

INSPECTION REPORT

FRIARS SCHOOL

Wellingborough

LEA area: Northamptonshire

Unique reference number: 130957

Headteacher: Patricia Norton

Lead inspector: Mike Kell

Dates of inspection: 20th – 22nd April 2004

Inspection number: 258900

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Type of school: | Special (moderate learning difficulties) |
| School category: | Community |
| Age range of pupils: | 11 - 16 years |
| Gender of pupils: | Mixed |
| Number on roll: | 128 |
| School address: | Friars Close Wellingborough Northamptonshire |
| Postcode: | NN8 2LA |
| Telephone number: | 01933 304950 |
| Fax number: | 01933 304951 |
| Appropriate authority: | Governing Body |
| Name of chair of governors: | Mr P Arnold |
| Date of previous inspection: | 22 nd – 26 th June 1998 |

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Friars has a designated roll of 140 pupils, which is significantly bigger than average for a school of this type and age range. Currently, 128 pupils attend the school and there are more than twice as many boys than girls. All pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Needs that identifies moderate learning difficulties as the major barrier to learning. However, there are a small number of pupils with autism and a similar number with severe learning difficulties. Pupils with these particular additional needs are taught as four separate classes; there is a designated class for each type of need in both Key Stage 3 (Years 7 to 9) and Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11). Because of the pupils' learning difficulties, their standards on entry to the school are below average. The school has a wide socio-economic mix in keeping with its intake from a wide geographical area. The vast majority of pupils have a White British background, with approximately 10 per cent having other ethnic backgrounds. All pupils have English as their first language. Very few pupils attend classes at a local mainstream school in order to extend their learning and to encourage their personal development, but a number in Years 10 and 11 attend local colleges.

The school has received a number of awards in recognition of its work. In 2002 it received the Sportsmark and a Schools Achievement Award, and a year later it was recognised as a Healthy School and was also awarded a Careermark. This year it has received a Nacemark for work in information and communication technology.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

| Members of the inspection team | | | Subject responsibilities |
|--------------------------------|------------------|----------------|--|
| 13101 | Mike Kell | Lead inspector | Music Physical education English as an additional language |
| 8937 | Howard Allen | Lay inspector | |
| 7465 | Richard Brent | Team inspector | Science History Geography |
| 2480 | Christine Gilder | Team inspector | Information and communication technology Religious education |
| 30243 | Anne Heakin | Team inspector | English Art and design French |
| 22178 | Kate Robertson | Team inspector | Mathematics Design and technology Personal, social and health education and citizenship Special educational needs |

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Friars is a **very effective** school that is excellently led and very well managed. Very good teaching promotes pupils' learning and they achieve very well. The very positive school ethos results in pupils behaving very well and having very good attitudes to their work. They make very good gains in all aspects of their personal development. The school provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The headteacher's vision for the school, its pupils, staff and community is outstanding, and is shared by key staff.
- Governance is very good and governors ensure that all statutory requirements are met.
- Very good relationships and the appropriate use of praise and encouragement underpin teachers' very high expectations of pupils' attitudes and behaviour.
- The school benefits from very strong support from parents.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are prepared very well for leaving school.
- Pupils' learning is extended very well through the use of community facilities and well through its links with mainstream schools and colleges.
- Not all teachers of mixed ability classes have the necessary skills to maintain the very good progress made by pupils with additional learning needs when they are taught in their specialist bases.
- There are excellent procedures for promoting very good attendance.
- Pupil performance data collected by the school is not collated, analysed and used effectively.
- Information and communication technology is not used consistently in lessons across the school as a whole.

The school has made very good improvement since the previous inspection, with progress having been made against all key issues. Many aspects of the curriculum have improved; the length of the taught week has increased, more accredited courses are offered to pupils in Years 10 and 11 and the overall curriculum is monitored effectively. Provision for new technology has improved significantly. There are now strong links between budgeting and strategic planning and so the school is better able to meet its priorities. Pupils' behaviour is now managed consistently and effective assessment procedures have been introduced.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

| Pupils' achievement at the end of: | In relation to individual targets in: | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Subjects of the curriculum | Personal and social education |
| Year 9 | Good | Very good |
| Year 11 | Very good | Very good |

Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent, very good, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory, poor, very poor.

Boys and girls of all ages, including those with additional learning needs, **achieve very well**. Pupils achieve very well in science, art and design, music, physical education, religious education, expressive arts and personal, social and health education (PSHE) in Years 7 - 11. They achieve well overall in English and mathematics, achieving very well in both subjects in Years 10 and 11. Achievement is also good in design and technology, history and French. Pupils' achievements are satisfactory in geography and information and communication technology (ICT) although pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve well in ICT. Pupils have many opportunities to follow a range of accredited courses that motivate them and provide appropriate degrees of challenge.

Pupils' personal development is very good: their attitudes and behaviour are very good. Pupils' attendance is very good and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a very good quality education for its pupils. **Teaching and learning are very good.** Skilled and knowledgeable teachers have very high expectations of pupils and manage their behaviour efficiently and with minimum fuss. Lessons are very well planned and orderly and pupils follow well established routines. The very high quality teamwork between teachers and very effective support learning assistants plays a very important role in promoting the learning of all pupils. Teachers however are sometimes less effective in using a variety of augmentative and additional communication systems consistently when pupils with autism are included in mixed ability classes. Assessment procedures are good overall.

The school provides a very good range of worthwhile curricular opportunities. There is a very good match of subject specialist teachers and very effective support learning assistants to the demands of the curriculum. A particularly effective curriculum programme for pupils in Years 10 and 11, including a careers programme and work experience, prepares them very well for leaving school. A varied and informative programme of visits supports classroom based learning very well. Very good accommodation and good resources meet the needs of a secondary school curriculum. A very good and comprehensive range of extra-curricular activities enriches the curriculum. Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is very good.

The school is extremely caring and offers a very high standard of care, welfare, and health and safety. Very well informed support, advice and guidance are made available to all pupils as they progress through the school. The school involves pupils well by seeking their views.

The school enjoys very good links with parents and carers that contribute positively to pupils' learning and development. There are very good links with the community and good links with other schools and local colleges.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The **leadership** of the headteacher is **excellent** and that of other key staff **is very good**. Governance of the school is **good** and governors ensure that they fulfil their statutory obligations. The effectiveness of **management is very good**.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are unanimous in agreeing that their children like attending Friars. They overwhelmingly agree that the school seeks their views and takes account of their suggestions and concerns. Pupils enjoy going to school and participate enthusiastically in what the school has to offer.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Devise and implement a programme of further training for all staff in meeting the learning and communication needs of pupils with severe learning difficulties, autism and its related conditions.
- Analyse the performance of different groups of pupils and carry out routine comparisons of performance between different classes and in different subjects.
- Continue to develop methods of recording achievement and progress in ICT capability in different subjects and extend the software and additional equipment to support learning and communication for those pupils with the most complex additional needs.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Overall, in relation to their prior levels of attainment and capability, pupils of all ages achieve very well and make very good progress. Boys and girls make similarly very good progress and those with additional learning needs achieve equally well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There have been good and, in the case of some subjects very good, improvements in standards of achievement since the last inspection.
- An increase in the number and range of accredited courses motivates pupils in Years 10 and 11 and provides appropriate degrees of challenge.
- Pupils in all years achieve very well and reach very high standards in their personal development.
- Pupils with additional learning needs achieve very well when taught in specialist groups but do not always make the same very good progress when they are included in other classes because not all teachers have the necessary skills.
- Pupils' literacy skills are promoted well through different subjects of the curriculum. Their numeracy and ICT skills are developed satisfactorily.
- Pupils' learning is extended very well through the use of community facilities and well through its links with mainstream schools and colleges.

Commentary

1. The school's commitment to raising pupils' achievements, and its success in doing so, was recognised by the receipt of a School Achievement Award in 2002. Pupils achieve very well in science, art and design, music, physical education, religious education, expressive arts and PSHE. They make good progress overall in English and mathematics, although in both subjects pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve very well. Achievement is also good in design and technology, history and French. Pupils' achievements are satisfactory in geography and ICT although pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve well in ICT. Overall, these standards represent significant improvements on the findings from the previous inspection when achievements were judged as no better than satisfactory, or worse, in all subjects except art and design, physical education and science in Years 10 and 11. The improvements in science, ICT, French, music, religious education and physical education have been particularly impressive.

