

# INSPECTION REPORT

## HILL TOP SCHOOL

Gateshead

LEA area: Gateshead

Unique reference number: 130942

Headteacher: Elaine Colquhoun

Lead inspector: Katharine Halifax

Dates of inspection: 7<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> June 2004

Inspection number: 258918

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 – 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	98
School address:	Wealcroft Felling Gateshead Tyne and Wear
Postcode:	NE10 8LT
Telephone number:	0191 4692462
Fax number:	0191 4384166
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs D Dawson

Date of previous inspection: July 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school caters for pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 years. Pupils come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. With 98 on roll, the school is of average size for a school of this type. Few pupils enter or leave other than at the usual time. All pupils have statements of special educational needs. Most have moderate learning needs, though an increasing number have been diagnosed as autistic spectrum disorder. In addition, some have social and emotional needs. Attainment on entry to the school is well below that expected of pupils of this age. Almost all pupils are of white European origin, and all speak English as their main language. There are twice as many boys as girls. Four pupils are in the care of the local authority. The school has received the Healthy Schools Award, School Achievement Award, Silver Artsmark the Sportsmark and Diana, Princess of Wales memorial award. On leaving school, the majority of pupils go on to further education, with a small number to open employment or training.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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9572	Kitty Anderson	Lay inspector	
11239	Sue Flockton	Team inspector	Art and design Music
27429	Margaret Smith	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Design and technology Physical education Special educational needs
16198	Carol Etherington	Team inspector	English French
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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is an effective school.** Good teaching and effective learning opportunities have resulted in good achievement. Links with other schools and the community contribute significantly to pupils' learning. The school is well led and managed and gives good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The leadership of the headteacher has brought stability and a sense of purpose resulting in good improvement in teaching thus enabling pupils to achieve well.
- Pupils with differing learning needs are identified early and, mostly, through very good teaching achieve very well, though this is not always so for pupils with severe learning needs.
- The very good provision in music, physical education, and information and communication technology has resulted in very good achievement in these subjects.
- The organisation of the way English and literacy is taught needs improvement.
- Learning opportunities, very good links with the community and with other schools and colleges, and very good provision for personal development prepare pupils very well for life after school.
- The persistent absence of a small number of pupils has a negative effect on attendance figures.

Improvement since the last inspection is good. Other than attendance, the issues identified in the previous report have been addressed. Though the school now caters for pupils with more complex and challenging needs, the percentage of very good and excellent teaching has increased. This is reflected in pupils' learning and achievement. Furthermore, there has been considerable improvement in behaviour, with a significant decrease in the number of pupils excluded. Pupils in Year 11 now leave the school with a wide range of nationally recognised awards.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement at the end of:	in relation to individual targets in:	
	Subjects of the curriculum	Personal and social education
Year 9	<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b>
Year 11	<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b>

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

**Achievement is good overall.** Pupils in both age groups achieve very well in music, physical education and in information and communication technology (ICT). Achievement is good in mathematics, science, humanities, art and design, religious education and personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE). Achievement is satisfactory in English and French. In English, some groups are made up of pupils from Year 8 to Year 11 and are taught by as many as three teachers in the course of a week. This reduces pupils' rate of progress. Staff changes and, until recently, the lack of a suitable programme have affected achievement in French. The achievement of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder and those who have a gift or talent is very good because of very good provision but on occasion, some pupils with severe learning needs do not achieve as well as they should

Pupils' **personal development is very good** because of the very good provision for their **spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**. Provision for pupils to experience a wide range of cultures is especially good. Pupils have a very good attitude to school and behave well. They are mature and confident. However, on occasions, staff do not let pupils to do simple tasks and take responsibilities. Attendance is unsatisfactory. Pupils are punctual.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education is good. Teaching and learning are good.** Particular strengths are in the very good relationships and the way staff help pupils to behave appropriately. In addition, teachers and support staff work well together helping pupils of different capabilities to be included in all activities. However, occasionally tasks for pupils with severe learning needs are not always pitched at the correct level. The curriculum is good and has particular strengths in the provision for sport, the arts and opportunities to work alongside pupils from mainstream schools. Links with parents are good. Those with the community and other schools are very good. Support for pupils' health and welfare is very good.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are good.** The leadership and management of the head teacher are good. She has successfully raised staff esteem and expertise. All senior managers are committed to high achievement and to lifelong learning, but some members are new and do not yet have a strategic overview. Useful systems are in place to aid further improvement. Governance is good. Governors visit the school regularly, have good links with teachers and have supported the school well, but need to do more in making the school accountable. All legal requirements are met.

