman Catholic. The school has gained several awards, including Artsmark, Sportsmark, Investor in People and a Millennium Product Award. There is very extensive involvement in a wide range of initiatives, including Excellence in Cities, Education Action Zone, Leadership Incentive Grant, New Deal and The Children's Fund. The school is a member of the Manchester Catholic Education Partnership (MANCEP) and a BAe Systems partner school. There are excellent links with the community and the school's facilities are used widely. The school's socio-economic characteristics are well below average, with almost all pupils living in wards which have been designated as very deprived. Standards of attainment on entry to the school are below average. Pupils are predominantly white British; only five pupils have English as an additional language. Approximately one-third of pupils have special educational needs, which is well above the national average, but the proportion with a statement of need is below the national average. There is a variety of special needs, including social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, dyslexia and moderate learning problems. The school meets the needs of these pupils very effectively. Mobility is very stable; the school is oversubscribed and many more pupils remain throughout their secondary education than is the national picture.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
15640	Mr D Thompson	Lead inspector	
9865	Ms S Howley	Lay inspector	
31688	Mr B McGonagle	Team inspector	Art and design
15594	Ms J Felce	Team inspector	Citizenship Leisure and tourism
19858	Mr J Follett	Team inspector	Physical education
15472	Mr P Andrews	Team inspector	Music
15372	Ms P Walker	Team inspector	History
32853	Ms J Edwards	Team inspector	Science
7431	Mr M Lewis	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
19533	Ms J Martin	Team inspector	Special educational needs English as an additional language
12968	Mr J Parker	Team inspector	Design and technology
12957	Mr J Stout	Team inspector	Geography
33232	Ms C Morrell	Team inspector	English
32851	Ms C Davison	Team inspector	Mathematics
33097	Mr G Watt	Team inspector	Information and communication technology

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

St Matthew's RC High School provides a high quality of education. Effective leadership is producing a very positive ethos in which pupils, teachers and members of the community work together in an exceptional way. The school has high aspirations for every one of its pupils and provides good value for money. Dedicated and committed teaching enables pupils to achieve well.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- the headteacher, senior leadership team and governors provide strong, yet sensitive and supportive leadership, which ensures that every pupil has an opportunity to succeed;
- there are excellent, innovative links with the community and a very effective partnership with parents;
- the school offers an excellent range of extra-curricular activities;
- teaching is good overall, but there is scope for improvement in widening the range of teaching styles and making better use of assessment to let pupils know how they can improve;
- the school has used a wide range of strategies to improve attendance successfully, but the poor attendance of a significant minority is adversely affecting their achievement;
- procedures for monitoring and supporting middle managers have improved but the impact of subject leaders on provision and achievement is still too inconsistent;
- pupils achieve well in a wide range of subjects, but not well enough in mathematics and German examinations.

Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Standards and teaching have improved. The school has made good progress on all of the key issues identified at the previous inspection but there is scope for further improvement in teachers' use of assessment and pupils' attendance and punctuality.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with:	all schools			Similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
	D	D	D	B

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average.
Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Pupils achieve well overall. Standards in Year 9 national tests in English were above average, representing good achievement. Standards were too low in mathematics and science when compared with pupils' previous attainment in Year 6, but represented positive achievement when compared with schools of a similar social and economic context. Current Year 9 pupils, taking account of all subjects studied, are achieving well to attain average standards. Pupils also achieve well in Years 10 and 11. Pupils achieve very well, throughout Years 7 to 11, in art and design, drama, ICT and Latin, and in GCSE courses in design and technology, physical education and double award science; achievement is too low in GCSE mathematics and German. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well, and gifted and talented pupils achieve well. School targets for Year 9 national tests were exceeded in English and science, and almost met in mathematics. GCSE targets for A*-C were exceeded but A*-G targets were not quite achieved. There has been an improving trend in standards since the previous inspection.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good. Attitudes, behaviour and relationships are very good and make a positive contribution to achievement. Pupils are very proud of their school but the poor attendance of a small minority adversely affects their progress.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a good quality of education. Teaching is good and leads to effective learning. Teachers are committed and dedicated professionals who provide extensive support for pupils beyond lessons, enabling them to achieve well. Pupils benefit from teachers' expert knowledge and are prepared well for examinations. Teachers know pupils very well and plan work carefully, setting realistically high expectations, resulting in a clear sense of purpose and a strong desire to learn. However, they sometimes use too narrow a range of teaching methods and do not use assessment well enough to help pupils improve.

The very high standard of care, guidance and support is fundamental to the school's success. Individual needs and targets are identified effectively but there is scope for further improvement in the use of specific advice to pupils on what they can do in subjects to reach their targets. The school offers a broad curriculum and an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. Links with parents are very good and community links are excellent. Partnerships with primary schools are exceptional.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is led very well and managed successfully. The school's high aspirations for pupils' attitudes, personal development and achievement are implemented effectively. The governing body has an excellent understanding of the school and works in an exceptionally productive partnership with school representatives to improve provision. The introduction of improved monitoring arrangements has enabled the leadership team to evaluate the quality of teachers and middle managers but there is still too much variation in the impact of subject leaders on pupils' achievement.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is highly regarded by parents and is oversubscribed. Parents are supportive of the school and appreciative of what is done to help their children succeed. Pupils have strong respect for their teachers and feel that they are given a very good chance of success.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- to provide for more focused monitoring and support for teaching in order to widen the range of teaching styles and make better use of assessment to help pupils improve;
- to continue to improve pupils' attendance and punctuality, especially of the significant minority whose achievement is very adversely affected;
- to work with leaders of subjects where management is having too little positive impact on provision, so that planning and monitoring improve in order to raise achievement further;
- to raise achievement in GCSE mathematics and German.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils achieve well throughout their education at St Matthew's. They enter the school with below average standards and improve successfully to be in line with the national average by the time they leave.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieved exceptionally well in recent national Year 9 tests in comparison with schools of a similar social and economic context, although overall standards were below average when compared with all schools nationally.
- Pupils achieved very well in GCSE/GNVQ examinations in comparison with schools of a similar social and economic context, although overall standards were below average when compared with all schools nationally.
- Pupils improve their competence well in English language and literacy skills, mathematics and ICT.
- Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well.
- 2003 results in national Year 9 tests in mathematics and science were not high enough in comparison with pupils' previous attainment at the end of Year 6.
- Standards in GCSE examinations were well above average in art and design, ICT, Latin, physical education and science double award but pupils did not achieve well enough in GCSE German and mathematics.

Commentary

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.6 (32.6)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	32.1 (32.6)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	32.3 (31.9)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 254 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 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	51 (39)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	87 (76)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	94 (91)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	31.7 (27.8)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 191 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

1. The school provides very extensive support for its local primary schools, including considerable enhancement of facilities, such as use of computers, and significant additional teaching from members of St Matthews. This has a positive effect on pupils' performance in national tests at the end of Year 6, with standards close to the national average. However,

- evidence from other independent national tests, and from work seen across a wide range of subjects when pupils enter the school, shows standards on entry are below average overall.
2. In the most recent Year 9 national tests, standards were above average in English, representing good achievement in comparison with previous results in Year 6, and exceptional achievement in comparison with schools of a similar social and economic context. Standards in science were below the national average and, although they compared very favourably with results of schools in a similar context, they represented below average progress in comparison with Year 6 results. Standards in mathematics were well below average, representing good achievement when compared with schools in a similar context, but well below average achievement compared with Year 6 results. Current Year 9 pupils are attaining average standards, representing good achievement.
 3. The most recent GCSE results show the proportion of pupils gaining 5 A*-C grades to be in line with the national average. This is very good achievement when compared with schools of a similar social and economic context, or when compared with pupils' previous standards in Year 9. Pupils do less well when considering those gaining A*-G grades; standards are below average, but this still represents good achievement in comparison with schools in a similar context, and satisfactory achievement when compared with pupils' previous Year 9 results. The main reason results at A*-G grades are not as positive as those at A*-C is because of the poor attendance of a minority of pupils, despite the school's strenuous efforts to improve attendance. The school prides itself on providing opportunities for all pupils to be fully included in the education on offer and this encompasses examination entry for pupils who would possibly be excluded elsewhere. Members of staff are resolute in applying this principled mission even though it adversely affects comparison of examination results with other schools.
 4. In 2003, pupils attained their best GCSE results in art and design, ICT, Latin, physical education and science double award. Pupils' lowest results were in German and mathematics where they attained about half a grade lower than in their average for all other subjects taken; current Year 11 pupils are attaining above average standards, representing good achievement.
 5. The school has agreed ambitious targets with the local education authority for its tests and examination results. In the 2003 Year 9 national tests these were substantially exceeded in English, exceeded in science and almost met in mathematics. At GCSE, targets for A*-C grades were exceeded but targets for A*-G grades were not quite achieved.
 6. Provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is very good and this enables them to achieve very well, making very good progress for their abilities. They perform very well at all ages, and a significant number reach national expectations in Year 9 national tests and at GCSE. They make very good progress in literacy, particularly in Year 7, due to the intensive support they receive from the Focus and English departments. Pupils with behavioural special needs make good progress through the support of the Phoenix Centre, the Focus Centre and multi-agency professionals.
 7. Girls' GCSE/GNVQ results have improved better than boys over the last year. Girls' results have become closer to the national average for girls whereas boys' results have remained below the national boys' average. However, differences observed during the inspection of current Year 11 girls and boys were not significant. There was also no significant difference observed for different ethnic groups. The overall achievement of gifted and talented pupils is good and pupils for whom English is an additional language also achieve well.
 8. Overall, the leadership team's vision of generating a very positive ethos and supporting it with strategies for raising achievement has been successful in producing very positive attitudes and good achievement.
 9. Achievement in national Year 9 tests has improved since the previous inspection, particularly in English which was worse than mathematics and science in 1998. GCSE standards still compare very favourably with those of schools with a similar social and economic context.

10. The school is very successful in developing ICT skills. The heavy investment in computers, and the school's very strong commitment to providing extensive access to them for all pupils, is paying dividends. Pupils develop good competence in Years 7 to 9 and then improve still further in Years 10 and 11 to produce well above average skills.
11. Pupils develop their competence in mathematics well as they progress throughout the school. They widen the range of calculation strategies they can use and are increasingly able to explain why they are appropriate and how they work.
12. By ensuring good levels of in-class support, through a substantial increase in funding from the school, the provision for pupils with special educational needs has improved very well. This has increased the progress of pupils in developing literacy, numeracy and communication skills and made a significant contribution to raising their achievement.
13. There has been an improving trend in standards since the previous inspection; the proportion of pupils gaining at least Level 5 in Year 9 national tests, and the proportion gaining at least five A*-C grades at GCSE, have both increased substantially.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attitudes, behaviour and relationships are very good. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is also very good. Attendance has improved but there is still some cause for concern.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' attitudes to school are very good, both inside and outside the classroom.
- Pupils are very well supported and encouraged to fulfil their potential.
- Adults provide very good role models, and very good relationships between teachers and pupils are mutually supportive.
- The mission statement is the guiding principle for high levels of mutual respect, resulting in very good behaviour.
- Attendance has improved; however, the unsatisfactory attendance of a significant minority has a negative impact on their achievement.
- Punctuality to school is unsatisfactory; too many arrive late and disrupt the start of the day.