2. Pupils with additional special educational needs, such as autism and severe learning difficulties, in all year groups achieve very well overall. They spend much of their time in discrete classes where specialist teachers meet their needs extremely well. Generally, when they are included in other classes they achieve equally well but, occasionally, teachers do not have the necessary skills required to ensure that this very good achievement occurs in all lessons in all subjects. Extremely effective support learning assistants are an important factor in ensuring that these pupils participate fully in lessons and are included in all activities.

3. A key issue at the time of the last inspection was to provide additional opportunities for pupils to follow accredited courses in Years 10 and 11. The school has worked hard in this area and now offers Certificate of Educational Achievement (Entry Level) accreditation in nearly all subjects and, additionally, General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses are now being provided in mathematics and science. Lower attaining pupils gain suitable accreditation for their work through ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) and they have been successful at

both Bronze and Silver Challenge levels. These courses motivate pupils and provide appropriate degrees of challenge and the most recent results show that, on average, pupils achieved eight Entry Level certificates. These figures represented a 15 per cent improvement on the previous year's results and reflect the improving standards that pupils are achieving.

4. Strong links with other schools and colleges provide opportunities for pupils to succeed in subjects, or areas of learning, that are not available at Friars. Currently, only one pupil is following GCSE courses at a local school but all Year 10 pupils attend 'taster' courses at local colleges in subjects such as carpentry, plumbing and vehicle maintenance. Some Year 11 pupils, for whom a work-based curriculum is most appropriate, continue these courses. Pupils achieve well in these situations and receive certification from the colleges for their success. Pupils achieve very well when they go out into the community. In particular, the very effective community placement in Year 10 and work experience programmes in Year 11 give pupils opportunities to develop specific skills and to practice personal qualities like collaborative working.

5. The promotion of pupils' personal development is a key feature of the school's aims. This is evident in its ethos and all the work that it does. The school is able to provide external accreditations in this area too. For instance, it offers a Junior Sports Leaders Award, accredited by the British Sports Trust, and 'Top Link', which recognises pupils working together to plan and facilitate a sports festival, such as a primary school sports day. Pupils are involved in setting their personal targets, which are recorded in clear and well written individual education plans (IEPs). Pupils make very good progress in achieving these. The school's very good provision for PSHE provides more formal, planned opportunities to promote all aspects of personal development. The school uses these opportunities very well, particularly in terms of developing situations in which pupils feel confident and comfortable about expressing their views and feelings.

6. Pupils have good language and literacy skills. In addition to English lessons, skilled teachers ensure that pupils' language and literacy skills are promoted well through other subjects of the curriculum. They provide extensive opportunities for pupils to improve all elements of communication; to rehearse speaking and listening skills through well managed discussions; to read and acquire key subject vocabulary through the use of dictionaries, reference books and the Internet; and to write in different styles. Pupils' mathematical skills are good, and at times teachers are equally effective in supporting pupils' learning of mathematical skills through other subjects of the curriculum, such as using measurements in design and food technology and reading scales in science. However, generally planning does not identify sufficiently well opportunities when numeracy skills can be developed or reinforced. Pupils have good competence in ICT, but this results more from the way they develop new skills in discrete lessons rather than teachers' planned and effective promotion of ICT across the curriculum.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

7. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Attendance is very good and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attendance is very good because there are excellent procedures for promoting good attendance.
- Pupils' behaviour is very good
- Pupils have very good attitudes. They enjoy coming to school and participate enthusiastically in all activities on offer.
- Relationships between pupils, and with staff, are very good.
- Pupils are courteous and respectful and show developing confidence and self esteem.
- Pupils are very aware of right from wrong.

Commentary

8. Attendance levels are much improved since the last inspection. The school works extremely hard to encourage all pupils to attend regularly and to engage the small minority who have a poor attendance record. Parents and carers support the school very well in ensuring their children attend unless they are unwell. Punctuality is very good because the transport is efficient and brings pupils to school in good time. Therefore, they arrive at school calm, settled and ready to learn. They listen carefully to instructions, try hard with their work and take pride in their achievements. Many are able to maintain concentration and work hard because they are interested in what they are doing. The very positive interaction that pupils have with staff means that they are well motivated to learn and respond enthusiastically.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

| Authorised absence | | Unauthorised absence | |
|--------------------|-------|----------------------|------|
| School data | 7.8% | School data | 1.9% |
| National data | 10.8% | National data | 0.6% |

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

9. The school has addressed very successfully the key issue identified at the last inspection that behaviour management should be consistent across the school. The coloured card system that teachers use is understood by pupils and implemented consistently across the school. As a result, pupils believe that it ensures that the few incidents of poor behaviour that do occur are dealt with quickly and fairly. Pupils are aware of what is expected of them and consider any sanctions imposed on the few pupils who have difficulties are fair. Exclusions are used appropriately, as a last resort when there is judged to be a risk to other pupils or staff. In addition, the school now employs a merit system that involves the allocation of points at the end of each lesson. Pupils understand and value this system because it recognises their work and effort and is implemented consistently across the school. Therefore, they respond well to it and it has been very influential in driving forward the significant improvement in pupils' attitudes and behaviour since the last inspection.

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 | 114 | 10 | 1 |
| Black or Black British - Caribbean | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Black or Black British - African | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Black or Black British – any other Black background | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Mixed background | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Information not obtained | 6 | 0 | 0 |

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

10. Pupils make very good progress in their personal development as a result of the school's very positive ethos. This represents significant improvement since the last inspection. Pupils happily undertake duties in the classroom and around the school. Pupils' social development is promoted very well. They understand very well the responsibilities of living in their school community and are proud to belong to Friars School. Routinely, they get out and put away their own work, get resources for other pupils and clear away after events such as assemblies. Many willingly help to

make tea and toast during social time sessions and hand these around to their classmates. Many opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their confidence and social skills and these have a positive effect on developing self-esteem. As a result, many pupils are able to work independently with little supervision and, at other times, they work co-operatively in pairs or small groups.

11. Regular assemblies have a weekly theme and this provides opportunities for pupils to reflect on moral and social issues. In addition, pupils develop spiritually because they are treated with respect by staff, which develops in them a sense of self-worth and identity. Pupils' moral development is very good. They have a clear understanding of right from wrong and many are able to articulate some of the injustices that exist in society today.

12. Most show respect for the feelings of others and, through lessons, visits and visitors into school, they are beginning to gain an understanding of their own culture as well as the cultures and beliefs of others. Therefore, they are beginning to appreciate the multi-cultural diversity that exists in society today but opportunities to promote multi-cultural awareness are not always planned or seized upon.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Teaching and learning

13. Teaching is very good overall. Therefore, pupils learn very well and make very good progress. Lessons also make a very good contribution to pupils' personal development. Assessment procedures are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers know their pupils, and their needs, very well. Pupils learn at a very fast rate as a result.
- Very good relationships and the appropriate use of praise and encouragement underpin teachers' excellent promotion of pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour.
- Very strong teamwork means that support learning assistants make a powerful contribution to pupils' learning.
- Teachers have very good knowledge of the subjects they teach.
- Detailed lesson planning enables pupils to be provided with activities that build on their prior learning.
- Resources are used very well so that pupils are motivated and involved.
- When pupils with additional needs are included in other classes, not all teachers use appropriate teaching and communication strategies and provide suitable work to meet their individual learning needs.

Commentary

14. Lessons have very many strengths and are very rewarding experiences for pupils. Skilled and knowledgeable teachers are extremely well prepared and classrooms are organised and structured. Teachers have extremely high expectations of pupils and they manage their behaviour efficiently and with minimum fuss and this is underpinned by the quality of relationships, encouragement and trust that feature in all lessons. Lessons are orderly and pupils understand, and follow, well established routines. Therefore, they settle very quickly, listen carefully to what they are asked to do and respond positively and amiably. As a result, time is used very efficiently as lessons are busy sessions during which pupils try very hard, approaching their work with very impressive interest and enthusiasm. When merit points are awarded at the end of lessons, they are allocated routinely, fairly and without argument. Pupils have a perceptive understanding of their own performance and behaviour.

15. Lessons are very well planned. Plans have clear aims that are based on pupils' targets and therefore interesting activities are provided that are appropriate to their age, interests and abilities.

16. The plans identify what pupils are expected to learn and show clearly the activities that have been chosen to develop subject-specific skills, knowledge and understanding. Lessons are well structured in three parts, an introduction followed by the main teaching activity and a final plenary session teachers generally use well to evaluate pupils' learning. Frequently, pupils are further motivated by teachers' choice and use of good quality learning resources.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 58 lessons

| Excellent | Very good | Good | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Poor | Very Poor |
|-----------|-----------|----------|--------------|----------------|--------|-----------|
| 5 (9%) | 19 (33%) | 27 (46%) | 7 (12%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) | 0 (0%) |

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

17. The very good achievements that pupils show owe much to the quality, range and expertise of the adults who work exceptionally well together as teams. The very high quality teamwork between teachers and very effective support learning assistants plays a very important role in promoting the learning of all pupils.