## **PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

Parents think well of the school, especially the commitment of staff, the friendly atmosphere and the range of learning opportunities available to their child. Pupils like the school. They say they are happy, that they like their teachers and their lessons. They are very enthusiastic about the range of sporting activities, the musical productions and the after-school clubs.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Continue to improve attendance rates;
- Ensure the achievement of pupils with severe learning needs is consistent.
- Reorganise the way language and literacy are taught.

The above have been identified in the school improvement plan.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

#### **Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses**

Pupils' achievement is good.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Achievement has improved since the last inspection.
- Pupils with autistic spectrum disorder achieve very well.
- Pupils with differing learning needs are identified early and so achieve very well, though this is not always so for pupils with severe learning difficulties.
- Year 11 pupils of all capabilities achieve challenging nationally recognised awards in most subjects but this is not always so in English.

#### **Commentary**

1. Achievement has improved since the last inspection and is now good in most subjects because of good teaching and suitable programmes that are generally matched to pupils' capabilities. Achievement is now very good in music, physical education and in information and communication technology because of inspired teaching, improved resources and imaginative activities. Achievement in English is satisfactory and supported by work in other subjects. However, the practice of having a wide age and capability range in each group coupled with some pupils having as many as three teachers of English during the course of the week results in inconsistent learning and slows their progress. Though achievement in the end of year assessments in 2003 in mathematics was disappointing, the subject manager has worked extremely hard providing guidance on how to teach mathematics, adapting the national strategy and setting pupils according to ability. This is paying dividends with the achievement of most pupils improving and now being good. Achievement in science has improved and is now good because of teacher knowledge, the very good resources and numerous opportunities for investigations.

2. A structured approach and the use of signs and symbols help pupils with autistic spectrum disorder to achieve very well in both special classes. This is because staff have very good understanding of pupils' needs, work very well as a team, and use appropriate teaching techniques. High quality individual tuition for one part-time pupil with medical needs has resulted in very good achievement. Though the main focus is on literacy and numeracy achievement is equally good in science, PSHCE, ICT, music, religious education, history and geography. The quality and quantity of work in the file is impressive. For pupils with severe learning difficulties, who are fully integrated into the main body of the school, progress is inconsistent. In subjects where assessment is very good and used effectively, these pupils do well. On occasions however, for example in some English and mathematics sets, there is not enough difference in the level of tasks. Clearer, more specific and measurable individual learning targets would make it easier for them to be more fully included, especially in the oral part of the lessons.

3. Pupils who are gifted and talented are identified early and given the opportunity to fulfil their potential. For example, work for a Year 7 pupil with autism who is gifted in mathematics is very demanding, and has resulted in him gaining 82% and 85% in two test papers at General Certificate



of Secondary Education (GCSE) Foundation Level. Pupils who have a talent in other subjects are identified equally early, for example, in sport where pupils are stretched by their teachers and referred to specialist clubs in the Borough. As a consequence one pupil has achieved the Gateshead Achievement Award and two pupils the Diana Memorial Award for contribution to sport and have been selected for coaching outside school as well as improving their performance.

4. Since the last inspection a wide range of accreditation has been introduced. This has allowed pupils of all capabilities to leave school with nationally recognised awards and has prepared them well for further education. For the past four years, there has been a year on year increase in the number of units accredited. Pupils now work towards GCSE in music and art. Furthermore, there has been an increase in the subjects accredited through Entry Level Certificate and in the number of certificates gained. The work of pupils with more severe and complex needs is recognised through Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). While pupils have undertaken a good volume of work in English and literacy lessons, and through literacy in other subjects such as physical education, careers education and information and communication technology, pupils' achievements are not recognised through sufficiently challenging national awards in this subject.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

Pupils' attitudes have improved since the last inspection and are now very good. Behaviour is good. As at the time of the last inspection, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development remains very good. Attendance is unsatisfactory. Pupils are punctual.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses:**

- Pupils have very good attitudes and are well behaved.
- Very good provision for pupils' personal development is demonstrated in increased maturity and independence, though on occasion, some adults do too much for pupils.
- The persistent non-attendance of a few pupils adversely affects their progress.

5. Pupils show very positive attitudes to learning. They talk enthusiastically about many aspects of school life including annual productions, art, sport and activities with other schools. They are justifiably proud to be the first pupils in the country to achieve open water snorkelling awards. With the occasional exceptions their behaviour in and around school is good. Break and lunchtimes are calm, social occasions where pupils get on well with each other enjoying the many opportunities to work with others during activities such as inter-house cricket. Behaviour is very good out of school when, for example, visiting college and exemplary when working alongside visiting pupils from a mainstream primary school for mathematics. Though there are far more pupils with challenging behaviour and those known to the courts, the number of exclusions has fallen from 17 at the time of the last inspection to one pupil in recent years. An analysis of instances of inappropriate behaviour shows a similar drop. Through the good examples of adults, pupils form friendships, are sensible, good humoured and regularly help each other.