Commentary

14. The strong positive ethos, and huge staff commitment to the success of pupils as individuals, motivate and encourage them to be aspirational and achieve their potential. Pupils are justifiably proud of their school and their achievements. There was a considerable and tangible sense of unity at the special Mass and at the band rehearsal during the inspection.
15. Attitudes to school and learning are very good. In lessons pupils are motivated and hardworking. There is a very positive achievement and "can do" culture. High levels of respect permeate all aspects of school life and pupils feel valued and believed in. They respond positively to praise, encouragement and rewards. Pupils are very keen to take advantage of the many opportunities which enable them to develop confidence and skills and become rounded individuals. There are good opportunities for pupils to take on additional responsibilities which they clearly enjoy, for example, as reception hosts, library monitors, through sport, the school council, performances and charity fundraising. Year 11 pupils are confident and mature. They recognise the significance of the personal guidance provided by all staff who are committed to their success. The head boy and girl speak with pride when remembering their recent meeting with the Prime Minister as part of 'the Big Conversation'.
16. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good. Parents and pupils comment favourably about behaviour and the lack of bullying. Very good relationships, mutual respect and thorough knowledge of individual pupils promote good learning. Staff provide very good

role models. Very good behaviour management and high expectations, consistently applied, mean that learning is rarely disrupted. Considerable emphasis is placed on core values and this is reflected in the very good interaction between adults and pupils from the headteacher down. There is some name-calling but bullying is not seen as an issue. The behaviour of a minority of pupils occasionally gives cause for concern, but very effective supervision and thorough knowledge of pupils mean that the school is an orderly community. Exclusions from school have been low but have risen this year. The excellent support provided by the Phoenix Centre to pupils with identified behavioural difficulties allows them to continue very successfully with their studies and has a very positive effect on avoiding their exclusion. Pupils with special needs are highly motivated to improve. They have excellent relationships with their support staff and with their peer groups.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.2	School data	1.0
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

17. Attendance has improved since the last inspection, and is now close to the national average. Staff make considerable, wide-ranging efforts to promote good attendance and minimise absence with prompt follow up, home visits, use of rewards and effective, individually tailored arrangements. A new electronic system has good potential to improve lesson registration and the detection of lesson truancy. Many pupils attend well and win awards for doing so. In all year groups the attendance of a small minority of pupils is very poor and a few parents are too willing to condone absence. This is having an adverse effect on achievement.
18. Punctuality to school in the morning is unsatisfactory. Despite the best efforts of staff at the gate, many pupils seem unconcerned about arriving late and many are dropped off late by parents. Too many pupils arrive late to registration and assembly which is disruptive for other pupils and has a negative impact on the start of the day.

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	1,143	31	0
White – Irish	10	0	0
White – any other White background	8	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	11	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	9	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	10	0	0

Chinese	6	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	3	0	0

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

19. Provision of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is very good. The development of spiritual knowledge and self-knowledge are significant strengths of the school. The school's mission statement very clearly draws attention to the fact that the whole ethos of the school is based firmly on the teaching and practices of the Catholic Church. The curriculum reflects Catholic teaching and values and has been designed specifically to satisfy the needs of all pupils, to enable them to realise their full potential within the context of a modern highly technological society. The religious education department provides very strong support for the spiritual development of pupils and relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. Pupils are also given sufficient opportunities to refine and develop their spiritual awareness through subjects, such as English, art and design and music.
20. The school plays a very active role in encouraging pupils to develop an awareness and understanding of their own and other people's feelings, values and beliefs. Pupils are treated with respect by their teachers, and are encouraged to be peacemakers and friends. Through daily prayers and "Thought for the Day" pupils are encouraged to consider spiritual matters and to take account of the needs of others. They are asked to address issues relating to despair, hope and love and to express concern for those who are ill. The chaplain has arranged for Year 11 pupils to pay a visit to an Old People's Home in the area. They found talking to the more disorientated old people a shock and it frightened them a little, but they persevered. They got to know some of the residents well and enjoyed visiting them and talking with them. As a result of these visits pupils believe that they have become less selfish and have a better understanding of the needs of others.
21. Pupils have developed a strong moral sense; they are taught to distinguish right from wrong and to think through the consequences of their actions and the actions of others. Teachers have introduced pupils to notions of right and wrong through lessons on 'Crime in the Community' in which they are required to take full account of the consequences of crime on the victims. These concepts of right and wrong are pursued in-depth in subjects such as English, through poetry and novels such as 'Of Mice and Men' by John Steinbeck.
22. Relationships in the school, between adults and pupils and between pupil and pupil, are very good. They are based upon the Gospel values of profound respect for one another, for justice, truth, charity and compassion. Emphasis is placed firmly on the importance of working together, and when discord does occur, on the importance of seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. Pupils relate very well to others and there are numerous examples, in subjects such as physical education and music, of pupils working very well together in pairs, small groups and large groups.
23. Pupils' awareness of their own cultural heritage and that of others is very well developed, especially through art and design, music and English. They encounter artworks, such as drawings, paintings, designs and pieces of sculpture such as those from Aboriginal and African Cultures. In addition, they are introduced to their own cultural heritage through visits to local churches and studies of local architecture. In music, pupils listen to complex rhythmic patterns in African music and in Jazz. In English, all Year 9 pupils are currently involved in a project, which requires that they investigate the impact of apartheid on people in South Africa. They also study the poetry and prose of their own cultural background.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a good quality of education.

Teaching and learning

Teaching is good overall, leading to effective learning. Three-quarters of teaching observed during the inspection was at least good and one-third was very good or excellent. Use of assessment is satisfactory, with scope for improvement to raise achievement further.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is high quality teaching and learning in many subjects.
- Most teachers have strong subject knowledge which they use well to plan lessons which hold pupils' interest and prepare them well for tests and examinations.
- Teachers have realistically high expectations which ensure that pupils behave well and are challenged effectively to do their best.
- The range of learning activities is too narrow in some lessons with too few opportunities for pupils to develop skills as independent learners.
- Teachers do not always provide pupils with sufficient information on how well they are doing or how they can improve.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 123 lessons (8 lessons seen by unqualified teachers were not graded)

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7 (6%)	32 (28%)	46 (40%)	27 (23%)	3 (3%)	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.

24. There is high quality teaching and learning in many subjects, including English, science, ICT, art and design, design and technology, drama, geography, Latin, modern foreign language, physical education and some mathematics lessons.
25. Teachers' widespread specialist knowledge, and their ability to communicate it effectively, is a considerable strength in many subjects. This was seen for example in a Year 11 mathematics lesson where the teacher had a good understanding of the requirements of the examination syllabus, and provided pupils with excellent advice on the standard required and of the step-by-step technique they needed to reach it.
26. Another important strength of teaching is the careful way in which teachers plan their work to provide demanding, but achievable, challenge for learners. This was seen for example in a Year 7 art and design class. The teacher prepared display boards of work by different architects. Pupils used these to produce drawings based upon one of the photographs in the display. The teacher carefully considered the best way of engaging the pupils, and pitched the work at just the right level. As a result all the pupils settled readily to their work, and got a lot out of the lesson. This resulted in them reaching a standard above that normally seen.
27. Pupils are encouraged and supported very effectively by teachers during lessons. In a Year 7 English lesson, for example, the teacher established a learning environment in which pupils felt able to express their views. It gave them the confidence to take part in class discussion, and enabled them to learn how to analyse characters in a novel.

28. The school places a great deal of importance on pupils behaving well at all times. This was apparent in many lessons, where teachers reminded pupils of the need for high standards of behaviour. It meant little time was wasted, and lessons went ahead promptly and purposefully with high levels of concentration.
29. Teachers are highly committed to helping pupils succeed. There are many instances of teachers giving time beyond lessons, both informally, such as when they help individuals, and formally, such as in running sessions on how to learn and prepare for examinations. This dedication is strongly appreciated by pupils and makes a significant contribution to raising achievement.
30. The proportion of lessons in which teaching was unsatisfactory was much lower than normally seen. However, there are some weaknesses in the teaching. The repertoire of teaching methods is not sufficiently broad with too many lessons tending to rely on teacher-directed activity. This means there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop skills as independent thinkers and learners. There is an inconsistency in setting homework effectively to reinforce and extend the learning in lessons. The school has good strategies in place to set targets for pupils and monitor their progress. However, teachers are making insufficient use of assessment to let pupils know what they have to do to improve in order to meet, or exceed, their targets and this is having an adverse effect on achievement.
31. Teaching of pupils with special educational needs in the Focus Centre is very good, with well-matched learning programmes, interactive teaching methods using a variety of learning styles, and effective involvement of pupils in peer tutoring. The use of ICT to teach phonics is outstanding. Pupils respond with enthusiasm, enjoyment and effort, and learning is fun, leading to sustained progress. Pupils learn well in subject areas because of good in-class support and understanding of their needs by most teachers. The greatest progress is made when teachers use active learning methods, such as in the use of the interactive whiteboard to teach geometry in a Year 11 mathematics lesson. The effectiveness of shared planning between subject teachers and teaching assistants varies too much; overall, there is too little emphasis on developing independent learning and expressive, descriptive and extended writing skills.
32. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection. The standard of teaching across the whole school has improved, with significant steps taken in ICT where the extent and quality of teaching is now much better.

Example of outstanding practice

Excellent progress in developing literacy skills in a Focus Centre lesson for a group of Year 7 pupils.

The focus of the lesson was to increase sight vocabulary and to explore long vowel sounds. Through a combination of a brisk pace of work, and effective transitions over a variety of tasks, pupils were fully engaged in successful learning activities that caught their attention. The use of the interactive whiteboard was outstandingly successful in enabling pupils to understand the construction of words and how phonetic rules apply. Through the use of a wide range of learning styles, pupils were able to predict answers and to collaborate in the completion of tasks. The teacher's encouragement and enthusiasm, underpinned by a strong focus on the lesson objectives, were fully appreciated by the pupils, who responded with confidence and enjoyment, even though the tasks were challenging. The sense of purpose was continued in the individual use of ICT wordsearches to practice the long vowel sound. The pupils were highly motivated, and surpassed expectations for achievement. Throughout the lesson their behaviour was excellent because of the very positive atmosphere created by the teacher.

The curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good; it caters well for pupils' needs and is enhanced by an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. Teachers and support staff are well qualified and deployed well to meet the needs of the curriculum. Accommodation is very restricted but resources are good. Resources for ICT are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are excellent curricular links with local colleges, high schools and contributory primary schools.
- There is excellent provision for a wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities.
- There is very good provision for pupils with special educational needs.
- The work-related and vocational curriculum for Years 10 and 11 is good but some 'balancer' groups are ineffective and personal guidance lessons do not provide enough time to deliver elements of PSHE and citizenship.
- The use of form time is too variable and where it is used ineffectively it is not contributing to pupils' personal development.
- The school is oversubscribed; accommodation is congested and restricts the range of activities in a number of curriculum areas.