18. In addition to providing many opportunities for pupils to make academic progress, teachers are committed to developing their personal qualities too. They are able to do this because they have good understanding of their pupils' targets. Therefore, they provide activities that require pupils to work independently, such as researching information on the Internet, as well as paired work and in small groups. Pupils collaborate well at these times, whether they are developing throwing technique in physical education, developing small performances associated with role play in expressive arts lessons or working together discussing topics such as domestic violence in PSHE. Lessons also make a strong contribution to promoting pupils' communication skills. There are good opportunities for pupils to speak and listen in all classes; adults are skilled at conducting oral sessions when they both give information and use questions to probe for evidence of learning. Many discussions take place in lessons and so pupils get used to expressing their own views orally and listening to those of others and develop increasing maturity in doing so. The school is less effective in using a variety of augmentative and additional communication systems, such as signing and symbols, consistently and efficiently when pupils with autism are included in lessons outside their main class bases.

19. Assessment is good overall, better than at the time of the last inspection, and is now well coordinated. The school assesses pupils thoroughly on entry and staff use the information well to identify suitable targets and to plan pupils' future work. They record a wealth of information about the levels that pupils reach, particularly in English, mathematics and science, to provide profiles of pupils' progress. As well as using information to create targets for pupils and to monitor their progress, it shares this information with them so that they can become involved in their own learning. However, senior managers do not yet fully use the information collected to give a clearer picture of overall trends and comparisons in areas such as behaviour, personal development and academic achievement of different groups.

The curriculum

20. The school provides a very good range of worthwhile curricular opportunities. Opportunities for additional activities outside the school day are very good. Very good accommodation and good resources meet the needs of a secondary school curriculum. Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There has been good, or very good, improvement in provision in most subjects.
- The school provides very good opportunities for learning outside the school day.

- The use of specialists as teachers and curriculum managers is improving the curriculum and the management of subjects.
- The curriculum needs of pupils with additional special needs are well met.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are provided with a very good careers and work related programme.
- Very good specialist accommodation and good resources are used well.

Commentary

21. At the last inspection, there were inadequacies in English, mathematics, geography, ICT, music and PSHE and the overall balance of the curriculum was distorted. Now, the national strategies for literacy and numeracy for pupils in Years 7 to 9 have been implemented appropriately across the school and are they are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' achievement in English and mathematics. The school has on roll a number of pupils with autism and severe learning disabilities but it works very hard, and successfully, to ensure that these pupils have equal opportunity to enjoy the wide range of curricular opportunities that are available and appropriate to their needs and interests. The quality of the curriculum has also improved because curriculum managers have developed more effective long term plans that enable pupils to follow a more balanced and broad curriculum, and teaching time has increased.

22. Improvements in the quality of staffing have also helped to raise the curriculum provision provided by the school. The match of teachers to subjects has improved since the last inspection and is now very good and pupils benefit from being taught by teachers with high quality subject knowledge. Similarly, subjects are generally led and managed by effective specialist curriculum managers and this has had a significant impact on improving the quality of learning opportunities. The experience, knowledge and expertise of support learning assistants continue to be strengths of the school. They play a key role in planning, alongside teachers, and are therefore able to ensure that pupils' individual targets are addressed consistently. Their effectiveness is maintained very well through ongoing training in, for example, the use of ICT.

23. Accommodation is very good. The whole site is clean, tidy, well maintained and accessible. The classrooms are of good size, with well-lit and pleasant rooms for pupils and teachers to work in. There is a very good range of specialist rooms so practical subjects such as science and design and technology can be taught effectively. The only exception is the computer suite, which is cramped and restricting for those pupils who have severe learning difficulties. The library is welcoming, centrally placed with easy access for all pupils; the school recognises and is addressing the limited choice of interesting and up-to-date books and magazines. The quality of resources is good overall and very good in art, science, physical education, ICT and textiles. The good use of the community swimming pool and leisure centre enhances the physical education provision.

24. There is a particularly effective curriculum programme for pupils in Years 10 and 11 and therefore they are prepared very well for leaving school. As a result, they are able to make very well informed choices and decisions. Very effective provision for PSHE and very well planned links with the community, such as for work experience, and local colleges equip pupils with the personal, vocational and academic skills to enter employment or continue with their education. Links with other schools are less effective in meeting the curriculum needs of individual pupils. Currently, only one pupil has a planned inclusion programme in a mainstream school.

25. A very good and comprehensive range of extra-curricular activities, including sports and the arts, enriches the curriculum. A breakfast club offers a good preparation for many pupils before they start their lessons for the day, and pupils are able to opt to attend a variety of lunchtime clubs, such as sports, ICT or board games. Some year groups can also attend the 'after hours club' which runs weekly, in five week blocks, until 7.00 pm. This provides them with many opportunities to experience a wide and varied range of activities. Participation in sport is particularly strong, with many fixtures and competitions with local schools.

26. A range of informative visits supports classroom based learning well and pupils visit a wide variety of museums, churches, galleries and places of local interest. These visits contribute very

well to the school's very good PSHE provision. The school is committed to promoting pupils' personal development and, therefore, it places great emphasis on developing these skills. Many lessons and activities help to do this but lessons in PSHE do this particularly well as they encourage pupils' personal development in a formal way. Long term planning ensures that topics, including all elements of citizenship, are covered progressively as pupils move through the school although the daily 'social time' has not been incorporated into this overall planning. Therefore, although valuable sessions, there are not yet clear formal links between them and the PSHE programme.

Care, guidance and support

27. The provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety is very good. Pupils are provided with very good quality support, advice and guidance. The school involves pupils well by seeking their views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good awareness of health and safety requirements.
- Very good quality care for all pupils by all staff in the school.
- Good induction arrangements are in place for pupils new to the school.
- Very good quality careers education and guidance.
- Very good relationships mean that pupils are confident when seeking advice from staff.
- Staff awareness training in child protection is not updated routinely.
- The support and guidance for pupils with additional special needs is very good.

Commentary

28. All aspects of pupil support, guidance and welfare have improved significantly since the last inspection. Parents are very pleased with the levels of care their children receive in school and pupils confirm they feel safe and well looked after. Child protection issues are the responsibility of the headteacher, who is appropriately trained and ensures procedures are correctly followed. However, given the recent high level of staff turnover, the school needs to better ensure that all staff receive regular child protection awareness training.

29. The school is a safe place for pupils and staff. Regular safety audits are conducted and any remedial or preventative action required is carried out promptly. The school and grounds are kept in a very clean condition and as a result the school environment is respected by pupils. Pupils' welfare is looked after very well, with efficient recording systems to ensure any accidents are properly monitored and parents informed as appropriate. Risk assessments are conducted within school and for all journeys, and the procedures for supporting such visits are extremely detailed. Details of routes taken, contact numbers for staff in charge of the group and contact numbers of parents of all the children are recorded in all cases.

30. The relationships teaching staff have with their pupils are very impressive and pupils confirm they can trust staff to help them if they are unhappy or troubled. The school employs a very effective mentoring system, and pupils confirm they appreciate this system which enables them to talk through any problems they may have with their link member of staff. The school places a high priority on pupils' personal development needs. Pupils are set appropriate social behaviour targets to enable them to better cope with, or respond to, situations. Effective monitoring ensures that any success pupils have in meeting their targets is acknowledged and new, more challenging targets, are set as soon as possible. This helps all pupils mature and develop their personal skills in readiness for leaving school. The monitoring and support for pupils with additional special needs within their class bases is very good. Targets on individual education plans are relevant and are used to address both learning and behavioural difficulties very well. Progress against these targets is monitored well and pupils' progress is assessed effectively through the use of appropriate and relevant records and pupil consultation.

31. In partnership with the Connexions Service, the school provides older pupils with very good guidance about the options available to them when they leave school. A very effective careers education programme, highly organised work experience placements, taster courses at local colleges and parental involvement all combine to give pupils as much information as possible.

32. Induction arrangements for pupils new to the school are very good and so they settle in quickly and smoothly. The school is sensitive to the fact that pupils who join after the normal start of school year, or transfer later from other areas, can be very apprehensive and so Individual induction plans are arranged to ease their admission. However, the school has had little success in integrating pupils back into a mainstream education setting and so few pupils who could benefit from curriculum opportunities, such as GCSE courses in specific subjects, are currently able to do so.