6. Provision for pupils' personal development is very good. Religious education now makes a good contribution to personal development. An awareness of the major world faiths enables pupils to develop a respect for the beliefs of others. Similarly, acts of worship make a useful contribution, though on occasion, opportunities to allow a pause for reflection or a response to music are missed. An awareness of the world, of each other and of themselves is strongly fostered. Pupils become increasingly independent and demonstrate their maturity when, for example, showing visitors around the school, but some adults do too much for them. In some classes support staff distribute writing materials and books and escort classes during

the changeover between lessons. This is not good preparation for college and work experience.

7. Moral and social values are very strongly promoted. Pupils clearly understand the code of conduct, knowing what is and is not acceptable. An awareness of the needs of others is successfully fostered through a great number of campaigns for charity. For example, hospitals, the Shoe Box appeal, the RNLI and Pets as Therapy. An awareness of other cultures is successfully encouraged through English, art, music and dance. This is furthered by the very strong links with a special school in Shanghai. Pupils have, for example, tried Tai Chi, created Chinese and African style art and are currently constructing life size puppets as part of a Spanish celebration to be held at the Baltic Centre.

8. Despite a lot of effort on the part of the school, as at the time of the last inspection attendance remains unsatisfactory because of a handful of pupils who have refused to attend previous schools and who have been placed on the roll of Hill Top. Their erratic pattern of attendance at Hill Top means their rate of progress is uneven. This has an adverse effect on their achievement. Nevertheless, the dedication of the care manager and staff has resulted in a much-improved attendance for most pupils with particular successes. For example, one pupil who had been out of school for three years has not missed one day in eight months since moving to Hill Top.

## Attendance

### *Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)*

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.34	School data	1.75
National data	9.1*	National data	0.6*

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

\*figures for pupils from similar schools.

## Exclusions

### *Ethnic background of pupils*

### *Exclusions in the last school year*

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	69	1	1
Mixed – White and Asian	6	0	0
Chinese	2	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	21	0	0

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

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is good with particular strengths in the provision for information and communication technology, music, physical education and for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder.

## **Teaching and learning**

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Procedures to assess pupils' achievements and the way in which this information is used to inform teachers' planning are both now satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The majority of lessons observed were of good quality, with examples of very good or excellent teaching seen in both age groups, leading good achievement overall.
- The recent participation in a national pilot initiative to improve the quality of teaching and learning has improved teachers' lesson planning.
- Weaker teaching occurs when teachers teach outside their particular subject specialisms or when they provide cover for colleagues.
- Teachers of some subjects use assessment effectively to track pupils' progress and identify next steps in learning, but assessment is only satisfactory overall.

### **Commentary**

9. It was not possible to make a judgement on how teaching has improved as there were no pupils aged 14 to 16 in school during the week of the last inspection. All teachers have high expectations for how well pupils will behave in lessons and employ effective strategies for ensuring that pupils live up to these. This includes work with pupils whose special needs may have related challenging behaviours, for example some pupils with autism. Teaching and support staff have very good relationships with pupils and this contributes well to pupils' learning, for example teachers use humour to motivate and interest pupils and they give the sensitive support, encouragement and praise. More effective teaching is characterised by the sharing of lesson objectives so pupils know what they will learn, and understand what is expected of them. Work is usually well planned for pupils of different capabilities so that all are challenged to improve though on occasions, pupils with severe learning needs are not fully involved in discussions. Consistently good teaching results in pupils enjoying their learning and achieving well.

10. Hill Top was the only special school in a national pilot to improve teaching and learning in secondary schools as part of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy. This has been successful in improving aspects of the quality of lesson planning. The whole-school focus on the use of 'starters' and 'plenaries' ensure that the beginnings and endings of lessons are more effective as learning opportunities. There has also been training in the use of focussed questioning to promote pupils' thinking skills and to check their understanding of key teaching points. Staff have benefited from a new 'coaching' approach whereby designated subject specialists give demonstration lessons to share good practice, support colleagues through giving advice, and observe lessons to monitor agreed aspects of their teaching. Improved planning techniques have yet to be consistently applied by all teachers, but many are already using them confidently and routinely.

11. Teaching is less effective than it should be when teachers are asked to teach subjects where they have insufficient subject knowledge and expertise. Or when teachers are covering lessons for absent colleagues or for senior staff given non-contact time to undertake their

management responsibilities. It is sometimes compounded by curriculum plans that are insufficiently detailed to support a non-specialist teacher; for example in food technology.