Commentary

33. In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum is good and all statutory requirements are met. Pupils follow a broad and balanced education including all National Curriculum subjects. All pupils also study classics and there is the opportunity for many pupils to study Latin, both of which are not available in most schools.
34. In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum is also good and all statutory requirements are met. There is a wide range of subjects which almost all pupils follow and they can opt for other subjects within the options system. This meets the needs of almost all pupils well and is leading to good GCSE outcomes. The school makes good provision for some pupils to study an alternative curriculum which involves work-related learning and work placements. There are, however, some 'balancer' groups which are ineffective in providing a worthwhile learning experience for the small number of pupils they contain. The contact time with teachers is too short; the work has too little structure and there are insufficient opportunities for accreditation. Careers guidance is good and some elements of PSHE, including sex, alcohol and drugs education are delivered effectively through science and religious education. The pupil guidance lessons, however, do not provide sufficient time to cover other elements of PSHE and citizenship.
35. There are excellent opportunities for pupils to enrich their learning, consisting of a considerable number of activities in a wide range of subjects. These take place pre- and post-school as well as at lunchtimes, on Saturdays and in school holiday times. They include revision sessions, sporting and musical events as well as extensive charity work. The school has an excellent reputation for its many sporting and musical successes.
36. There are excellent curricular links with a local college, high schools and the school's contributory primary schools. The primary schools, in particular, benefit greatly from the involvement of a significant number of the school's staff in a variety of curriculum projects in most subject areas. Many activities involve teachers from the school running sessions both in the primary school and at St Matthew's. There is also excellent involvement of the staff and resources of the City Learning Centre, based in the school. These include running video conferencing and providing technical support, as well as hosting schools visiting the CLC to use advanced ICT facilities. This is having a significant impact on pupils' achievement, the development of the curriculum and resources for learning, for both the school and the wider educational community.
37. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good, resulting in very good achievement. This is due to the school's commitment to including all pupils in full access to the curriculum, and a very strong special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo), supported by committed teaching assistants. Subject areas are fully involved, and there is a wide range of interventions to promote learning. The Focus Centre is a hub of purposeful learning activity, promoting excellent relationships between staff and pupils and a shared enjoyment in learning.

The Focus Centre and Phoenix Centre work closely and effectively to support pupils who have additional behavioural needs. There is a wide range of academic and vocational opportunities for special educational needs pupils in Years 10 and 11.

38. The school is a popular choice for parents and pupils and is oversubscribed, with the result that accommodation is very constrained. The school lacks any social spaces for pupils to use and the narrow corridors and stairways demand a considerable amount of adult supervision during lesson changeover times to ensure safe passage around the school. There are accommodation pressure points in a number of curriculum areas, but teachers manage these very well to minimise any adverse impact on learning. However, in music, drama and physical education, accommodation places significant restrictions on the range of activities which can be offered.
39. Teaching and support staff are well qualified and are deployed effectively to provide good coverage across the curriculum. The school has suffered fewer recruitment problems than many schools because of its involvement in initial teacher and graduate teacher training programmes. There are good induction arrangements to ensure that staff, new to the school, are well integrated into their role. There are good continuing professional development opportunities for all staff. Administrative staff provide very good support to enable the smooth running of the school. Classroom support staff, including ICT and science technicians, the librarian and physical education and SEN teaching assistants, all provide very good support to teachers and pupils and significantly enhance teaching and learning.
40. Resources for teaching and learning are good and have improved since the last inspection, especially in the provision of up-to-date ICT equipment which is now very good.
41. The school has made good progress in improving the curriculum since the previous inspection. The curriculum now is broad and balanced and provides a good range of opportunities to meet the needs, interests and capabilities of all pupils. Improved provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE), careers guidance and citizenship means that it is now satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. There is, however, insufficient time in Years 10 and 11 for the development of citizenship. The discrete teaching of ICT has become much better and is now very good for pupils of all ages, and the integration of ICT skills into other subjects is good. Form time is often not used effectively by form tutors and as such is not contributing as well as it could to the development of PSHE.

Care, guidance and support

Members of staff provide a very high standard of care for pupils, guided by the mission statement and shared core values. This is a major strength of the school and pivotal to its success. Pupils benefit from very effective support and guidance and there is extensive consultation to seek and act on their views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are very well known and their needs clearly understood. The aim of the school to promote and sustain the well being of each individual is achieved very successfully.
- Very good relationships, supported by very good moral and social development and consistently high expectations, provide pupils with very good personal guidance.
- Arrangements for child protection and health and safety are good.
- Pupils have very good access to expert advice and benefit from the presence of the chaplain and other professionals in school.
- The Phoenix Centre and Focus Centre provide excellent support for pupils with specific identified need.
- Academic monitoring is very good. Very effective termly reviews identify underachievement and trigger good support and intervention. However target setting is not sufficiently specific in subjects.

Commentary

42. Care, guidance and support of individual pupils are fundamental to the successful ethos and mission of this school. Staff are hugely committed to the success and continued life chances of their pupils and are inspired by the personal involvement and interaction of the headteacher and leadership team. Pupils are very well known and their needs thoroughly understood. Form tutors and heads of year closely monitor the personal development of all pupils and ensure effective early intervention when needed.
43. There are thorough procedures for child protection and staff work very effectively with a range of external agencies to support the more vulnerable pupils. Procedures for health and safety are thorough. An effective policy, thorough risk assessment and regular review have been put in place since the previous inspection and these ensure a safe working environment. Staff carefully supervise pupils entry and exit at the start and end of the school day and there is a patrolled road crossing, although a few pupils do not cross sensibly.
44. Pupils have very good access to staff and good arrangements are in place at lunchtimes for more vulnerable pupils to access quieter areas. Large numbers of staff are on duty at breaktimes and provide very good supervision. The Phoenix Centre and Focus Centre provide excellent support for pupils with identified need and all pupils have very good access to professional support and advice from the health worker and counsellor as well as the chaplain.
45. Very thorough collation and use of pupil performance data informs the very effective process of termly reviews with form tutors. The mid-year reports are very concise, very informative and particularly useful for review of pupils' progress within school. Individual Academic Progress Files are a valuable running record for termly reviews and targets, which pupils find helpful, particularly in initiating discussion with teachers. Journals are used well to record this information. Underachievement is identified effectively and additional mentoring is provided to improve the performance of those pupils unlikely to reach their targets. Targeted Year 11 pupils are individually mentored by senior staff and a very comprehensive range of revision workshops are made available, all of which has a very positive impact on achievement. Target setting is still evolving and does not yet contain sufficient information on how pupils can improve in their subjects.
46. Pupils receive good guidance for making options and post-16 choices. A good programme of careers guidance is delivered through the tutorial sessions, enhanced well by a good careers library and effective support from the Connexions Service. There are very good induction arrangements for Year 7 transfer, and Year 11 pupils enjoy their role as 'Guardian Angels' supporting Year 7. Pupils benefit from study support in the Open Learning Centre, which is a very effective provision with good extended opening hours and well-trained staff, as well as good access to the cyber café in the City Learning Centre.
47. Pupils have a strong voice in the school. They feel their views are listened to and valued, not only in lessons and through the school council but in their general relationships with staff. They participate in the Mission Day reviews and have influenced recent improvements to facilities.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

There are very good links with parents and excellent partnerships with other schools and the community.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school is held in high regard by parents and is heavily oversubscribed.
- Staff work very effectively with parents, who are provided with good information about the school and the progress of their children.

- Excellent links with primary schools, other secondary schools and a college are extensive and this has a very positive impact on transfer and achievement.
- Excellent links with the local parishes and the wider community enhance the life chances of pupils.
- Excellent partnership with the City Learning Centre and other agencies significantly enrich the provision.
- Some parents would welcome a clearer report format and a homework timetable.

Commentary

48. The school has excellent partnership arrangements with a very wide range of educational, business and community groups who hold the school in very high regard. The headteacher is very active in promoting many of these partnerships as part of the school's determination to improve facilities and opportunities at the school and the life chances of young people in the area.
49. The school works hard on its partnership with parents and ensures that they have very good access to staff. Parents are very pleased that their children attend the school. The vast majority are supportive and appreciative of the commitment of staff to the success of pupils, although there are too many parents who do not sufficiently support their children's attendance and punctuality. Parents' views are sought and valued, for example through involvement in improving and interpreting the school's mission. The Phoenix Centre and Focus Centre have excellent links with parents who are extremely pleased with the additional support provided for their children. The school is held in high regard by parents and by many ex-pupils, who continue to be involved in extra-curricular activities, particularly music.
50. Excellent links with feeder schools and the local parishes support effective parental links and very good transfer arrangements. The interview with all Year 7 parents is a very positive feature of this partnership. The school provides good information and concise termly progress reviews which are much appreciated, although some parents find them difficult to interpret. Journals are used well to convey information, although the lack of a homework timetable restricts parental involvement in checking that homework is done. Attendance at parent consultations is good and performances and sporting events are supported well. There is a thriving PTA which works hard at fundraising.
51. Links with local schools are excellent and the management of partnership work is seen as a model of good practice. The school provides very good targeted support for contributory primary schools, making good use of its specialist technology college funding. It also provides other support and expertise which enriches the primary curriculum of future pupils, and has a positive impact on the wider community of secondary pupils, through, for example, the Wide Area Network of ICT provision.
52. Links with local colleges are excellent and have a very positive impact on work-related learning provision and on post-16 transfer. Significant work with the local college and other Catholic colleges has resulted in the development of a vocational sixth-form college currently being built on site. This will have a major impact on the post-16 provision and life chances of pupils in the locality where nearly three-quarters of families have no tradition of further education.
53. There is extensive involvement in the development of major partnerships with educational organisations, such as the Education Action Zone (EAZ), Excellence in Cities (EiC) and Manchester Catholic Education Partnership (MANCEP). These have had a significant impact on provision and enriched opportunities. Similarly, excellent relationships with the Education Business Partnership (EBP) provide excellent work-related opportunities for pupils and contribute positively to pupils' personal development. The unique partnership with the City

Learning Centre (CLC), based on site, provides considerable enrichment in the use of study

and ICT facilities for staff and pupils and has a significant impact on achievement, with wide use of the cyber café.