33. The school involves pupils well. They are consulted at review time and have an input to any targets they have to achieve. An active school council meets regularly and considers many issues about the life of the school and the school does act on some of its suggestions. However, there is no formal process for regularly gathering the views of the whole school population.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

34. The school's links with parents and carers are very good. There are very good links with the community and good links with other schools and local colleges. The school does not provide any outreach support to teachers in mainstream schools.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school enjoys very good links with parents and carers that contribute positively to pupils' learning and development.
- Parents receive very high quality information about the school and their children.
- Local facilities are used very effectively and the local community supports the school very well in the work that it does.
- Effective links with local colleges help to prepare pupils well for leaving school, but inclusion links with local schools are very limited.

Commentary

35. Parents support for the school has improved since the last inspection. They now have a very positive view of the school and are overwhelmingly very satisfied with all aspects of its provision. This improved partnership with parents has had a positive impact on the quality of education pupils enjoy.

36. The quality of the annual progress reports parents receive about their children are of a very high standard. These reports give very detailed information about what their children know, understand and can do. The reporting of the number of targets pupils achieve gives parents a good understanding of how their children are progressing and the sharing of future targets enables parents to support their children's learning and development at home. The home/school and working together booklets enable parents to keep in touch with teachers and to help with their children's education at home. In addition to these routine communication and general information letters, parents receive a regular newsletter celebrating the school's successes. The Friends of Friars group provides parents with opportunities to visit the school and also helps raise important funds. Parents enjoy being able to meet socially and appreciate the benefit to their children any money raised brings; resources such as digital cameras and play equipment have been financed by The Friends.

37. The school makes good use of its location and pupils benefit from many planned trips out to local shops, libraries, churches and leisure centres. Visitors into school from the local community also demonstrate the effectiveness of these links. For example, representatives from the police, ambulance and other local services attend the school's Community Day. There is a lot of

community support for the school and it enjoys strong and productive links with the local business community. The work-related learning manager plays a leading role in maintaining these links. A wide range of employers willingly provides valuable work experience placements for older pupils and they also contribute to Young Enterprise schemes. Their loyalty to the school reflects the positive nature of their experiences with pupils and the high number of local organisations, including some national chains, that support the school reflect the high standing the school has within the local community.

38. The school maintains good links with its primary feeder schools. The well-planned induction for new pupils and parents begins in the summer term before pupils enter Year 7 and helps to smooth the transition to secondary school. The school makes effective use of its budget to further its partnership with two local colleges for Year 10 and 11 pupils to experience a variety of taster courses. These good links ensure that all pupils who leave the school after Year 11 have a worthwhile destination, either in employment or further education. Although the school has made a strenuous effort to forge links with mainstream schools in order to provide pupils with opportunities for learning and personal development, these have proved largely unsuccessful and remains an area for development. Currently only one pupil attends classes in another school.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

39. The headteacher's leadership is excellent. Governance is very good and governors ensure that all statutory requirements are met. The leadership provided by other key staff and the management of the school are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher's vision for the school, its pupils, staff and community is outstanding, and is shared by key staff.
- All staff are exceptionally good role models for pupils.
- Governors and staff work very closely together and have brought about a range of very good improvements since the last inspection.
- Financial management is extremely efficient.
- The development and support of staff at all levels is first rate.
- Further training is needed for all staff to help them meet the complex needs of pupils who are increasingly included in mixed ability classes.
- The management, recruitment, deployment and retention of staff are particularly effective.
- The leadership team does not yet fully utilise the performance data it collects in focusing and refining the remaining improvement priorities.

Commentary

40. Friars school is exceptionally well led. The headteacher's approach to leadership of her staff, pupils and governors is an inspiration to them all. She has absolute clarity of vision for the school's further development and all staff share it wholeheartedly. Staff trust her integrity and judgement; she is respected for the quality and depth of her educational knowledge and her understanding of pupils' personal and learning needs. Her focus is always on raising the standards of pupils' achievement and preparation for adult life. This has led to impressive and continuous improvements in examination results. Her commitment to inclusion within the school, and beyond it in mainstream schools, is outstanding, and she is clear about additional strategies to try to increase the opportunities available in local schools, which are currently very limited.

41. The school's success has been achieved through the strong partnership between the headteacher, staff and governors. Together, they share the headteacher's vision of excellence and of the means to achieve it. Leadership is shared by everyone at Friars. The leadership team was expanded in September 2003 following the deputy headteacher's secondment to another school. The acting assistant headteachers and other members of management team share and promote the

headteacher's vision and priorities and are highly effective in their roles. Staff at every level are strongly encouraged to bring forward creative ideas for improvement. Very well qualified and experienced support learning assistants feel valued as full partners in all that the school does.

42. Governors provide invaluable support to identify and secure the resources needed for the continuous change that has characterised the years since the last inspection. The governing body is very well led, with a range of additional expertise amongst its members. This enables close and high calibre scrutiny of all issues and proposals by the sub-committees. The aspects of improvement that have dominated recent years – personnel re-structuring, increasing learning resources and site development have been planned for, and funded, very efficiently. Governors are very well informed about the school's performance and the quality of management.

43. All staff benefit from the headteacher's commitment to their professional and personal development. She is very adept at identifying potential at all levels in the school and providing the challenge and support for people to realise it. This enriches practice, increases staff commitment to the school still further and helps raise standards for pupils. Her imagination and skills in managing the deployment of staff since the last reorganisation enables the governors to be rightly confident that the staff profile now matches the learning and personal needs of pupils. The school's commitment to integrating the pupils with increasingly complex needs into ordinary classes is developing well. It is now appropriate to devise and implement a programme of further training for all staff in meeting the learning and communication needs of pupils with severe learning difficulties, autism and its related conditions.

44. School self evaluation is good at present, but the leadership team does not yet fully utilise the performance data it collects to focus and refine the remaining improvement priorities. The school collects a range of data about pupils' performance in subjects and external examinations. In addition, the school has been piloting an approach to analysing information about incidents involving pupils who have difficulties with behaviour or interaction with others. However, the school does not yet analyse the performance of groups of pupils by their key disability, ethnicity and gender and nor does it carry out routine comparisons of performance between different classes and in different subjects. New approaches to recording and analysing performance data are being led by one of the leadership team and the ICT curriculum manager but other dimensions also need to be considered. Although the range of pupils' learning needs has widened, the leadership team does not yet routinely compare these pupils' performance in specialist and inclusive settings. Therefore, the team does not have robust information that pupils experience the same quality of teaching at all times. They also need to identify a broader range of measures of the school's work to include in its data analysis. This could include more structured means of measuring parents' and pupils' responses, rates of internal and external inclusion and pupils' success in meeting IEP targets.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

| Income and expenditure (£) | |
|----------------------------|---------|
| Total income | 1255045 |
| Total expenditure | 1245484 |
| Expenditure per pupil | 8896 |

| Balances (£) | |
|--|-------|
| Balance from previous year | 48790 |
| Balance carried forward to the next year | 58351 |

45. The school's financial management and control are outstanding. At the time of the last audit, in November 2002, it was only the second school in the local authority to have received a report with no areas of weakness. The school employs the principles of best value very well in its spending decisions and in the way it monitors the impact of this spending on raising pupils' achievements. The value for money it provides is therefore very good.

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

46. Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- The subject manager is conscientious in developing the English curriculum in line with national developments.
- Pupil achievement by the end of Year 11 is very good.
- The analysis and use of good assessment information is insufficient.
- Resources are good overall, but the library lacks a sufficiently varied range of appropriate books and magazines.

Commentary

47. The appropriate combination of basic skills teaching and the development of pupils' appreciation of novels, plays and poetry result in pupils making good progress overall, although pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve very well. The very good achievement of pupils in Year 11 is due to the structured approach to external accreditation and very good teaching. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils and the very good teamwork between teachers and support learning assistants mean that behaviour is managed well, resulting in very good learning. Lessons start promptly, resources are well prepared and pupils settle quickly to their tasks.

48. Achievement in speaking and listening is good. Throughout the school, adults are good models in the way they speak to each other and to the pupils. The sensitive way teachers and support learning assistants encourage discussion encourages pupils to take turns and listen to each other. Their ability to explain and discuss improves as they progress through the school so that by the time they reach Year 11 most pupils are confident communicators. Within the life skills programme, pupils who have severe learning difficulties have special sessions to help with their social communication, emphasis being placed on role-play such as using the telephone. The daily social time sessions provide a relaxed atmosphere and very good opportunities for informal discussion about topical events. Pupils are friendly and happy to talk about their work and to help visitors to find their way around school.