12. The quality of assessment systems varies from subject to subject and their usefulness in informing teachers' planning. Clear procedures in physical education and in information and communication technology enable teachers to identify gaps in learning and plan activities that challenge pupils to achieve highly. Art and music use self-assessment by pupils effectively. However, other subjects have only satisfactory assessment arrangements. In particular, pupils' personal targets from their individual education plans are often insufficiently precise in identifying the next steps of learning, and many teachers do not refer to them in lessons where they could be promoted, for example literacy and numeracy. Although this area has improved since the last inspection, senior leaders have correctly identified the need for a whole-school approach to assessment to ensure its consistent and used effectively to track pupils' progress and to plan better targeted work for all capabilities.

**Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 62 lessons**

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (2%)	17 (28%)	30 (48%)	12 (19%)	2 (3%)	0	0

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

**The curriculum**

The curriculum is good. Opportunities for enrichment are very good. Good accommodation and resources meet the learning needs of secondary age pupils well.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There has been very good improvement since the last inspection.
- The very good careers and work-related programme, including accreditation, prepares pupils very well for life after school, though the lack of accreditation in English restricts pupils' achievements.
- The very good provision for music and excellent sporting opportunities enrich pupils' experiences and contribute to achievement.
- There are insufficient resources to support learning in English and for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder.

**Commentary**

13. At the last inspection there were inadequacies within the curriculum. Though broad and balanced it was judged not to meet the needs of all pupils and, in particular, those in Years 10 and 11 were disadvantaged owing to the restricted opportunities to achieve nationally recognised awards. Due to effective leadership this has improved dramatically with pupils' achievements in academic and vocational subjects now recognised through GCSE, Entry Level Certification, ASDAN Youth Award and the Duke of Edinburgh Award. In addition, where any pupil displays an interest or talent for something the school is unable to provide, every effort is made to arrange suitable provision at link colleges or schools. The exception to this is English where very little accreditation is offered despite pupils covering work that should entitle

them to an external award. This disadvantages pupils when they are moving on to college or employment.

14. The curriculum has improved also because managers take a lead role in discussing and implementing changes in subjects. Increased stability in staffing has further helped to improve the curriculum. Subjects are led and managed mostly by effective specialist curriculum managers and this has had a significant impact on improving the quality of learning opportunities. The very good specialist accommodation for science, ICT, and design and technology contributes very well to pupils' enjoyment and achievement in those subjects. The extensive outdoor facilities combined with a hall and a separate gymnasium facilitate the excellent provision in physical education; this is accessible for all pupils.

15. Pupils achieve very well in the expressive arts because of the very good work by the specialist teachers and the planned programme. This has been recognised through the silver standard of the Artsmark. All capabilities have the opportunity to join the choir and percussion band, and to play alongside professional musicians. Annual school productions are of a high quality. Working with a professional artist, pupils are currently creating life-size puppets to be used in a festival at the Baltic Centre. The excellent range of sporting activities contributes considerably to pupils' skills and personal development. Pupils improve their skills in gymnastics and dance in the full size gymnasium. They have gained British Sub Aqua Club snorkel open-water awards alongside peers in mainstream schools and take part in numerous regional sporting tournaments. Together with their teachers, pupils have organised regional activities including the highly successful 'Girlsport' at Gateshead Stadium which was attended by over 150 girls. In recognition of the imaginative programme and many successes, the school has been awarded the Sportsmark.

16. Teachers take a pride in the appearance of their classrooms, displaying pupils' work well and surrounding pupils with displays relevant to their lessons. Resources are good in most subjects supporting good teaching. In ICT and music the very good resources enhance the opportunities for pupils to develop skills in these subjects. However the lack of age-appropriate items for lower attaining pupils in English on occasion limits pupils' learning and achievement. Similarly, despite the efforts of teachers for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder in producing imaginative resources, especially symbol material, there are insufficient age appropriate resources for these pupils too.

17. The programme for pupils in Years 10 and 11 is particularly effective. Productive links have been established with the Connexions service so pupils gain experience of interviews and job applications. As a result pupils understand choices for further education and future employment. Very effective provision for PSHCE including sex education and drug misuse awareness, and very well-planned community links for work experience and college placements equip pupils with the personal, vocational and academic skills to enter further education. Pupils are enthusiastic in recalling their experiences in industry and mature in judging how useful those experiences are for them. The 'option' system including hairdressing in school, and engineering and childcare courses at the local college provide very good opportunities for pupils to learn new skills and become confident with different adults and in new environments.

18. The very good range of extra-curricular activities enriches learning very well. Weekly after-school clubs offer a very good range of sporting activities; homework based on ICT and the Adventurers Club and contribute to learning. Pupils preparing for a camping experience learn about basic survival and are making significant headway with teamwork and personal

development. The courtesy and consideration shown by pupils as they included the inspector in their tea and toasted marshmallows reflect well the focus placed on independence and personal development.