54. Inspectors met with a group of significant partners, representing a wide range of educational provision, who were unanimous in their praise for the strength, depth and impact of the school's work in the community, in particular the visionary and energetic involvement of the headteacher.
55. The excellent partnerships, which the school has energetically embraced and extended, have a significant impact on the curriculum, and pupils' personal development, aspirations and achievement.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is led very well and managed successfully. There is a very clear vision, supported by effective strategies, which result in a very positive ethos of mutual respect and high achievement.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher provides excellent leadership and the senior leadership team has a strong, shared vision which is understood well throughout the school.
- The governors have an excellent understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are very actively involved in driving improvement forward.
- There is a strong commitment to including all pupils in the wide range of opportunities provided by the school; the school's high aspirations for pupils' attitudes, achievement and personal development are implemented successfully.
- The senior leadership team has introduced very effective monitoring arrangements which enable them to be acutely aware of the quality of teachers and middle managers.
- Improvement plans contain highly appropriate priorities for development, but are often not sufficiently well focused on the beneficial impact for pupils.
- There is too much inconsistency in the quality of middle management, from excellent to unsatisfactory.

Commentary

56. The school is led very well. The headteacher's leadership is excellent; he is highly respected by pupils, parents, teachers, governors and educationalists linked to the school. He is actively involved in forging and leading a wide range of educational partnerships, with strong, far-reaching benefits for members of the school and local community. For example, the school successfully attracts funds from a wide range of sources which it uses very effectively, as in the provision of enhanced computer facilities for pupils and other community members. The senior leadership team has formed a strong cohesive partnership. Members of the team are hardworking, dedicated to success and use their complementary skills effectively to pursue strategies for improvement continuously. This has produced a very positive ethos, characterised by strong, mutual respect, very positive attitudes to learning and very good relationships. The school's race equality policy is implemented effectively. Perseverance in developing and refining strategies for raising achievement, such as 'learning to learn' sessions and the use of target grades and academic monitoring, are having a positive impact on pupils' performance. The school makes good use of national strategies for raising achievement.
57. The vision of the leadership team, and the very productive community partnership established, have resulted in a 'leading-edge' initiative to provide post-16 education with a strong vocational element on St Matthew's site from September 2004.
58. The governors are exceptionally effective. They are keenly supportive of the school's ethos and are actively involved in determining strategies for success. They have formed a strong partnership with representatives of the school, through which governors' talents and

experiences are used effectively and beneficially. Extensive involvement in training, and regular meetings, including high quality presentations from teachers, have enabled governors to develop an excellent understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have used their knowledge very well to shape improvement and have not been afraid to take difficult decisions when they can see how the provision for pupils can be made better. They have ensured that all statutory requirements are met.

59. The leadership team has introduced new monitoring and evaluation arrangements since the previous inspection. There are now thorough arrangements for monitoring the performance of managers and overseeing their plans for improving provision and raising achievement. This includes establishing an expanded senior leadership team, with an identified link person for every subject. The arrangements have enabled the leadership team to produce an accurate evaluation of the relative effectiveness of departments. Management of teachers' performance is well established and teachers' personal targets are closely linked to their professional development and the school's needs. The leadership team goes to considerable lengths to help weaker teachers to improve and takes effective action to remove persistently weak teachers when they are adversely affecting pupils' learning. The school is involved successfully in initial teacher training and is a popular place for established teachers to work. There have been difficulties in recruiting sufficient, high quality mathematics teachers, but this has been overcome for the new academic year.
60. The special educational needs co-ordinator provides very good leadership for the Focus Centre, resulting in the very good progress of pupils with special needs and their inclusion in all aspects of school life. Development planning, training, and the use of self-evaluation have created a team that works very effectively. The requirements of the SEN Code of Practice are met very well, with very good support from the local authority support services. The support services contribute to the programme of monitoring in-class support to ensure high standards. Some subjects are making very good use of the information and resources provided by the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) to promote the learning of pupils with special needs, but this is inconsistent. The SENCo has insufficient time for administration and record keeping.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,448,299	Balance from previous year	100,697
Total expenditure	4,485,296	Balance carried forward to the next	63,700
Expenditure per pupil	3,701		

61. Financial management is very effective. A deputy headteacher and members of the governing body work together with great effect to deal with budget allocation. The school is very flexible in its response to income changes, has a healthy carry forward of funding to meet contingencies at the end of the financial year, and has a highly appropriate system of encouraging bids for funding related to strategies for raising achievement. Several providers of services, such as catering and school uniform provision, have been considered, resulting in an increasing trend towards the school running its own services in order to gain the best quality at the most competitive cost.

62. There is too much inconsistency in the quality of middle managers. Management is successful in many areas, such as heads of year who provide very good care and support for pupils. Managers of a few subjects, such as ICT, physical education and drama demonstrate energetic, enthusiastic commitment which promotes very high achievement. The library is managed very effectively, with careful analysis of pupils' usage of books evaluated well to modify stocks and encourage poorly represented readers. The school improvement plan identifies highly appropriate priorities for development, such as teaching and learning, assessment, ICT and citizenship, but criteria describing successful outcomes for pupils are insufficiently well focused. Subject managers' response to the school's framework for monitoring and improving strategies for raising achievement is being used very effectively in a few subjects, such as English and science, but many subject departments have been too slow to respond, missing opportunities to improve provision for pupils and raise achievement further.
63. Progress since the previous inspection has been good. The impact of leadership and management on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement has improved, and the issue of introducing the monitoring of middle managers, raised in 1998, has been dealt with.
64. Overall, very good leadership is producing a very positive ethos and an effective school. A very strong commitment to helping pupils learn, throughout the majority of staff, has improved the quality of education since the previous inspection. The school uses its above average expenditure per pupil well to provide good value for money.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well and make good progress from the time they enter the school.
- Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported and make very good progress.
- Intervention strategies are very effective in supporting pupils' learning.
- Teaching is good for all groups of pupils.
- Excellent relationships underpin pupils' positive attitudes to learning.
- Many pupils are unclear about what they need to do to improve.

Commentary

65. National test results in Year 9 were above the national average in 2003; pupils had made good progress to improve on their national Year 6 results. The results represented excellent achievement compared with pupils in schools with a similar social and economic context. Whilst girls' results were better than boys', boys achieved well to reach standards above the national average. GCSE results were at the national average in 2003, representing good achievement when compared with pupils' previous Year 9 national test results. Although results in English literature were significantly lower than those of pupils nationally, these were depressed by the school's decision to offer the majority of pupils the opportunity to enter GCSE. Boys achieved significantly less well in English literature than girls.
66. Current pupils achieve well to attain average standards by Year 9. They make rapid progress from the time they enter the school and by Year 9 are able to write appropriately for a range of audiences. Those in the middle and higher ability groups are able to write extensively using creative and often adventurous language. By Year 11 pupils achieve well to produce carefully structured written work, which is particularly evident in course work assignments. Language develops well in Years 10 and 11, resulting in pupils of all abilities being able to articulate opinions and concepts beyond what might be expected of pupils in similar contexts.
67. Teaching is good and pupils learn well. This is because all teachers have high expectations of all ability groups and work hard to engender self-belief in their pupils. As a consequence, most pupils have the confidence to tackle challenging texts with enthusiasm. For example, in a Year 7 class pupils were able to recognise a dual meaning in the poem 'The Thought Fox' by Ted Hughes because the teacher planned the questions carefully, encouraging pupils to achieve understanding by small steps until the entire meaning became clear. Learning is enhanced by the excellent relationships that exist between teachers and pupils, and teachers use different techniques to challenge and encourage pupils to become independent learners. In a lower ability group in Year 10 pupils were able to analyse the characteristics of a well-chosen range of media texts because the teacher used examples which were relevant to their own experiences. There are excellent strategies in place to identify pupils who need support; intervention activities are planned well and appropriate to pupils' needs. However, although teachers are clear about pupils' progress, pupils themselves are often unaware of what they need to do to progress to higher levels and are often not given enough time to reflect on their own learning.

68. The department is led well. There is a clear vision for raising standards and staff work as a supportive team. Responsibilities in the department are managed collaboratively and there is a shared commitment to the care and welfare of the pupils. Management is good. Planned innovations have had a positive impact on attainment and pupil data is used well to support targeted groups of learners. Resources are used effectively including the Open Learning Centre (OLC), which is invaluable in supporting learning in all areas of literacy. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to use ICT as a tool for learning.
69. Progress since the previous inspection has been good. The department has continued to succeed, with all groups of pupils making good progress. Teaching remains good with many examples of very good and even excellent practice. More pupils are able to produce extended and accurate written work and are now active and supportive listeners. The use of ICT in the curriculum still needs to develop further.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

70. Pupils achieve well in developing their language and literacy skills. There is good support for the development of literacy in many subjects. Pupils are encouraged to use a wide and varied range of vocabulary and recognise that the development of their language skills will help them to succeed in all subject areas. Most subjects focus on the use and spelling of key vocabulary to support learning and target vocabulary banks are often on display in classrooms. In science there are many examples of teachers explaining the derivation of vocabulary as an aid to understanding. In geography, pupils' reading skills are supported well and they are encouraged to mark texts as they read them to highlight key information and vocabulary. Writing frames are used effectively to support the structure of pupils' writing. A good example of this was seen in a Year 10 GCSE physical education class where pupils were using the support framework to identify how to answer an examination question fully. There is a good range of booklets available to support the teaching of literacy across the curriculum; these include advice on reading strategies and how to enhance written work by the effective use of connectives. The librarian has developed a very wide range of strategies to promote reading and improve pupils' use and understanding of research techniques; this plays a significant role in the development of literacy skills.

Example of outstanding practice

The use of the Open Learning Centre in promoting literacy

The Open Learning Centre truly lives up to its name. The highly skilled and committed librarian ensures pupils know how to make the most of this well-used facility. She actively supports pupils by showing them how to research properly. Having identified a group of reluctant users of the centre - lower school boys - she is enticing them in with workshops run by a popular author and a range of 'television tie-in' books, on, for example, James Bond and Star Trek. Training in the National Strategy for Years 7 to 9 enables the librarian to support pupils effectively in their work and she rightly sees herself as playing a central role in improving literacy across the school. She also uses her IT training to present ideas on literacy convincingly to senior management and to educate heads of department about new and exciting ways to develop project work with their pupils. The centre is a hub for literacy development and is used for paired reading, special educational needs work, research and Literacy Progress Units. The librarian is constantly striving to engage pupils, to address their needs and to work with staff in all areas of the school to encourage and support learning.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French and German

Provision in French and German is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good, and is well-focused on ways of guiding pupils towards success.
- Links with primary schools are very well developed.

- ICT makes a strong contribution to pupils' motivation and learning.
- Marking of pupils' work and feedback during lessons does not offer enough information on performance and hints on how to improve.
- Leadership vision is not expressed sufficiently clearly in schemes of work and strategies for improvement.
- There has been insufficient action to build pupils' fluency and pronunciation.