49. Pupils' attitudes to reading are good in all years and they achieve well. When appropriate, teachers make very good use of simplified texts and role-play so pupils who have severe learning difficulties can understand and learn about the characters, such as in *Animal Farm* or *Romeo and Juliet*. Year 7 pupils showed positive attitudes to books, explaining competently why they would select a particular text by the appearance of the front cover and confidently reading the back cover information about their new book, *Cliffhanger*. Pupils explore a suitable range of texts including poetry, fiction and plays. Prior to reading the story of *Anne Frank's Diary*, pupils in Year 9 responded empathetically to photographs and poetry based on the holocaust, reading to the class their adjectives based on sadness and anger. Reading is not limited to stories; Year 10 pupils select and analyse magazine adverts, discussing the impact of slogans and graphics in persuading people to purchase the items. Year 11 pupils were thoughtful and attentive in their reading of *Mid-term Break* by Seamus Heaney, and through discussions and annotation of the poem they came to appreciate the feelings of personal loss expressed by the poet. The school successfully promotes reading not only in lessons but also by making the library available during lunchtime. Pupils are free to sit and browse, change books and videos, use the computers or work with the librarian to make book

reviews. The curriculum manager and the support learning assistant with responsibility for the library have been successful in further developing an interest in books by helping a number of pupils to join the local public library.

50. Achievement in writing is good. Good use is made of ICT to motivate pupils and encourage them to redraft their work. Lower attaining pupils learn to form the letters of their names, progressing to writing simple sentences. As they move through the school higher attaining pupils develop clear, legible writing. Writing becomes more sophisticated as pupils progress from writing about themselves to using texts such as *Goodnight Mr Tom* and *The Elephant Man* as inspiration for writing creatively. By the end of Year 11, pupils have learnt the protocols of letter writing and writing in diary form, know how to write balanced arguments showing, for instance, the pros and cons of boxing, and how to take notes during discussions to use in extended writing. They use the Internet to research information to help form their views about moral issues, such as capital punishment and the behaviour of football fans. The focus for Year 11 pupils is on the world of work and pupils are encouraged to use and develop their literacy skills in recording their work experience placements, producing a curriculum vitae and writing letters of application for jobs.

51. Teaching is very good. All adults are constantly alert to pupils' learning needs and are ready to prompt or question as necessary. This means that although many pupils have very limited levels of concentration, they remain focused on their tasks for increasing lengths of time and learn very effectively. Teachers combine high expectations with interesting and challenging activities that motivate pupils of all abilities. Very lively questioning and the very effective use of simple clear language typify the teaching for pupils with autism. The very good use of the plenary session enabled these pupils to appreciate their new knowledge of 'sensible sentences' and they 'glowed with pride' because they knew they had achieved so well.

52. Leadership and management of the subject are good and despite a number of teachers teaching the subject, curriculum balance and progressive learning is maintained throughout the school. The curriculum manager monitors pupils' progress and the teaching of English and has a very good understanding of the strengths of the subject and areas for further development. The outcome of this work is evident in the increasing percentages of higher level examination grades at the end of Year 11. There are good quality sets of books to support the range of learning needs in all aspects of the English curriculum and good use is made of ICT to encourage and interest pupils in their English work. Improvement since the last inspection is good, but there is scope for more analytical use of assessment data to further improve teaching and learning and build on the current good progress being shown.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

53. This is good. There are good opportunities for pupils to speak and listen in all classes. Pupils read and write in other lessons and adults are adept at encouraging pupils to communicate their thoughts and ideas. Teachers link literacy to other subjects, for example combining the study of *Goodnight Mr Tom* with life during World War II, labelling plant diagrams and recording the results of scientific experiments.

French

54. The school provides French for pupils in years 7 to 9, although a significant number in Year 9 have been formally disapplied from studying the subject through amendment of their Statement of Educational Needs. Insufficient lessons were seen during the inspection to form overall judgements on achievement, teaching and learning.

55. In the lessons sampled, teaching and learning were good and typified by a sense of fun, enjoyment and enthusiasm. An appropriate emphasis was placed on oral work, with pupils replying promptly and confidently to the greetings as they come into the classroom. Year 8 pupils were enthusiastic; happy to recall the names of colours they had learned earlier and to count to ten. They extended their vocabulary well as they learnt the names of shops and enjoyed handling and learning

the value of the Euro notes brought in by their teacher. Pupils learned with some surprise that words can be very similar in both languages. Pupils in Year 9 were equally enthusiastic as they learned to name the parts of the body. The classes are well managed by the teacher and oral work is consolidated well by written tasks.

MATHEMATICS

56. Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' achievement is good overall, and accredited courses at Years 10 and 11 are challenging and motivating pupils.
- Very good relationships between staff and pupils promote good learning.
- Using and applying mathematical skills within lessons, and across the curriculum, is not yet planned systematically.
- The subject is well led and managed and developments are planned well.
- There is insufficient use of ICT to reinforce and extend learning.

Commentary

57. Provision in mathematics has improved well since the previous inspection. This is due in part to the way in which an effective curriculum manager has adapted the principles of the National Numeracy Strategy for pupils in Years 7 to 9. Teachers put these principles into practice well, so that lessons are well structured with a three-part format that includes well-paced introductions, carefully chosen activities, and effective plenary sessions that establish the degree of pupils' learning. This, together with the clear planning of the curriculum, results in good learning by most pupils. Achievement is good by the end of Year 9 and, by the end of Year 11 many pupils are gaining accreditation in GCSE and Entry Level examinations and their achievement is very good.

58. Lessons are well planned and teachers' high expectations are clearly established. Teachers plan lessons effectively and prepare a wide range of resources well, using materials matched to the abilities of the pupils. For example, Year 9 pupils with autism were effectively challenged to recognise and calculate the area of simple shapes, accurately recording their findings, supported by careful questioning and well-designed examples. In another Year 9 group, pupils consolidated their understanding of fractions using paper strips and were able to recognise that fractions are several parts of a whole by the end of the lesson. Pupils are very proud of their achievement and they evidently enjoy the tasks and the success they achieve. Lessons in Years 10 and 11 focus on individual pupils' needs and prepares them well for examinations. All pupils are fully included in lessons, although progress rates do differ according to their level of understanding and how the work is presented to them. Tasks given to pupils with severe learning difficulties and autism, when taught within their class groups, are structured well and any small gains in learning are noted. However, when these pupils are included in lessons with other classes, individual learning styles are not always considered sufficiently closely to ensure even more effective progress in learning.

59. One significant feature that strengthens teaching is the very good relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils are well supported by all staff and, as a result, they develop the confidence and skills to make good progress in their learning. They develop the self-assurance to contribute in the plenary sessions of the lesson, or to ask for help. Staff are skilled in asking individuals questions that differ in their level of challenge; this helps to involve all pupils and is effective in assessing their knowledge and understanding. However, ICT is not being used enough to support learning in mathematics; it was rarely seen being used by pupils during the inspection despite good examples to be seen in records where the digital camera had been used successfully to record the achievement of pupils. These procedures support the subject's good assessment arrangements. The tracking of pupils' progress is now more rigorous and developing well, which is an improvement since the previous inspection when assessment was found to be lacking in detail.

Mathematics across the curriculum

60. Overall, pupils' numeracy skills are developed satisfactorily across the curriculum but they are not always given structured and planned opportunities to rehearse, use and apply their mathematical skills in other subjects. There are examples of numeracy skills being promoted well, such as pupils counting runs in physical education, using measurements in design and food technology and reading scales in science, but generally planning does not identify sufficiently well opportunities when numeracy skills can be developed or reinforced.

SCIENCE

61. Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in accredited examinations are improving rapidly and achievement is very good.
- Teaching and learning are very good, with many excellent features.
- Pupils' conscientious attitudes and behaviour enhance their learning very well.
- The curriculum manager provides very good leadership and management
- Investigative skills are developed extremely well and develop pupils into confident young scientists.

Commentary

62. Pupils' achievement in the subject is very good throughout the school. There has been a very good improvement since the previous inspection. This is due to the appointment of a subject specialist who has revitalized teaching and learning and other features of the provision. Very good leadership and management have resulted in a much improved curriculum, better resources and enhanced assessment procedures which motivate and encourage pupils. All staff share a commitment to improving further pupils' standards of achievement in science and the outlook for the subject is good.