### **Care, guidance and support**

The school provides very well for the care, health and safety of its pupils. Staff provide good support, advice and guidance for pupils. They are well consulted and involved in the life of the school.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Staff endeavour to provide well for the health and well-being of pupils.
- The head of care makes a significant contribution to pupils' well being and personal development.
- Pupils make choices about courses and are consulted through School Council, though this is not always reported back to classes.
- Pupils are well prepared for when they transfer into the school and when they leave.

19. The school looks after its pupils very well. Very good systems are in place for the care, health and safety of pupils, including thorough child protection procedures that are understood by all adults. Possible risks are checked frequently and the safety of the premises is regularly reviewed. Pupils are well supervised at all times; the start and end of the day are well managed. A sufficient number of adults are trained in First Aid. They keep good records of any accidents and provide a high level of care. Staff are aware of pupil's specific medical needs and good quality care is provided when required. The school and grounds are kept very clean and secure. As a result pupils are not put at risk. This is good improvement since the last inspection.

20. A further improvement has been the appointment of the care manager as part of the senior management team. All of the care management team and form tutors go to considerable lengths to make sure that relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. The head of care is the first point of contact for parents and provides very good support. Furthermore, he supports pupils who are timed out of lessons extremely well. Not only does this minimise disruption to learning, but also, following frank discussions pupils are helped to understand the consequences of their actions and begin to come to terms with their difficulties. With other staff, he knows families well and is extremely sensitive to their varying needs and situations. This aids his efforts to help families when attendance falls. Although he has been extremely successful in many cases, he is yet have to impact on persistent non-attendees who have been transferred from other schools.

21. Pupils' personal development is formally monitored through Records of Achievement and daily records of attitudes, behaviour, effort and work. The award systems ensure that pupils' achievements, both in and out of school, are celebrated. Pupils are very confident to approach any adult in school for help. They value the personal support they receive. In the words of one pupil 'staff are not your enemies they are your friends'. The good support and guidance that pupils receive has a positive impact upon their achievement. Individual education plans have improved since the last inspection, though targets need to be in smaller more measurable steps.

22. The school council gives all pupils the opportunity to play their part in shaping the school. Councillors have devised the school rules, chosen colour schemes for the toilets and recommended alterations to the lunchtime menu. However, although one pupil acts as chair, members are not fully involved in the running of the council. Furthermore, there are no formal systems for reporting back to classes so while councillors are developing a very good understanding of the democratic process, this does not extend fully to the classrooms. Three representatives have been elected to attend the Gateshead Youth Assembly. The school is rightly proud of these pupils who recently attended and contributed to the Young Peoples' Consultation Day at the Department for Education and Skills.

23. A number of primary schools feed into Hill Top. To ensure all settle quickly, new pupils are carefully and sensitively introduced to the school. They make a series of visits in the summer term and sit in on some lessons. As a result they become familiar with the routine, environment and their fellow pupils before transfer. Individual pupils who join during the school year are supported according to their needs. Additional visits are provided for pupils with more complex needs to familiarise them with routines. In partnership with the Connexions Service, the school provides older pupils with very good advice about the options when they leave school. A very effective careers education programme, highly organised work experience placements and college links combine to give pupils as much information as possible. From discussion with pupils it is clear they value these opportunities and are proud of their achievements in their work experience placements.

### **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

This school has established good links with parents and very good links with the community. Parents play an active role in their child's learning. Links with other schools and colleges are very well established and contribute significantly to learning.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents receive good information that enables them to help their child learn at home.
- The work of the Parents' Association contributes significantly to the quality of education.
- Very good opportunities for pupils to work alongside those from mainstream schools boost pupils' confidence, supporting very good personal development.
- The very good links with the community, and with other schools and colleges make an important contribution to learning.

### **Commentary**

24. The school enjoys good relationships with parents. The information parents receive through a useful brochure, annual report, newsletters and pupil progress reports is relevant, informative and very helpful. Regular curricular evenings are held at times to suit parents. In response to their requests information events, such as a meeting about the ASDAN Youth Award, enable parents to contribute to their child's learning. There are many opportunities both formal and informal for parents to find out how their child is getting on. Parents are suitably informed of the targets for literacy and social development in their child's individual education plan, but in some cases these are too broad and give little guidance on the small steps needed for improvement. Parents value the opportunity to exchange information through the home-to-school link books.

25. Under the dynamic leadership of the chair of the Parents' Association, parents and staff have worked extremely hard and raised impressive sums of money from the wider community, which have been put to very good use. The provision of computers has contributed to achievement in information and communication technology and, most recently, equipment in the sensory room

enriches the learning for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder, encouraging their understanding of cause and effect, and of the world around them. In addition, activities such as the planned cultural evening for pupils, staff and parents contribute well to pupils' personal development.