Commentary

71. In 2003, pupils achieved a satisfactory standard by the end of Year 9. The proportion of pupils reaching at least Level 5 was at the national average, although girls did less well than nationally, and the number of pupils achieving Level 6 was low.
72. Standards achieved at GCSE in 2003 were well below the national average in German. Boys performed particularly weakly compared to the national picture. There was a heavy concentration of D grades. Standards were slightly above the national average in French, although girls achieved less well than in their other subjects. There was particular weakness in the speaking element in both languages, and in written course work in French. Over the last three years GCSE results have followed a downward trend. The French A*-C rate, with a small number of candidates, has moved from comfortably above to slightly above the national figure, a drop of over 30 per cent. German, with the majority of candidates, has shifted from below to well below the national A*-C rate; 17 per cent lower than in 2001.
73. In Years 7 to 9, most pupils achieve better than expected results and make good progress, so that standards achieved by pupils currently in Year 9 are only slightly below the national expectation. Most pupils are able to compose paragraphs or dialogues, using models and patterns supplied by their teachers. Extended written work and the ability to compose from memory are less well developed than usual. Most pupils can recognise and use past and future verbs. They can confidently understand recorded and printed texts relevant to their current area of study, with a clear factual content, but they hesitate when dealing with more complex material which contains unfamiliar words. When speaking, pupils supply mainly very brief statements, and pronunciation is often inaccurate. Some boys tend to lose motivation quickly when writing, so that the quality and volume of their work are lower than they should produce.
74. In current Years 10 and 11, pupils reach satisfactory standards overall, but there is a very wide range of attainment. Judging by current performance in lessons, and assessment data, most pupils are in line to achieve a grade C or more at GCSE. This represents good individual achievement, and an accelerating rate of progress. Most pupils cope adequately with the requirements of Foundation tier GCSE: they are able to understand uncomplicated texts and to give straightforward written and spoken responses. At the higher level, pupils experience much more difficulty with complex texts and the much broader vocabulary, and are often not able to carry forward into their future learning what they have just learned to do or say. With guidance and training, most pupils can write compositions which fulfil the criteria for grade C or more, but the level of originality and accuracy is lower than usually seen.
75. Teaching is good and it leads to good learning in French and German. Lessons are carefully planned, developing new items of language step-by-step, so that pupils become gradually more confident and proficient. Lessons have clear objectives, which are carefully explained. As a result, pupils know exactly what they are aiming to do, and the steps which will take them there, and the lesson has a definite sense of purpose. When teachers present and practise the foreign language, they use cards, pictures, and real objects, so that the abstract and invisible rules of the language are made visible and understandable. Teachers offer very clear grammar patterns and intensive practice, so that pupils develop a secure understanding of how the language works. In Years 10 and 11 lessons, teachers' knowledge of the language and the examination is very good. This results in all pupils receiving very clear advice and training on how to meet GCSE requirements, so that they do their tests with a good degree of

confidence. Computers and electronic whiteboards are used confidently and effectively as a medium for presentation of new material, research, or practice. This motivates learners, gives clarity and impact to lessons, and encourages independent study. The usefulness of marking is variable. There are many instances of congratulation and encouragement, especially for pupils who experience difficulty with the subject, but there are relatively few examples of comments which give clear feedback on a pupil's performance, or advice on how to improve. In lessons, the quality and frequency of feedback to pupils about performance, and targets for future action, vary too greatly from lesson to lesson and teacher to teacher. Strategies to improve the weakness in pupils' pronunciation and confidence in speaking are not systematic or intensive enough.

76. The languages department has forged very successful links with local primary schools, in order to build continuity and to give children earlier experience of French and German. This provision is much better than in most schools. As a result, pupils begin their languages study in Year 7 with much more enthusiasm and competence than is normally seen.
77. The co-ordination of modern foreign languages is shared within the department. The shared leadership of the subject is good, typified by good communication, sharing of ideas and a high degree of collective thinking. The shared management is unsatisfactory, mainly because clear strategies to drive improvement are not fully in place and promoted. Analysis of data has not been fully exploited to define actions for improvement. The scheme of work for Year 7 does not express and drive high achievement. The topics, grammar and words which will be taught are stated, but there is no reference to targeted standards or outcomes. Schemes of work for Years 10 and 11 lack detail, and do not show the action the department is planning to take in order to obtain better results.
78. Since the previous inspection, improvement has been unsatisfactory. Curricular issues have been resolved, but the assessment still lacks consistency and effectiveness, and GCSE results have fallen.

Example of outstanding practice

German Year 9 low ability set

The Year 9 German lesson with a group of very low ability pupils focused on developing knowledge about the new countries which joined the European Union this month. Pupils had four very clear jobs to do: to find six pieces of information about their target country from the Internet; to design a poster containing the main facts; to present this to the class; and finally to write - in German - four activities which a tourist might do, all within one hour. Pupils worked rapidly and effectively, using an accessible, enjoyable and comfortable medium for their research. There was a genuine sense both of urgency (with the teacher reminding the class regularly that they had only a few minutes left) and of discovery (with pupils finding out, for example, that more people lived in Manchester than in the whole of Estonia). At the start of the lesson, the class knew almost nothing about the new EU countries. By the end, they had achieved far more than might have been expected: individuals had become experts, had 'taught' their classmates, and had produced a display which gave substance to their learning. The lesson had given them a good understanding of the new Europe, and had generated positive attitudes to it.

Latin

Provision in Latin is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent teaching.
- Excellent contribution to pupils' social and cultural development.
- Outstanding level of challenge and inspiration.
- Very good contribution to the study of citizenship.
- The time allocation to the subject in Years 7 to 9 limits its effectiveness.

Commentary

79. Standards achieved by the end of Year 9 are good. Within a very limited time allocation, pupils have developed a broad grasp of Latin grammar. They can read substantial texts, picking out facts and working out implicit attitudes and issues. They have a sound knowledge of the cultural background which surrounds the language. They can apply what they experience in Latin lessons to the modern world, notably in relation to issues of citizenship, at a higher level than is usually seen. Their achievement is very good.
80. Pupils who chose to study for Latin GCSE achieved good standards in previous years. Current pupils are on target to achieve a very good rate of A*-C grades. They are confident with the technicalities of grammar, can explore texts competently, and show a very broad knowledge of classical culture and society. The rapid progress of Years 8 and 9 is accelerated, so that pupils demonstrate excellent achievement.
81. Teaching is excellent and the learning which results from it is never less than very good. A very high level of expectation, interaction and stimulation is always present. Pupils' knowledge is repeatedly challenged, extended and acknowledged. This builds pupils' self-confidence and therefore their ability to aim for and reach high standards. The cultural and linguistic links between the classical past and the modern present are constantly highlighted, and the language which is exercised is firmly rooted in a social context. Therefore, what pupils learn is related to their own experience, and extends their ability to interpret issues and events. Visits to classical sites, and participation in the Pompeii masterclass activities, excite pupils' intellectual growth and their thirst for learning. Information technology is used confidently as a routine medium for teaching, and as a resource for learning. It gives clarity to grammar presentations, so that pupils always receive a lucid picture of how the language works. The availability of texts with an accompanying on-line dictionary allows pupils to work independently and at their own speed.
82. The leadership and management of Latin are excellent. The vision which underlies the subject is of the highest order, and is transmitted enthusiastically and powerfully in lessons. Planning is excellent, particularly in the breadth of its reach into cross-curricular areas such as citizenship.
83. Since the previous inspection, the development of the subject has been excellent. High standards have been maintained or improved, and the impact of Latin in increasing pupils' self-confidence and intellectual ambition has been very powerful. This is a subject which has changed pupils' lives.

Example of outstanding practice

Latin Year 10 class

A Year 10 class explored a Latin text on computer screens concerning the structure of Roman society at Pompeii, discussed it with their teacher, and continued their study of adjective agreement. The teacher engaged individuals and the whole class enthusiastically and spoke Latin with a lively and expressive manner, making it a communicative and living experience. He asked a rapid series of testing, specialist questions about grammar and Roman life whose superficial purpose was to refresh and extend pupils' factual learning, but whose ultimate effect was to build up pupils' awareness of their own talent. Pupils were enthusiastic to take part and to demonstrate their competence. Owing to an electronic dictionary facility, and the attractive on-screen display of a letter and a dialogue, the Roman language and culture were easily accessible, vividly realistic, and highly motivating. Pupils worked independently, with a very high degree of concentration, and then contributed to whole-class discussion at a good academic level. This lesson had a powerful effect on defining and constructing pupils' self-confidence and intellectual ambition. These pupils have been inspired to become avid learners and high achievers. The study of Latin has changed their lives.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching, which fosters good relationships and positive pupil attitudes, produces effective learning.
- Achievement of current Years 10 and 11 pupils is good, but recent GCSE results were too low. Achievement of current pupils in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory but Year 9 national test results in 2003 were too low.
- The provision for the more able is good.
- Planning is made more effective by the increased use of pupils' prior attainment levels but pupils are given insufficient written feedback on how to improve.
- The range of teaching and learning styles and resources used is too narrow to meet the needs of all learners.

Commentary

84. Although results in Year 9 national tests were well below the national average in 2003, standards represented good progress in comparison with pupils in schools with a similar social and economic background. However, compared with pupils' prior attainment in Year 6, achievement was poor. There was no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. GCSE results in Year 11 have been consistently below the national average and pupils attain about half a grade lower than their average across other subjects, representing insufficient achievement. Boys performed less well than girls.
85. Pupils currently in Years 7 to 9 demonstrate satisfactory achievement, and standards are approaching those expected nationally. Pupils in Year 8 middle ability groups have a good understanding of straight-line graphs and can find and interpret the equations of these lines. Pupils in a mixed-ability Year 7 group could find the n th term of a sequence. Achievement is good in Years 10 and 11. Middle attainers in Year 10 can calculate percentage change and use this to solve real life problems, while higher attainers in Year 11 can interpret statistical data in a wide variety of ways.
86. Teaching is good and pupils learn well. Teachers have high expectations and use good subject knowledge to motivate the pupils to understand and enjoy their work. Very good behaviour and attitudes also promote very effective learning. All teachers plan lessons using objectives from the National Strategy for raising achievement in mathematics, but not all use these to review learning at the end of a lesson. Starter activities engage pupils effectively and these are planned well to rehearse skills to be used in the main part of the lesson. In a Year 8 class, this enabled pupils successfully to calculate fractional parts of amounts prior to dividing quantities into given ratios. Teachers' good questioning ensures pupils are able to explain their calculation strategies with correct mathematical vocabulary. In Year 11 lessons, pupils mark solutions using examination board criteria which help them understand what is required to do well. However, in some lessons there is insufficient variety of tasks and resources and too little feedback is given to pupils in the marking of written work to help them improve.
87. Leadership of the mathematics team is good. Despite staffing problems the head of department has high expectations of the team and high aspirations for improvement of standards. An example of this is the provision for more able pupils in Year 10 to study GCSE statistics and AS level mathematics. Management is satisfactory. Assessment data is used to monitor pupils' progress from Year 7 to 11 but more analysis is needed to inform pupils of what they need to do to improve. The scheme of work does not include a sufficiently wide range of resources. Previous good links with primary schools have not occurred this year because of staffing difficulties and there are no courses for adult members of the community.