63. In Years 7 to 9, pupils develop very good understanding and knowledge of many aspects of the living and non-living worlds. In addition, they develop very many skills in scientific inquiry because they are provided with many opportunities to experience practical work. These activities require them to design, plan and carry out their own practical investigations. Examples were seen where they designed parachutes to prevent eggs breaking on impact, experimented to find which soft drink caused most damage to their teeth and worked out their respective lung capacities. In Years 10 and 11, standards of achievement are equally impressive and boys and girls achieve equally very well. A sustained focus on investigative work, such as an experiment on how energy is transferred, maintains pupils' interest and further develops their scientific expertise, knowledge and understanding. Consequently, the interesting range of activities and the brisk pace of learning during Years 10 and 11 contribute very well to pupils' very good preparation for their GCSE examination.

64. Teaching and learning are very good across the school. Teachers use their excellent knowledge of the subject to engage pupils' active interest and to ensure that learning proceeds rapidly and progressively. Lessons have a well-planned and structured range of stimulating activities that engross pupils in the subject and motivate them to work very productively. Consequently, pupils' attitudes and behaviour are always very good. Teachers' high expectations and the level of challenge offered mean that pupils grasp new ideas quickly and make very good progress. The very good use of resources, including the contribution of the specialist science technician, enables teachers to provide further support and encouragement for pupils' learning.

65. Teaching of the very highest quality, illustrating all of these features, was evident when a Year 7 class considered forces. Expertly managed, fun activities resulted in learning of the very highest

quality. Following a cartoon-based demonstration using new technology, pupils were invited to twist off the tops of lemonade bottles, which had been carefully glued down to make this 'impossible'. However, one boy succeeded twice and the teacher was able to turn this unexpected and amusing event to good use by explaining about forces before giving a practical demonstration, with apples, of Newton's discovery of gravity. Scientific skills such as prediction and the application of a 'fair test' were reinforced when pupils attempted to see who could exert most pressure on the Newtonmeter. Amidst much controlled excitement, every pupil had a turn and had their score recorded carefully, with constant references to the need for pupils to have more than one attempt in order to have a more reliable evidence base. Finally, an arm-wrestling match was held between two pupils with similar scores to test the theory of equal forces.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The sustained programme of developing the provision has been very successful in raising standards of achievement.
- The curriculum manager's leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- Pupils enjoy the subject and work very hard.
- Some subjects use ICT well in lessons but more use of new technology is needed across the school as a whole.

Commentary

67. There has been a great improvement in the school's provision since the last inspection. Led by the curriculum manager, and supported vigorously by governors, the school has planned very effectively to build its ICT capacity steadily in the past five years. A well-structured programme has secured funding to build up equipment and resources, supported by training at each stage to build the confidence of teachers and support learning assistants. The curriculum manager has played a key part in developing and supporting teachers and support learning assistants to enhance their skills. Extensive in-house training for all staff supplements the training that some staff have received on external training courses. This is valued and effective; whole team and individual coaching sessions are helping most staff to develop their skills. Support learning assistants are particularly appreciative of the extra help they receive individually and several are now very confident in problem-solving with pupils. However, as these developments are comparatively recent it is too early to see the full effect on pupils' achievements although the school's developing provision has been recognised by the award of a NAACE Mark (National Association of Advisers for Computers in Education).

68. Pupils' achievements are satisfactory overall, although they make good progress in Years 10 and 11. Therefore, examination results at the end of Year 11 are good and rising steadily each year. Although teaching and learning are currently satisfactory overall, lessons have many good and very good features and there is a strong capacity for improvement. They are characterised by very good relationships between the teacher and pupils, the appropriate use of encouragement and praise, and the patient approach in explaining techniques and processes to pupils individually. There are high expectations of pupils' work and of their behaviour and therefore lessons are busy sessions. However, lesson planning is not always sufficiently detailed in terms of identifying what it is anticipated that individual pupils, and groups of pupils, will learn in each session. Insufficient use is made of grouping pupils according to their competence and skills, with specially designed tasks for each group. In addition, the balance between presentation to the whole class and individual work is not always pitched correctly so that time is not always used to maximum effect.

69. Pupils are keen to learn. Their responses to ICT lessons are very good at all times; they concentrate very well, listen carefully and behave impeccably. Many have computers at home and try to practise what they are doing in school, and there are many opportunities for pupils to use the

school's computers outside lessons, such as lunchtimes. On these occasions, they are generously supported by staff time.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

70. Information and communication technology is promoted satisfactorily across the curriculum. Some subjects, such as science, make very effective use of ICT, with particularly good use of the interactive whiteboard. It is used well in English for drafting and presentation and pupils in many subjects research information on the Internet. New technology is also evident in other subjects; electronic keyboards feature in many music lessons and pupils are able to develop their techniques in physical education as their performance is video recorded so that they can observe themselves and note pointers for improvement. However, overall more could be done. The school has recently given the science curriculum manager the responsibility of promoting the use of ICT more widely across the curriculum and to disseminate his innovative approaches for recording achievement and progress in ICT capability in the different subjects. Currently, there is limited software and additional equipment to support learning and communication for those pupils with the most complex additional needs, although the school rightly recognises that such additional supports for learning are rapidly becoming a priority.

HUMANITIES

History

71. Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of achievement are improving and most pupils achieve well.
- The subject is well led and managed.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have the opportunity to follow an accredited course.
- Other subjects of the curriculum made a good contribution to developing pupils' historical knowledge.

Commentary

72. Teaching and the pupils' achievement have improved since the last inspection, and the quality of the curriculum and assessment arrangements have also been enhanced. This represents good improvement overall. Improvement has occurred because an effective curriculum manager has worked hard, and with good effect, in areas such as assessment arrangements, which in turn has led to more effective lesson planning.

73. Pupils are taught well and therefore they make good progress in a broad and balanced curriculum that incorporates the major components of the subject, such as strengthening pupils' historical knowledge and their skills of both interpreting and communicating information. Well informed teachers provide interesting activities that stimulate pupils' desire to learn and therefore they have very good attitudes to the subject. As a result of such good teaching, pupils learn well. Learning is also helped by the expectations and confidence of the teachers, which lead to pupils producing work which is appropriate in quality and quantity on subjects such as castle development. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 pursue an appropriate course which leads to accreditation. Well planned and managed lessons help pupils to appreciate the lives of people in the past. Lessons are enhanced by the effective use of explanation, carefully structured written tasks and the use of videos to produce, for example, interesting and accurate accounts of the development of slavery and the history of the American West.

74. Pupils' appreciation of historical events is enhanced by the contribution of other subjects. For example, imaginative work in English helps pupils to understand everyday life in the Second World

War when they study *Goodnight Mr. Tom*, and subjects like art and design support pupils' learning when they produce models of the Cyclops and medieval gargoyles.

Geography

75. Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement has improved since the last inspection when it was unsatisfactory.
- Pupils work at a good pace which helps their achievement.
- Weaknesses in lesson planning and assessment procedures remain.

Commentary

76. Given pupils' low levels of attainment on entry, their achievement is satisfactory across the school. There are no significant differences between boys and girls or between the achievements of higher and lower attaining pupils. The subject is led and managed satisfactorily by a non-subject specialist and, unlike most other subjects, teaching is shared by all staff. Although there have been improvements to the curriculum, shortcomings remain in linking topics and themes more explicitly to the appropriate National Curriculum programmes of study in order to make assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress more effective. In addition, limited use is made of fieldwork to help geographical understanding. Overall, there has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

77. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 follow a curriculum that contains an effective balance between geographical inquiry, the study of places and a consideration of environmental change. Their developing knowledge and understanding has also been helped by the implementation of the literacy strategy for pupils in Years 7 to 9 which helps them to appreciate some geographical ideas through their study of literature. Therefore, for example, pupils acquire a better ability to understand location and can take part in discussions on the developed and undeveloped parts of the world. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not follow an accredited course but continue to study important aspects of physical and human geography. These sessions also support pupils' development of numeracy and literacy skills well as they produce graphs and tables and write assignments to illustrate, for example, aspects of the local environment.

78. Teaching and learning are satisfactory across the school, with some good features. The quality of learning is helped by the confidence and expectations of the teachers. Therefore, for example, Year 9 pupils were able to understand that food is different in India as a result of the clarity of the teacher's explanation and practical demonstration. Teachers expect pupils to behave well and to produce work which is appropriate in quality and quantity.

Religious education

79. Provision in religious education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Pupils of all ages really enjoy religious education and work very hard.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Very good use is made of local community facilities.
- The subject makes an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development.

Commentary

80. There has been very good improvement in provision since the last inspection. A highly effective curriculum manager has developed the subject extremely well. Classroom based learning is enhanced very well through a programme of visiting a wide range of places of worship in the community and learning from people from many faiths. The curriculum is creatively designed to exploit these opportunities to enrich pupils' understanding of other cultures and beliefs. Good assessment procedures are in place and these involve new approaches to involving pupils in self assessment.