26. All staff are fully committed to social inclusion. To that end they have built very good relationships with other schools in and out of the borough, and internationally. Very good curriculum links for mathematics, sport, literacy and drama are shared with primary and secondary schools. For example, students from Emmanuel College help with reading and have joined the snorkelling course, whilst others attend additional mathematics lessons. Similar reciprocal links regularly take place with a number of other primary and secondary schools and as part of their ASDAN bronze award, two boys have worked with children at St Catherine's Primary School. Through close liaison with Gateshead College pupils receive good support in their transfer to further education. Tutors get to know students prior to them leaving school and are able to tailor courses according to individual needs. Very strong links with a school in Shanghai have resulted in a Chinese teacher working at Hill Top and the headteacher visiting China to exchange good practice.

27. Links with the community have improved considerably since the last inspection and are now very good. By extensive use of the community for both visits out and visitors in, the school offers its pupils a wide variety of life experiences. Visits to relevant locations, for example to the Chronicle newsroom support teaching in literacy. Pupils are offered the chance to go on a residential trip to the Lake District and speak with enthusiasm about their ICT trip to Windsor. Similarly, many visitors come to talk to pupils about the work they do. For example, an education officer from the Royal National Lifeboat Institute has spoken about his experiences as a naval officer. Visits from the police have been particularly helpful in supporting the school and in its efforts to obtain a secure perimeter fence. Businesses provide valuable support. The school has been selected as the named charity by the local supermarket. Pupils regularly visit the store as part of their 'life-skills' programme. Other examples include very good support from a teddy bear factory and a local computer firm. The community is well very used for work placements, with pupils undertaking three 'blocks' which help them learn more about the world of work and aid their career decisions.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership provided by the headteacher is good. Leadership by other key staff is satisfactory. The effectiveness of management is good. Governance is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher has a clear vision for the quality of education she wants the school to provide.
- Managers are committed to the inclusion of pupils in all aspects of school life.
- The school improvement plan is being used effectively to drive improvements, although more specific targets in some areas would enhance this process.
- Monitoring has been well developed, but following up the outcomes of monitoring in relation to teaching and the curriculum is less effective.
- There is very good continuing professional development for all staff
- Administrative support and day-to-day financial management are good and the school provides good value for money.

### **Commentary**

28. The headteacher, who has been in post since 2000, has united staff and governors in a commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity for all pupils and in a determination to meet their individual needs. She is committed to achieving the best possible education the school can give, both now and in the future. She has clear ideas of ways forward for the school. The



work of the headteacher is complemented by the hardworking deputy. She has a high profile around the school and has introduced some innovative challenges such as main stream links, including snorkelling.

29. Throughout the school there is emphasis on the inclusion of pupils with different needs, for example, pupils with autistic spectrum disorder are included in school activities as much as possible, and some join other classes whenever this is appropriate. The wide range of extracurricular activities is open to all pupils, and there are links with mainstream schools and colleges which provide further opportunities for inclusion.

30. Staff and governors have input into devising the school improvement plan, which ensures that everyone's contribution is valued, and that all are aware of the key features of the plan. The plan is a good working document, and is monitored regularly by senior staff and governors to ensure that progress is being made, for example, in relation to attendance and to behaviour. Some of the targets, especially those in subject areas, are not precise enough to allow a judgement to be made about their successful completion. While appropriate systems for monitoring both the curriculum and teaching have been developed, these are not always followed through sufficiently to drive improvement and ensure that concerns which may be raised are dealt with fully.

31. Governors are fulfilling their role well in supporting and challenging the school. In addition to questioning why, for example, the rate of unauthorised absence remains high they have supported the headteacher in matters of finance and in extending the range of provision. Since the last inspection, the population has changed. Prior to the admission of certain pupils, governors questioned the headteacher to ensure, for example, that staff were suitably knowledgeable about pupils with complex needs and that suitable health and safety checks had been undertaken to make sure challenging behaviour would not affect the well-being of other pupils. Furthermore, aware that the school budget does not reflect the complexity of pupils, governors have corresponded with the finance department for over two years and met with the director of education to clarify the designation of the school and ensure funding matches pupils' special educational needs.

32. Opportunities for staff at all levels to continue their professional development are very good. The deputy headteacher and assistant headteachers have all completed National Professional Qualification for Headteachers course, and the headteacher has set up a rolling programme giving them opportunities to experience various aspects of the headteacher role. These senior managers are conscientious, but as yet not all have a full strategic overview of the school. Teachers and support staff attend a variety of training, linked to the needs identified in the school improvement plan and to their own professional targets. Through the pilot for teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9, a number of staff has been involved in coaching others. Administrative staff are also given opportunities for further development. These opportunities ensure that staff feel valued, increase their skills, and help the school to improve further.