88. There has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection. There is an increased use of ICT with good use of interactive whiteboards to engage pupils in their learning and the pace in most lessons is sufficiently high. However, standards in test and examination results are still too low.

Mathematics across the curriculum

89. Pupils improve their mathematics skills well in subjects across the curriculum. They have developed a good range of calculation strategies which they can explain confidently. There has been a whole-school training day to ensure consistency in approaches to calculations, measurement and handling data and this is having a positive impact in a variety of subjects. In geography, Year 9 pupils correctly draw and interpret temperature/rainfall graphs and in Year 10 pupils analyse data and graphs on population changes. Physical education's contribution to mathematical development is satisfactory with measuring and timing in athletics and calculation of pulse rates. In science pupils are able to perform calculations with equations to check results.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE standards are above the national average.
- There is very good use of student data to let pupils know what they are achieving and how they can improve.
- Lessons are well planned to engage pupils, with realistic challenge, good pace and high expectations.
- ICT is used very effectively to enhance pupils' learning.
- A well-structured revision programme, with good support materials, prepares pupils well for examinations but investigative skills are not developed sufficiently in Years 7 to 9.
- Very good use is made of key scientific terminology but there are insufficient opportunities for independent writing to help pupils understand key words.

Commentary

90. Standards in the Year 9 national tests in 2003 were below the national average. However, these results were well above average compared with schools of a similar social and economic context, although they were below average based upon pupils' prior attainment at the end of Year 6. The results have shown an improving trend over the last three years. Attainment at GCSE is above the national average and again has consistently improved.
91. The standards being attained by pupils in the current Years 7 to 9 are in line with the national picture, and they make good progress, although their investigative skills appear weaker than their knowledge and understanding of the other aspects of the course. The standards seen in Years 10 and 11 are better than the expected national level in both the modular science and the applied science courses. The well-planned revision programmes and the production of support materials have enhanced pupils' understanding and prepared them effectively for the final part of their GCSE assessments. Current pupils achieve well. In Year 9 they are able to discuss the accuracy of their measuring, and Year 11 pupils are able to distinguish between different types of microbes and explain their effects.
92. Teaching is good and is producing good learning. In the best lessons clear expectation and challenge, through a variety of activities, ensures good progress. Teachers make effective use of examples within pupils' experience to provide models to help their understanding, for example when comparing the number of expected collisions in a crowded playground with

particles colliding in more concentrated solutions. Very good examples of ICT are used to enhance the learning of pupils, including appropriate software packages and effective use of the interactive whiteboard. Learning objectives are shared with pupils but identifying expected outcomes is not consistently explained. All teachers introduce and reinforce appropriate scientific terminology, clearly explaining the meaning and spelling. This information is also displayed in the classroom, but there are insufficient opportunities for extended writing to embed this into written work.

93. Leadership is good. There is a clear vision and the science development plan indicates effectively the priorities for raising achievement. It dovetails with the overall school development plan and has identified improvements in science which have good potential to produce a positive impact on teaching and learning; for example the introduction of a new scheme of work for pupils in Year 7 to 9 and the implementation of an applied course for those in Years 10 and 11. Management is good and the department self-evaluation process helps in the monitoring process. Areas of good practice, such as the use of interactive whiteboards, need to be identified better as a model for other staff.
94. The department's use of data to set and monitor targets is a real strength. Pupils understand the process and know at what level they are currently working. They are also aware of how to obtain help in deciding targets to achieve their potential. This process is evident in all years, and allows intervention strategies to be implemented, where needed, to prevent underachievement and help all pupils to succeed.
95. Members of the department spend a substantial amount of time with pupils, outside normal lessons, giving them the opportunity and support, for instance, to complete coursework. Extra-curricular opportunities are also available to primary school pupils through the primary school science club. This has a significant, positive effect on achievement.
96. There has been good progress since the previous inspection. Standards in both key stages have been raised, the quality of teaching has improved and the issues raised about health and safety have been addressed.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GNVQ ICT results in 2003 were above the national average.
- There has been significant investment in ICT equipment, which has considerably improved facilities for pupils.
- The willingness of staff to use new technologies is increasing the use of ICT in and beyond lessons but embedding ICT across the curriculum is in need of further development.
- Student access to ICT facilities is very good, including beyond the school day.
- There is innovative liaison work with other schools which is raising standards but there is too little consistency in guiding pupils to attain higher levels in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

97. Standards of Year 9 pupils, in the 2003 teacher assessments of ICT, were in line with the national average and this represents good achievement. The performance of girls at the higher levels was better than that of the boys. In 2003, 86 per cent of Year 11 pupils following Part 1 GNVQ ICT were successful and this represents very good achievement.
98. The National ICT Strategy for Years 7 to 9 has been fully embraced and as a result is having a positive impact on learning. Allocation of the nationally recommended time for discrete ICT in

years 7 to 9 is also helping to improve standards. Evidence of work seen during the

inspection confirms pupils' work is being rigorously assessed but, in some cases, teacher feedback needs to inform pupils better as to how higher levels can be attained. Standards continue to be in line with the national average.

99. Current Years 10 and 11 pupils are attaining above average standards representing very good achievement. Pupils are given good guidance on how to maximise their performance in submission of the required portfolio work.
100. Teaching is very good and is producing very good learning. Pupils display positive attitudes towards ICT. They concentrate for extended periods of time, showing good interest in their work. Teachers have good relationships with the pupils and this supports them in their learning. Specialist lessons exhibit a lively pace. Very good use is made of starters to engage pupils right from the beginning. Interactive whiteboards provide an effective way to present the lesson objectives and this provides a clear, time-focused structure for the lesson. Some plenaries need to be better focused as they do not always summarise the learning that has taken place, resulting in pupils being unclear about what has been achieved. However, in a Year 11 lesson in the City Learning Centre, the teacher conducted an excellent plenary in the style of 'Who wants to be the strongest link?' Through the use of an in-house interactive software program the teacher was able to test the extent of the pupils' learning. It was clear that the pupils enjoyed this plenary, but also that very good learning had taken place.
101. Video-conferencing technology is increasingly used and excellent links are being fostered with local feeder primary schools to deliver masterclasses on control within design and technology and ICT. Very good access to ICT facilities is provided during and out of school hours. Both the cyber café and the Open Learning Centre are used very well and pupils benefit from the high quality support provided by staff.
102. Leadership of ICT is very good. The subject is led by a very experienced teacher, with a clear sense of direction for the future. Staff work well as a team in order to ensure pupils' success. Constant review of teaching units is routine and dissemination of good practice at departmental meetings is actively encouraged. Management of ICT is good. A high level of on-site expertise is used to good effect in both the procurement and ongoing development of ICT facilities. Target setting and recording of student performance data are in place to monitor individual progress; this is especially well developed for the GNVQ course.
103. There has been very good improvement and considerable investment in ICT since the previous inspection. Standards are now good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Staff demonstrate a very high level of ICT competence and familiarity with the hardware and software. The implementation of the National Strategy for Years 7 to 9 ensures there is planned progression. Student performance data is electronically collated and used to good effect to inform lesson planning and target setting.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

104. Pupils achieve well in their development of ICT skills in Years 7 to 9 and very well in Years 10 and 11. An audit of software being used by each department has been undertaken in order to highlight coverage. Plans are in place to build on this so that ICT can be firmly embedded across the curriculum and ICT capability consolidated. Ongoing training for staff has resulted in improved ICT confidence and this has been reflected in the quality of teaching and learning observed during the inspection.
105. In a Year 7 physical education lesson, good learning resulted from the use of a digital camera and laptop to help the pupils evaluate their own performance with a view to improving their skills in badminton. Increasing use is being made of interactive whiteboards to generate very good learning. In a Year 8 geography lesson, for instance, the teacher made very good use of

an interactive whiteboard to display photographs of a limestone cavern. Very good learning resulted from these stimulus photos as the pupils were introduced to structures, processes and features. Other departments observed making very good use of interactive whiteboards during the inspection were science, mathematics and design and technology. Excellent teaching using the Cambridge Classics Project website in a Year 10 Latin lesson resulted in excellent learning and achievement.

106. Extra-curricular activities provide further ICT opportunities. For example, two Year 11 pupils used a lunchtime session during the inspection week to explain the ROBOLAB Soccer project to a group of fourteen interested Year 7 pupils. This provided a very good opportunity to inspire others to learn how to programme using the ROBOLAB equipment.

HUMANITIES

107. **Classical studies** was lightly sampled during the inspection week. The quality of teaching in the lessons observed was good, with effective planning for an interestingly varied range of tasks and activities. Effective tasks were matched well to pupils' needs and they responded with interest, making good progress with some challenging concepts. Pupils show good understanding of the impact made by classical civilisations on present day life and language. There is a well-chosen range of resources and teachers make good use of ICT facilities to enhance learning. There are no pupils currently studying the subject in Years 10 and 11.
108. The school offers **sociology** as a GCSE option for Years 10 and 11 and two lessons were sampled during the inspection. Teaching and learning were good and pupils had a positive attitude to the subject.
109. This is an increasingly popular option and standards are good and improving. In the 2003 GCSE examination 68 per cent gained an A*-C grade compared with 55 per cent nationally. This was a slight dip on the 2002 results, but a significant improvement on previous years. Pupils did as well in the subject as they did in their other examinations and this represents satisfactory achievement overall

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a high standard of teaching so pupils learn well in most aspects of the subject.
- Pupils are encouraged and supported well in class so achieve well.
- There is good subject leadership and teachers work well together as a team.
- There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their skills of enquiry.
- Some pupils are not sure how to improve their work in order to reach their target.

Commentary

110. The standard of attainment for Year 9 pupils in last year's teacher assessments was slightly below that normally seen. Girls reached higher standards than boys. Two pupils were entered in last year's GCSE examination and both gained a low grade.
111. Pupils currently in Years 7 to 9 are making good progress and most achieve well. Work in lessons and in pupils' books is similar in standard to that normally seen. They study an interesting range of topics and do well. For example, work on coasts gives pupils a sound understanding of how the natural landscape changes. Work on the global fashion industry gives them a satisfactory understanding of countries at different levels of development. Learning about international aid helps them get a sound understanding of the way countries are linked and are dependent on each other. Pupils who chose geography in Years 10 and 11 are

also making good progress. In one lesson they demonstrated a sound grasp of skills of interpretation, as they compared a map and photograph of a small village. They applied similar skills in another lesson, when analysing graphs and statistics of population structures. A range of case studies helps pupils gain a sound understanding of how people live in different parts of the world. Their work on industrial development in Brazil, for example, helps them learn how the world is changing. Pupils with special educational needs do well. They are very well supported in class so can take a full part. In one lesson, for example, the teaching assistant knew all the pupils well. Her encouragement was tactful and sensitive. Pupils responded well, tried hard and therefore coped with some difficult text on flooding. Gifted and talented pupils are also doing well. In one lesson, for example, the teacher included more challenging tasks, to enable some pupils to reach a higher level of understanding about industrial development.