81. Pupils now achieve very well in lessons and make very good progress over time. This is because teaching and learning is of very high quality, especially in Years 10 and 11 where the introduction of an accredited examination course has proved highly motivating. Lessons contain very many features of very high class teaching, being taught by a subject specialist with first rate knowledge and understanding that enable her to answer pupils' many questions skilfully. Lessons are very well planned to make sure that the work is varied, accessible to everyone and that there are clear objectives for the whole class and individuals. Strong links are made between topics and issues that pupils can understand and teaching builds imaginatively on their responses to the teacher's questions.

The very best qualities of lessons were captured in a Year 11 lesson on domestic violence. This was a mixed gender class and included pupils with autism and severe learning difficulties. Excellent relationships supported meticulously planned activities and classroom management that enabled pupils to make excellent progress.

They all followed a video interview with a victim of violence; several flinched at the woman's description of what happened to her. During the subsequent discussion, the very sensitive handling of the topic through carefully worded questions, prompts and encouragement enabled many reticent pupils to become involved and contribute spontaneously. They displayed very mature attitudes and made many perceptive contributions - "But we'd never do anything like that, would we? It's so cruel and unfair for the woman." To which another responds "but sometimes its women who do it too, remember." "Yes, but not *often* is it? It's just like bullying".

Carefully selected groups then worked on selecting information and images for a poster. They helped each other with the more difficult words, discussed the images and reflected on how each made them feel. At the end of the session, the teacher took great care to celebrate individual contributions to the team effort and to individual achievements. It was clear that pupils had taken considered, but imaginative, approaches to the poster. They all focused hard on communicating the lessons each group had learnt from the interview they had watched and the written information and the images they had found so painful. The usually shy boys were sensitively commended for being prepared to express their feelings.

82. A particularly impressive aspect of religious education lessons is the way in which all pupils are successfully involved, including those with autism and severe learning difficulties when they are included in lessons with other pupils. Support learning staff are clear about who needs most help and several are developing their own knowledge of the major world faiths that the pupils study. For example, pupils with writing difficulties are provided with a suitable range of activities and are supported by support learning assistants who help them convey their thoughts and ideas. Activities that pupils enjoy, and very positive relationships, mean that pupils are good humoured and respectful at all times. Pupils take lessons very seriously and their very good behaviour and attitude to the subject create a positive climate for learning, in which concentration and perseverance are strong features. For instance, Year 11 pupils always give care to the presentation of their work and are keen to understand how to improve their work further, and so increase the marks they receive. They clearly devote considerable time to doing their best work in their assignments.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well and make high quality products.
- The curriculum provides a broad range of well-planned design projects.
- The quality of teaching and learning is enhanced by specialist teachers working in specialist accommodation.
- Planning for pupils with additional learning needs has yet to be completed.

Commentary

84. There has been good improvement in provision since the last inspection. The quality of teaching is good overall. Good quality products are inspired through demonstrations and motivating projects. There is wide range of activities provided, including a very motivating programme for textile design. Pupils are given good opportunities to give their views and to share their ideas.

85. In resistant materials, attention is given to subject vocabulary and to opportunities for the development of mathematical and ICT skills. Staff help all pupils to understand the processes they need to undertake when they plan, design, and make products. Consequently, pupils generally learn well, showing good use of tools and materials. However, on occasions lesson planning limits progress because there is insufficient detail about how tasks will be modified or extended to meet the needs of all pupils, particularly those with additional learning needs. As a result, their developing skills, knowledge and understanding are not always assessed as effectively as they could be. However the school has wisely recognised this as a shortcoming and it is being addressed through a revision of planning.

86. Subject plans, pupils' work and teachers' records indicate that the majority of pupils make good progress. A good number of pupils in Year 11 are successful in gaining accreditation for their work. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The curriculum managers have improved the subject plans so that the school now provides a good curriculum, which includes appropriate opportunities for learning to be accredited. A wide variety of visits and visitors into school enhance the curriculum well. For instance, pupils have won several awards for their success in the Formula 1 in Schools car design competition with local mainstream schools. Their interest in this was evident as many spent lunchtimes with the teacher continuing their work on the project. Visits to shops in food technology make a good contribution to pupils' personal and social development.

87. There is good, specialist accommodation for both resistant materials and food technology, and the rooms are well equipped. The school does not yet have facilities for computer aided design or manufacture, but projects such as the F1 car design competition requires designs to be sent away for computer aided manufacture and therefore pupils do learn about the use of this technology.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very high quality teaching by the specialist teacher.
- Very good leadership and management of the subject.
- Pupils' self evaluation of their work at the end of each module contributes very well to assessment procedures.
- Limited use is made of visiting artists and gallery visits.

Commentary

89. Although few lessons were seen, there were many examples of pupils' work on display around the school supported by detailed assessment records.

90. Pupils achieve very well in this subject. The scheme of work is very well designed to meet the educational needs of all the pupils. The course is well structured and based on developing pupils' artistic skills. As pupils progress through the school they build on, and enhance, skills learned earlier. By the time they reach Year 9, pupils have used sketchbooks to develop their ideas and experimented with colour, print, clay, sketching and calligraphy. They have learned about, and been influenced by, major artists such as Lowry and Kandinski. Pupils' work shows they persevere, are very positive and try their best to achieve well. Older pupils take art as an option and the school has successfully started to enter pupils for externally accredited examinations. The portfolios of work are a credit to the pupils, annotated to show how they develop an idea, experiment in creating images and how they use a good range of resources, including natural objects and ICT, to extend the original idea and present their final piece. Throughout the school pupils learn to evaluate their own work, discussing it with their teacher and writing down their personal assessments of how well they have done and what was difficult. The teacher retains these evaluations along with samples or photograph of the work, building up a fascinating record of pupils' progress through the school. Pupils' work and ideas are respected and this, in turn, makes pupils value their work.

91. The teacher and support learning assistant are calm and focused throughout the lessons. The very knowledgeable teacher demonstrates the new skills to be learned and there is a very high expectation that the pupils will do their best to emulate. Year 7 pupils' attitudes to their work were exemplary when they made clay tiles; they asked sensible questions and were totally absorbed because they knew exactly what to do and adults were continually on hand to advise or discuss their work. Year 8 pupils had mature discussions about the linear patterns they were creating. In both lessons there were times when we could have heard a pin drop, such was the concentration and effort made by the pupils. Another common factor in the teaching was the sensible and constructive praise given to pupils, a respect shown for their efforts and meaningful comments lacking in condescension. Pupils felt valued and responded by concentrating and working to the best of their ability.

92. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. Subject documentation is very well organised and reflects the approach to teaching the subject. There are specialist art and pottery rooms which are well organised with interesting displays of pupils' work. The quality of accommodation and resources is very good. Recent links with a visiting artist produced some startlingly good results, although the school acknowledges some difficulty in arranging this sort of activity. There has been good improvement overall since the last inspection.

Expressive arts

93. Expressive arts is a recently developed aspect of the curriculum. The subject manager, who is responsible for all the teaching, is still in the first year of managing the subject and is establishing and evaluating the impact of the curriculum provided. Currently, there is a lost opportunity to link with, and support the English curriculum, but both subject managers are keen to pursue how this can be developed.

94. There is a specialist room, well equipped with plenty of space for pupils to move around. In the lessons sampled, teaching and learning were very good and pupils had very positive attitudes. The very good modelling by the teacher, ably supported by other members of staff, encouraged pupils with severe learning difficulties to develop their imagination and re-enact the story of a dragon who frightened the local villagers. Working collaboratively, pupils mimed 'fear', freezing their poses every time the dragon snarled at them, and crept stealthily to his doorstep to deliver milk and newspapers. Year 9 pupils participated in a re-enactment of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* and then reinforced their understanding of the poem by creating a village scene and making puppet rats to illustrate the retelling of the poem. In both lessons pupils enjoyed themselves, were proud of their efforts and grew in confidence. Planning indicates that the topics for the older pupils relate appropriately to developing social skills and self-esteem, and considering moral dilemmas.

Music

95. Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are taught very well and enjoy music, being keen to join in.
- Lessons promote pupils' personal development extremely well.
- Pupils are given many opportunities to develop listening and performing skills.
- Music makes a valuable contribution to pupils' cultural development and in providing moments of reflection.

Commentary

96. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 achieve very well in music. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Pupils are now provided with many opportunities to listen to music, sing and play instruments. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not study music as part of their set curriculum, although it is available as one of the options provided for pupils to pursue as an interest rather than as an accredited course.