33. Day-to-day organisation is good and administrative staff carry out their roles very effectively. This allows managers and teachers to concentrate on their responsibilities. As part of the work force reforms, an audit of teacher tasks was carried out, and no teacher is now completing any of the tasks which are nationally agreed to be the role of support staff. This means that teachers have more time available for their key roles. While financial management is good, and aspects of the school improvement plan are costed, there remain difficulties in setting a budget because the local education authority review of special educational needs

finance is not yet completed. The cost of educating each pupil is average for a school of this type, given its good performance, the school provides good value for money.

## Financial information

### *Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004*

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	1,053,756
Total expenditure	1,007,184
Expenditure per pupil	9592

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	47,418
Balance carried forward to the next	-846

# **PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES**

## **SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4**

### **ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

#### **English**

Provision for English is **satisfactory**. Overall satisfactory teaching results in satisfactory learning and satisfactory achievement. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Achievement varies because some groups of pupils get consistently good quality teaching and so achieve well, while the achievement of others is satisfactory because they have two or three different teachers each week.
- The organisation of the teaching of English ensures that pupils successfully gain basic literacy skills but does not allow sufficiently for older pupils to gain nationally recognised awards.
- Teachers place good emphasis on developing pupils' basic literacy skills in many other subjects.
- Some learning resources used with pupils of lower capability are designed for use with much younger children.

#### **Commentary**

34. The school has only one subject specialist, who is the subject leader. Her leadership and management are satisfactory. She provides the other teachers with good advice, training and support, including through the recently introduced staff coaching system. Non-specialist teachers value this and it contributes to the good quality of teaching observed in many lessons. Furthermore, she has led training in the teaching of reading and writing. A national pilot project included valuable work on the use of questioning which has improved pupils' speaking and listening skills. Pupils of all ages have a long daily literacy session incorporating most elements of the national strategy. This regular focus on basic literacy skills, results in good achievement in this aspect.

35. English is taught to all pupils at the same time and senior leaders are released for management duties in literacy time, fifteen different teachers teach at least one lesson of English or literacy each week. Each group has its own teaching assistant for every lesson and some groups of pupils are allocated the same teacher for all five daily literacy sessions. This means they have access to consistently good quality teaching leading to good progress in acquiring basic literacy skills. However, a few groups have two or three different teachers across their five lessons. In these cases, teachers decide together how to share the teaching, for example by taking responsibility for different aspects of the curriculum. The quality of lessons taught by these teachers is often good, or even very good on occasion, but there is sometimes a lack of consistency in approach, and information about pupils' progress is difficult to track using the current assessment procedures. While achievement is satisfactory, this has reduced the rate of progress of some pupils. The co-ordinator and other senior staff have not monitored the effect this is having on pupils' achievement where more than one teacher takes a group.

36. Pupils in Year 7 in their first year at the school are taught English together throughout the week and some of the oldest pupils in Year 11 are also taught with their peers. However, the majority of pupils work in mixed-age groups consisting of pupils aged 12 to 16 years, supplemented by a single short weekly English lesson with their own class. The groups are organised mainly by pupils' ability in reading and spelling, but account is taken of other factors such as their behavioural needs and social relationships. This means that the range of ability in different groups often overlap significantly. In addition, teachers may be teaching pupils from four different year groups and several types of special educational need.

37. Most teachers cope well with the arrangements. However, a few find it hard to plan effectively to work with texts at an appropriate level of detail and depth that is suitable both for younger pupils still needing to concentrate on basic literacy skills and older pupils studying for nationally recognised awards. Consequently, much of the necessary text-level work needed for many accredited courses is only covered in the single class lesson each week. Pupils are therefore limited in the modules they can attain, and their achievement in English remains satisfactory overall. At present, many pupils leave without achieving the level of recognition that their English capability deserves. There are plans to extend the range of awards, but the school needs to support these by reviewing the way in which the teaching of English is organised for the different age groups.

38. Most teachers choose suitable texts for their literacy groups and the subject leader has identified appropriate literature for each class group to study, including good quality novels, poetry and plays. However, some of the learning resources available for pupils of lower capability are not suitable for the age group served by the school. For example, series of booklets purchased to support the teaching of phonic sounds and the spelling of commonly used words include content designed for primary pupils.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

39. Teachers in many other subjects place a high priority on promoting literacy skills. For example, pupils are encouraged to develop their discussion skills in geography, history, ICT and art. They read for information in personal, social and health education, careers education and art. They record their work in a variety of written forms, including labelling diagrams in science and French, by maintaining a work experience diary, word-processing in ICT and extended essays in history. Consequently, pupils' progress in gaining and using their basic literacy skills is good.