112. The standard of teaching is good. Teachers know their subject well and work with authority and confidence as in a lesson where the teacher demonstrated good knowledge of climate patterns in Japan. He explained them simply and concisely to the pupils, who saw very quickly how to analyse graphs and build up a picture for themselves. There is a clear sense of purpose in all lessons and pupils are well supported at all times. Teachers insist on high standards of behaviour and effort. There is a no-nonsense approach, with no time wasted. Pupils respond well and work hard. This was seen in a Year 8 lesson, where pupils were learning about limestone scenery. The teacher pitched the work at just the right level, set a sequence of challenging activities, and insisted on good behaviour and effort throughout. As a result all the pupils worked hard, and by the end of the lesson gained a good understanding of the processes shaping the landscape.
113. The leadership and management of geography are good. The subject leader is committed to raising standards and supports his colleagues effectively. Teachers are already beginning to make good use of assessment to set targets, but there is still not enough use made of this information to plan lessons to meet the needs of individual pupils.
114. The department has made good progress since the previous inspection. The standard of teaching is better and this is the main reason why standards are improving. Other key factors include significant improvements in the use of ICT, and in support for pupils with special educational needs.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9.
- Standards at the end of Year 11 are above the national average.
- Teaching is satisfactory, but there is insufficient variety of methods to maintain interest and encourage independent learning.
- Pupils receive too little information on how well they are doing or how they can improve.
- Leadership of the department is satisfactory, but management is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

115. Assessments recorded by teachers at the end of Year 9 have risen steadily over the past three years. In 2003, the percentage of pupils attaining the expected level was in line with the national average, while the percentage at the higher levels was below average. Inspection findings confirm that attainment is in line with what is seen nationally.
116. In 2003, the percentage of pupils who attained GCSE grades A*-C was above the national average, although the number entered for the examination was so small that national comparisons are not necessarily valid. Over previous years the percentage at the higher

levels has fluctuated but has been consistently above average while the numbers taking the examination have been very low.

117. Pupils enter the school with attainment which is below average and with very varied experience of history. Overall, pupils achieve well by the end of Year 9 to reach the national average, while the achievement of higher attaining pupils is satisfactory. Overall, achievement for most pupils in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. The achievement of current Year 11 pupils, who intend to take a GCSE examination, is good, but of the small numbers who study history, a significant proportion have made unsatisfactory progress and have not been entered for the examination.
118. Teaching is satisfactory and in some lessons it is good, but there are significant areas for development. The work in each lesson is tightly structured and nearly all lessons follow the same pattern. Teachers have clear objectives for what they want pupils to learn in lessons. These are shared with pupils so that they know what to expect and what is expected of them. Teachers make use of their good subject knowledge to make effective use of questioning. However, the repetitive tasks limit opportunities for pupils to plan independent writing. The very restricted opportunities for pupil participation or independent work inhibit interest and pupils work compliantly rather than enthusiastically. There has been insufficient progress in this since the previous inspection. In one Year 10 lesson, where there were good opportunities for pupils to learn by handling some genuine artefacts, there was a marked increase in interest and pupils progressed well. Teachers do not plan a sufficiently wide range of tasks to meet the needs of all pupils and they have little knowledge of which pupils have special educational needs. Marking is very brief and does not explain to pupils what they need to do in order to improve. There has been no progress since the previous inspection when marking was described as having 'limited value'.
119. Leadership is satisfactory while management is unsatisfactory, since a number of initiatives have not been adequately addressed. The schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 are satisfactory and there is a good range of resources but there is insufficient monitoring of the work of the department to co-ordinate improvement. The assessment policy is only partially successful; there is too little use of National Curriculum levels to help pupils know how well they are doing or how they can improve. The shortage of time allocated to history lessons in Years 7 to 9, commented on in the previous report, has not been sufficiently addressed; time is too short, especially in Year 7 and for higher attaining pupils in Years 8 and 9. The policy on special educational needs is very brief and does not offer sufficient guidance to teachers. There is no ICT policy and schemes of work do not identify opportunities for pupils to use their ICT skills. Little evidence of pupils' use of ICT in their history lessons was seen.
120. Improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory. Assessment has been insufficiently improved to promote pupil achievement.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11 but there is scope to raise standards further in Years 7 to 9.
- Teaching and learning are consistently good.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are very good; pupils have very good attitudes and behave very well.
- There is very good leadership of the subject, with a clear purpose and direction for future development.
- Links between the department and the local community are very good.

- There is too little emphasis on letting pupils know how well they are doing in lessons.

Commentary

121. Recent teacher assessments of 14 year-olds have been below average. By the age of 16, however, recent results at GCSE level have been good overall and above the national average at grades A*-C. Both boys and girls achieved higher grades than in their other subjects. Results in textiles have been consistently well above the national average over the last three years.
122. In the current Year 9, pupils are achieving well, and standards are similar to those normally seen nationally. Girls and boys are making good progress throughout Years 7 to 9 developing a range of designing and making skills within each material area. For example, in Year 7 textiles pupils design their own puppets by analysing puppets purchased by the department. In Year 8 food studies they evaluate the bolognese meal they have made by using computers effectively to record the strengths and weaknesses of their products. In Year 9, however, learning from participation in projects, such as the electronic timer, is too closely directed by the teacher and does not provide opportunities for pupils to make the designing and making decisions which would enable them to reach the higher National Curriculum levels. In Years 10 and 11, pupils are making very good progress and achieving very well across the full range of skills. The standard of GCSE coursework in Year 11 is above average. Pupils extend their designing and making skills and produce a range of well-finished products. Gifted and talented pupils have produced work of the highest grades. For example, in textiles pupils' folders and practical coursework demonstrate garments and textile items for the home, designed and made to a very high standard. Across the department, pupils have made very good use of computers to enhance their designing and making. For example, in graphics they have used computerised milling machines effectively to manufacture point of sale display stands.
123. Teaching is consistently good. Relationships between pupils and their teachers are very good. Teachers plan a good variety of activities to maintain pupils' interest throughout lessons. For example in Year 11 electronics, the teacher engaged the group in a mixture of activities including use of the interactive whiteboard, paired activity on the computers and whole-class questioning. Teachers use a wide variety of activities at the start of lessons to focus pupils' attention on the learning planned. However, they do not fully evaluate the progress pupils have made at the end of lessons, for example by discussing and assessing the learning that has taken place.
124. The head of department is providing very good leadership and management of the teaching team. There is a clear focus on raising standards across the department. Extensive links have been forged with the local community. For example, innovative use is made of video-conferencing to support the work of both teachers and pupils in local primary schools. There are accommodation issues which are restricting the range of work that can be undertaken. Despite staff efforts, the workshops and the mobile classroom do not provide appropriate environments in which pupils can both design and make.
125. Since the previous inspection, the department has made good progress. Pupils' achievement has improved so that they are now achieving very well in Years 10 and 11. GCSE results have improved to be above the national average.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

126. **Drama** is a very successful department in which pupils reach high standards and achieve very well, especially at the higher grades of GCSE. Current pupils work with enthusiasm, energy and obvious enjoyment to produce work that is well above the standard that might be expected of pupils nationally and in similar schools. They respond to teaching that is always at least good and at times is inspirational. Pupils are constantly challenged to reflect upon their learning and seek ways to improve in both practical and textual activities. Their responses are

both valued and evaluated, by the teacher and other pupils, and the progress of learning in these lessons is rapid for all pupils. The department is led and managed very well and plays a key role in developing confidence in learning and language that supports the development of pupils throughout the whole school. The school recognises the success of this department and is extending drama to Years 7, 8 and 9 from September 2004.

Example of outstanding practice

A drama lesson in Year 11 in which pupils identified the impact of tone, gesture and movement on how the audience understands

As pupils entered the room it was clear that this was an environment in which they expected learning to be rapid. After a quick, but amusing, physical warm-up in the circle, the teacher explained not only the learning that would take place but also how it would happen and the relevance to the pupils in their forthcoming examinations. Working in pairs, pupils used a prescribed examination text to decide how an actor would use movement and voice to extend meaning to the audience. After a buzz of conversation the teacher refocused the class by reading the text with no variation in tone of voice or movement; a performance that gave rise to much laughter and ironic applause. Having taken a bow the teacher then challenged the group to improve his performance using the ideas that they had developed. This challenge was taken up with enthusiasm. As suggestions were offered, the teacher adopted them in his performance and pupils were able to assess for themselves the effectiveness of their ideas. Amongst much laughter, and aided by challenging interventions from the teacher, ideas were adopted or discarded by the group. The outcome was a performance which brought alive the text and pupils were able to assess the success of their work. Challenge, learning and laughter dominated this work and this was just the starter!

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make very good progress in their first three years from Year 7 to Year 9.
- Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good.
- Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were well above the national average.
- Teachers have very high expectations that all pupils will work to the best of their ability.
- Insufficient use is made of ICT and photography to generate images in a design context.

Commentary

127. Although pupils' attainment on entry to Year 7 is below national expectations, progress in the first two years is very good because pupils enjoy drawing, painting and craft work involving a wide range of materials. By Year 9, the majority of pupils have improved their basic skills and are capable of producing work of a standard that is above national expectations. Achievement from Year 7 to Year 9 is very good.
128. In the 2002 GCSE examination, the number of pupils attaining the highest grades A*-C was well below the national average. This was due mainly to staffing difficulties at the time. In the 2003 examination however, there was significant improvement and attainment was well above the national average. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good.
129. Teaching is very good with some excellent features. Teachers are very well informed and possess very good subject knowledge. Planning is carried out very thoroughly prior to lessons and excellent use is made of exemplar material. Teachers have very high expectations of all pupils, including those with special educational needs, and they are encouraged to work to the best of their ability to realise their full potential. Behaviour management during lessons is excellent and this is a major factor in helping pupils to achieve high standards in their work. Homework is set and marked on a regular basis but there is a need for a more formal structure to this process. Schemes of work are good, and lesson content is designed to meet the

needs of individual pupils. Most pupils enjoy art and craft work, and, as a result of the very good teaching, very good learning occurs. Pupils settle very readily to the tasks that are set and work with concentration to deepen their understanding and improve their skills. Most work at a very good pace and pupils in Years 10 and 11 have acquired the self-confidence to base their work on their own ideas, concepts, attitudes, values and beliefs. They are more self-reliant and work with greater independence. There is evidence in the visual diaries that many of these pupils carry out extensive investigation into the work of artists and sculptors from many different cultures. Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported and make very good progress.