97. Lessons have many strong features of teaching that encourage and engage pupils and therefore they learn very well. In particular, they are thoroughly enjoyable and fun occasions because they are taught in a lively and enthusiastic way. The mood is set early. Pupils enter the room with music playing and, when appropriate such as with pupils with severe learning difficulties, they are each welcomed to the lesson in song, which they join in with energetically. A skilled subject specialist has a very clear idea about what it is intended pupils will learn and prepares an interesting and challenging range of activities. Therefore, time is used very productively and highly effective support learning assistants ensure that all pupils are engaged and able to benefit from what is on offer. As a result, they have very good attitudes to the subject and behave extremely well.

98. In addition to developing their musical skills, music lessons are valuable sessions in other ways. There are many planned opportunities to develop social skills, such as working together co-operatively. The choice of music in lessons contributes to pupils' cultural development as well as providing moments of spirituality and opportunities for quiet reflection. The teacher is particularly skilled at promoting pupils' literacy too. All of these features were evident in a lesson with Year 7 pupils based on *The Carnival of the Animals*. Pupils were challenged to identify which animal they thought was being represented by the music and one thought she could "hear diamonds". The teacher seized on this opportunity to prompt pupils about where else they might see the 'sparkly/twinkly' nature of diamonds and this led onto the idea of water and fish. Suitable descriptive words were then considered, such as 'rippling', 'glistening', 'splashing' and 'swishing' and these were supported by the written form on cards. Pupils were then put into groups and challenged to compose simple pieces on keyboards and percussion instruments that reflect these mood words. They performed their work to members of the group, who listened respectfully.

99. Music is well led and managed by an enthusiastic curriculum manager. Appropriate priorities have been identified in a subject development plan and long term planning shows a comprehensive subject curriculum. Pupils' appreciation of their own and others' cultures is enhanced very well through the topics studied. They consider music from the Caribbean, Far East and South Africa as well as English folk songs and benefit from visitors into school. They have been entertained by the Ecton Brook Samba Band and some are currently embarking upon a series of workshops as part of the Drake Music Project, run by the Wellingborough Castle Theatre. Assessment procedures are good and record well pupils' developing musical skills and knowledge.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Techniques are built up in a structured way in very well organised lessons.
- Pupils benefit from individual coaching by a skilled subject specialist.
- A very good range of clubs, fixtures with other schools and the use of local facilities provide very good additional learning opportunities.
- There are limited opportunities for outdoor and adventurous activities.

Commentary

101. Overall, there has been good improvement in provision since the last inspection and this has been recognised by the school's acquisition of a Sportsmark Gold Award in 2002. Pupils achieve very well and make very good progress as they move through the school. They are provided with a good curriculum covering a variety of activities, although overall they do not pursue adventurous activities in any depth. They experience some elements, such as orienteering in Irchester Country Park, but they do not now have the experience of a residential facility when they can pursue activities like rock climbing and abseiling.

102. Lessons are extremely well organised and managed sessions. Pupils are very well supervised and they have very positive attitudes towards the subject. Therefore, they work safely in potentially dangerous situations. Highly detailed lesson planning means that time is well used as good quality resources are readily available for the planned activities. In addition, pupils follow well established routines, such as getting into pairs or groups, and so lessons are very productive sessions. Pupils make such very good progress because the specialist teacher is extremely adept at presenting activities in ways which enable pupils to acquire skills through the progressive building up of technique, through very good individual coaching. For instance, in both the lesson where Year 10 pupils were learning about shot putting and in the one in which Year 8 pupils developed cricket skills, the required techniques were broken down into very small steps. Demonstrations provided by pupils further contribute to the development of the required skills. Additionally, even when not directly involved in the activity, pupils were encouraged to be participants such as during the shot putt lesson. Pupils worked in pairs and the one not making the throw was required to examine and comment upon the technique of their partner. This helped them maintain their concentration throughout the lesson.

103. The subject is very well led and managed. A very knowledgeable curriculum manager also works as part of the Sports Co-ordinator Project and this has enabled strong links to be forged with local schools. The school also makes very good use of local community facilities through activities like horse riding, swimming at the local pool and visits to Redwell Leisure Centre to use fitness machines and make use of the accommodation for badminton and basketball. Pupils' experiences of sporting activities are further enhanced very well through lunchtime and after school clubs which provide them with opportunities to experience additional activities.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, social and health education

104. Provision in pupils' personal, social and health education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- A broad and appropriate curriculum of high quality ensures that pupils build securely on previous learning.
- Very strong links with community facilities support learning.
- There are very good planned opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in other lessons across the curriculum, so that enrichment of learning is a significant strength.
- The purpose of 'social time' sessions requires more clarification.

Commentary

105. Pupils achieve very well in PSHE and citizenship as they study a range of topics that are appropriate to their age and interest. Teaching is consistently very good. Much of it is based on practical action, meaningful to all pupils. For instance, projects such as recycling and improving the environment bring learning to life and build very much on pupils' own experience. Pupils with additional needs make as much progress as others. The overall very good progress that pupils make is in response to the broad and relevant curriculum, which is offered to all pupils, and also to the very good teaching they receive.

106. The citizenship element of the curriculum is well developed. The school attaches much importance to pupils' developing self-awareness and then progressing to an understanding of their immediate world, the wider world and their relationship to the others who share it. The very good use of visits and visitors is paramount in ensuring pupils' have a good understanding of issues such as crime and punishment so that, by Year 9, pupils have made very good progress in recognising anti-social or criminal behaviour.

107. There is a very appropriate emphasis in the PSHE programme on life skills, which are augmented very well by other curriculum areas. Pupils have many opportunities to work independently as well as collaboratively with others in pairs or small groups. Therefore, their social competence and confidence improve as they move through the school. Pupils learn about taking turns and understand aspects of personal care. They develop responsibility for their own belongings and they all have good opportunities to carry out responsibilities around school. In their appreciation of a healthy, safer life style they identify a range of healthy foods and all appreciate the necessity for hygiene. The school received recognition for its work when it was given a Healthy Schools Award in 2003. The development of good relationships and respecting the differences between people is a strong feature of the achievement of older pupils.

108. The school makes very good use of the local community, where a significant amount of learning takes place. Very effective links with services and organisations such as local colleges, employers and community-based groups provide valuable learning opportunities for pupils. There are programmes for Year 10 pupils to work within the community each week and for Year 11 pupils to follow extremely well established and managed work experience. They were observed in a variety of settings, including a supermarket, children's nursery and local primary school. In all cases, organizations were extremely positive about the pupils' attitudes and maturity. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are very well catered for in preparation for leaving school to the extent that the school was given a Careermark in 2003. The school's success in this area is further evidenced by the destination of leavers in 2003, when 25 pupils continued their education in school or college and a further four went into employment. Careers education and guidance is well supported through links with the school's Connexions personal adviser. The many opportunities pupils have to go on visits

out of school and their varied work experience ensure they exercise their sense of responsibility in much wider and more challenging contexts.

109. The subject is very well led and managed, and this is evident in the quality and diversity of the curriculum. The daily 15 minute 'social time' sessions are valuable in many ways and pupils were seen participating in very pleasant social settings, making and handing round snacks and drinks and participating in discussions. While these sessions are valuable social experiences, there is no indication or record as to how they contribute to, or supplement, the overall PSHE programme. They are unplanned and therefore there is no guarantee that all pupils will follow comparable programmes. The school should consider giving an overall focus to these sessions, such as current affairs, and then link this into the long term planning for PSHE, such as the role of the media.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Inspection judgement

Grade

| | |
|--|----------|
| The overall effectiveness of the school | 2 |
| How inclusive the school is | 2 |
| How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection | 2 |
| Value for money provided by the school | 2 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| Overall standards achieved | 2 |
| Pupils' achievement | 2 |

| | |
|---|----------|
| Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities | 2 |
| Attendance | 2 |
| Attitudes | 2 |
| Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions | 2 |
| Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 |

| | |
|--|----------|
| The quality of education provided by the school | 2 |
| The quality of teaching | 2 |
| How well pupils learn | 2 |
| The quality of assessment | 3 |
| How well the curriculum meets pupils needs | 2 |
| Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities | 2 |
| Accommodation and resources | 2 |
| Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety | 2 |
| Support, advice and guidance for pupils | 2 |
| How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the school's links with parents | 2 |
| The quality of the school's links with the community | 2 |
| The school's links with other schools and colleges | 3 |

| | |
|--|----------|
| The leadership and management of the school | 2 |
| The governance of the school | 2 |
| The leadership of the headteacher | 1 |
| The leadership of other key staff | 2 |
| The effectiveness of management | 2 |

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

*In a special school such as this, **standards achieved** are judged against individual targets and not national standards.*