130. Leadership is very good and management good. The recently appointed head of department has a very clear vision of how she would like to see the department develop which is shared with other staff. She is a very good role model for staff and pupils alike, and after a period of some difficulty with staffing there is now a more stable team in place. Planning is carried out thoroughly and organisation of the department is very good. Informal assessment is carried out on an ongoing basis during every lesson and pupils are provided with instant feedback. However, formal procedures that record and track pupils' progress are lacking in rigour at present. Accommodation and resources are very good. There are three large multi-purpose studios in which pupils work in two and three dimensions within a very traditional model of the curriculum, which places emphasis on drawing, painting and craft work. However, the provision of computers, scanners, digital cameras and printers within the art studios, to enable the production of images in a design context, is inadequate.
131. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Pupils are now making very good progress throughout the first three years and results in the GCSE examination are well above national expectations.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The department offers an unusually wide range of opportunities for music-making.
- Many pupils are justifiably proud of their musical achievements, especially in school bands.
- The head of department is a very accomplished and committed director of school ensembles.
- There is a need for greater rigour in the department's class teaching of music.

Commentary

132. In 2003, only three pupils took GCSE music; this number is too small to make national comparisons on standards.
133. The performance standards of the large number of pupils who take instrumental lessons and play in ensembles are good. Under the very capable direction of the head of department the sixty or so members of the school's brass band and concert band play well, close to the limits of their capabilities, refining and improving their playing and giving polished performances of substantial pieces. They have a responsible, professional attitude to their band-playing, and the standards of their frequent concert performances are high. Many individual players reach grade 5 or above during their time at the school, some on more than one instrument. This represents very good achievement.
134. Standards in class are variable. Most pupils enter Year 7 with little prior knowledge or experience of music. Throughout Years 7 to 9, though standards remain below national averages, pupils make some progress in practical music-making. Overall this represents satisfactory achievement.

135. Current Years 10 and 11 pupils achieve well to attain above average standards. The 25 or so pupils in the present Years 10 and 11 are working at an above average level in performance and composition, but they are weak in their knowledge and understanding of musical styles and concepts.
136. Teaching is good and leads to good learning, when taking into account teachers' efforts beyond lessons. The quality of the class teaching, though satisfactory overall, does not always match that of the ensemble teaching. The mixed picture of achievement is a direct result of the variable quality of the department's teaching. The ensemble teaching is very good. Pupils respond eagerly to their teachers' high expectations and commitment. Working well together they acquire a broad range of skills and musical awareness. Their spiritual and aesthetic development is enriched by the experience of performing at a high level and they become more sociable, self-disciplined and confident. Their immersion in high quality band music, some written for them by the head of music, gives them a strong sense of cultural context. In this thriving musical milieu, playing alongside a wide range of adults from the local community, several past pupils have discovered the motivation and talent to become professional musicians. Many more have acquired a life-long love of music, with a rich set of transferable skills and attitudes that help them to succeed in other fields.
137. Classroom management is generally good, relationships between teachers and pupils are warm and supportive, and pupils are given interesting musical tasks. However, there is a need for more thorough planning of programmes of study and lessons, and for far more effective assessment, including more supportive monitoring and marking of the work of the GCSE pupils' work. Pupils have insufficient opportunities for aural work to internalise their musical learning.
138. The head of department's devoted leadership of the department is very good; his abundant inspiration, boundless enthusiasm and sheer hard work are precious commodities for the wider school community. Whilst there are some fundamental weaknesses in classroom provision, overall the management of this complex department is satisfactory.
139. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The lively performance ethos noted in the previous inspection report has been further strengthened.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in GCSE examination results are well above the national average for both boys and girls.
- The head of department is a very good leader who provides a very effective role model for colleagues.
- Teachers have high expectations of positive behaviour and high achievement, which produces very good attitudes from pupils, with a positive impact on their learning.
- There are good opportunities within lessons and an excellent range of extra-curricular opportunities, which enable pupils to improve their skills very effectively.
- The marking of GCSE work lacks sufficient detail to inform pupils of what they need to do to improve further.
- Girls' achievement in lessons seen, although good overall, is not as high as boys'.

Commentary

140. Results in Year 9 national tests in 2003 were slightly above the national average, with no significant difference between boys and girls. This reflects good progress and good achievement.

141. Standards in recent GCSE examinations for those pupils who opt for the course has been well above the national average with all pupils gaining a pass grade and 77 per cent gaining an A*-C grade compared with 55 per cent nationally. There is little difference between the performance of boys and girls and this represents very good achievement for these pupils.
142. The work of the current pupils in Years 7 to 9 indicates that they achieve well and are reaching above average standards overall, with some boys reaching very good standards. For instance, in a Year 9 athletics lesson pupils quickly learned to perform the shot put with a good technique and significantly improved their performance over the course of the lesson. The teacher assistant was very effective both in supporting lower achieving pupils and extending the work for a more talented pupil.
143. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 continue to study physical education and standards in lessons show that they make good progress so that by the end the end of Year 11 most pupils are at least working at a level which is typical for their age. There are, however, a significant number who are working above this level. This represents good achievement. GCSE is a popular option choice and pupils of all abilities are building up a good knowledge of the theoretical elements of the syllabus and are able to relate these well to their practical work. For instance, in a Year 11 lesson on the principles of training, pupils were able to explain how particular exercises benefit different activities and how they can be adapted to suit different training regimes.
144. Teaching, overall, is good with some examples of very good teaching seen. The school's policy of open access to the subject at GCSE means that pupils of all ability levels, including those with special educational needs, are represented in the groups. They are well supported by subject teachers and the department's teaching assistants and learn well. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of physical education is a particular strength and they make good use of pupil questioning to ensure pupils have understood what they have been taught. Lessons are usually planned well, with good opportunities for pupils to develop their observation and evaluation skills to help them improve their own and others' performance. On the very few occasions when teaching is not as good, it is because the teacher does not provide appropriate activities for all abilities thus limiting the progress of some lower attaining pupils. The department makes a good contribution to the development of pupils' literacy skills, especially through its promotion of key words and structured framework to help pupil answers GCSE questions. However, although GCSE theory work is regularly marked it often lacks sufficient detail to inform pupils what they need to do to improve further.
145. Pupils' standards of behaviour are usually good and they respond well to the teaching. Most pupils are keen to do well, listen carefully, follow instructions and show good levels of effort. Working relationships are very positive; pupils generally show respect for each other, teachers and other adults and work well to improve their own standard of performance. There is a very good sharing of subject expertise with the school's contributory primary schools through well-established links. All staff give of their time generously and pupils benefit from an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. The school has achieved considerable sporting success at local, regional and national levels.
146. The head of department provides very good leadership and is supported well by his colleagues in the drive to continue to raise standards in the subject. The department is managed well with good documentation and assessment records and analysis of performance all in place. Accommodation for teaching the subject is satisfactory, with a very well appointed sports hall and a dedicated classroom for GCSE teaching. However, the lack of another indoor area limits the range of activities the subject can offer. Resources are good and very good use is made of the department's digital video camera, linked to a laptop computer, for pupils to observe and evaluate their own and others' performance.
147. The subject received a positive report at the previous inspection and the department has maintained these good standards. This constitutes good progress.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Health and social care

Provision in health and social care is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good; lessons are well-structured, with a good range of activities, producing good learning.
- Work placements are managed well and enable pupils to develop good practical skills.
- The social skills, maturity and personal development of the pupils is good.
- Pupils' skills of critical analysis and evaluation are not sufficiently well developed.
- The use of assessment information to set targets for pupils and to track their progress is too inconsistent.

Commentary

148. This is the first time that health and social care has been offered so there are no past examination results.
149. The work of current pupils, in their portfolios and in class, demonstrates average standards and good achievement. However, the demands of both the GNVQ and GCSE courses have been too great for a few pupils whose achievement is unsatisfactory. Although their knowledge and understanding of care terminology are sound, their analytical and evaluative skills are too limited.
150. Teaching is good overall. In Year 10, work is well planned. The best lessons make good use of a variety of activities, including questions and answer, group work and role-play. In one Year 10 lesson pupils were looking at the importance of non-verbal signals in communication. They were encouraged to reflect on their own communication styles, enabling them to improve their performance in care settings. Skilled questioning by the teacher developed understanding and stimulated discussion. In another Year 10 lesson pupils used a range of research tools to create a job description and showed good development of ICT skills. The quality of research, analysis and presentation varies considerably. The teacher has good knowledge of the criteria requirements and pupils are encouraged to incorporate features into their work, which will take their performance into a higher category. Some pupils respond well, but they need to be pushed harder to develop sharper analytical and investigative skills. In a lesson observed, the teaching had good features but progress was slow because the pupils had not previously been taught how to think for themselves. They experienced difficulty when required to think laterally and provided only a few weak responses in the brainstorming activity. The teacher had to use a great deal of skilful questioning to elicit alternative answers.
151. Leadership and management are good. The subject is led by an enthusiastic teacher who has considerable experience. There is a clear vision for the department to consolidate and extend the impact of the subject. There is a purposeful focus on raising standards. The accommodation creates constraints. Lack of designated space denies pupils the access to secure and safe storage of portfolios and additional resources.
152. Health and social care was not inspected in 1998.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Elements of the programme provide good opportunities to develop aspects of citizenship, such as an understanding of democracy.
- The citizenship programme for Years 10 and 11 is not structured well enough to provide sufficient progression in learning or enough scope for work in depth.
- Pupils demonstrate very good responsibility in their attitudes to themselves and others.
- Arrangements for assessing and recording citizenship are inadequate.

Commentary

153. Achievement is satisfactory in citizenship, overall, and standards are average, but some of the written work is at a lower level than that achieved in other subjects. Most able pupils are not working at the levels expected.
154. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There are some good lessons. For example, in a Year 8 lesson on using the media to look at freedom of expression, the teacher made effective use of newspaper pictures of torture in Iraq to successfully stimulate high levels of interest, concentration and learning from pupils. In a Year 9 lesson dealing with 'Crimes and non-crimes', the teachers' competent behaviour management, brisk pace and good knowledge ensured high levels of pupil attention and participation, resulting in them developing a strong insight into the effect of crime on victims. In Years 10 and 11, citizenship is taught within other subjects and the citizenship element of lessons is too insubstantial and incidental. Lack of time allocated on the timetable means that some aspects are not covered in sufficient depth.
155. The curriculum manager provides satisfactory leadership. He has a clear view of the strengths and areas for development of the current provision. A detailed audit has been completed across all subjects but departments are not clear enough about the areas for which they are responsible and there is no co-ordination of assessment from different subjects to contribute to the overall record of progress being made by pupils.
156. There are some good elements within the citizenship programme for Years 7 to 9. This covers many important issues and gives the pupils the opportunity to be informed, to discuss topics and gain knowledge and understanding of aspects of society. Pupils are able to take part in the democratic process used to elect the school council and those pupils elected have a strong sense of responsibility and wish to make a difference to the school community.
157. The school has a structure which has the potential to deliver citizenship effectively. The teacher responsible has made a good start to planning the delivery with supporting documentation. A satisfactory foundation has been laid for further progress.
158. Citizenship was not inspected in 1998.

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	3
Value for money provided by the school	3
Overall standards achieved	4
Pupils' achievement	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	4
Attitudes	2
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	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	1
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	1
The school's links with other schools and colleges	1
The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	1
The leadership of the headteacher	1
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	3

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