### **French**

Provision for the teaching of a modern foreign language is **satisfactory**. The little improvement in provision since the last inspection is mainly very recent.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Where teaching has been consistently good, pupils achieve well.
- Although only temporary, the current subject leader has made many improvements to what is taught.
- Resources are unsatisfactory.
- Pupils in both age groups have the opportunity to learn French, and a few go on to gain nationally recognised awards.

## Commentary

40. There has been some disruption to learning caused by staffing changes. Pupils' achievement varies from group to group, although all pupils have at least satisfactory achievement in learning a modern foreign language. However, some groups achieve better than others because they have had less disruption from the staffing changes and the teaching they receive is consistently good. For example, pupils in Year 7 are making good progress in learning French because they have had the same teacher since starting the language. Because she is a native French-speaker, these pupils are developing very accurate pronunciation. Much of the lesson is conducted in French, including greetings at the start of lessons, instructions and questions, and praise and encouragement. Consequently, these younger pupils conduct short conversations in French, using two or three sentences. In another group where the teaching is good, pupils had clear recall of a story in French that they had worked on in a previous term, joining in enthusiastically with the words and actions. Where pupils have experienced changes in staffing, many find it difficult to recall previously learned vocabulary and need to revise this before they can move on to each new study unit. This limits their achievement.

41. The temporary subject leader has only been in post since the start of the academic year but has worked hard to improve the school's provision. She has already rewritten the programmes of study, ensuring that suitable units of study are planned for each age group. She has taken into account what older pupils will need to learn when they are entered for externally accredited awards. She has also developed a suitable action plan to further improve the subject.

42. Teachers currently have to make many of their own teaching aids, for example word and picture cards used in the teaching of new vocabulary, worksheets that structure pupils' writing and recording, and games that give pupils' opportunities to practise the language they have learned. The school is dealing with pupils with an increasingly wider range of special educational needs and more complex learning difficulties. The existing learning resources are unsatisfactory because they are not suitable for the needs of lower ability pupils. There are also insufficient ICT resources to support the subject. The temporary subject leader is advising senior managers on appropriate resources and the necessary budget to improve this situation.

43. The teaching of a modern foreign language is compulsory only for pupils aged 11 to 14. Pupils at Hill Top have the opportunity to continue learning French throughout their time at the school, and all pupils in lessons observed clearly valued this. Pupils enjoy speaking a foreign language, and are proud of what they achieve. Some leave with modules of nationally recognised awards, and appropriately there are plans to allow more pupils have this opportunity.

## MATHEMATICS

Provision for mathematics is **good**

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' achievement is good, and accredited courses at Years 10 and 11 challenge and motivate pupils.
- The subject is very well led and managed and developments are planned well.

- Very good links with a local primary school contribute to pupils' achievement and personal development.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good, but some lack of subject knowledge amongst non-specialist teachers restricts pupils' achievement.

## Commentary

44. Pupils' achievement in mathematics is good. Provision for the subject has improved well since the previous inspection. This is largely due to the commitment and strategic planning of the subject manager which has resulted in new developments being implemented by the rest of the staff. Long term planning indicates a measured approach to curriculum innovation combined with high aspirations for all pupils. The subject manager has reviewed and amended the curriculum making it appropriate for the learning needs of pupils within the school. In conjunction with the curriculum changes the assessment procedures have been reviewed and augmented so they will reflect pupils' achievements more accurately. The principles of the National Numeracy Strategy have been introduced for pupils in Years 7 to 9, so lessons are structured around the three-part format that includes appropriate introductions, carefully chosen activities and effective plenary sessions that establish the degree of pupils' learning. Pupils in Year 11 work towards Entry level Certificate.

45. The quality of teaching is, overall, good. Where teaching is less than good, it is because non-specialist teachers are teaching the subject and have some gaps in their own subject knowledge resulting in confusing or incorrect teaching. Nevertheless, teachers plan their lessons effectively and prepare a wide range of resources well, mostly using materials matched to the abilities of the pupils, though on occasion, this is not always so for pupils with severe learning needs. Conversely, for example, pupils with autistic spectrum disorder were effectively challenged to name and match simple shapes and patterns because of very good structured teaching including symbolic communication and appropriate resources which ensured they met their individual targets and achieved very well. Pupils in Year 7 achieved well because their teacher presented challenging activities to encourage all pupils, including those with autistic spectrum disorder, to give reasons for their working out in subtraction and share their new knowledge by discussing what had been difficult. Lessons in Years 10 and 11 focus on pupils' individual needs and prepare them well for examinations and national awards. Teaching for these pupils is never less than good. Very good teaching in Year 10 was exemplified by the teacher and assistant expecting all pupils to be as independent as possible. Pupils rose to the challenge, concentrating well on the individual activities leading to understanding of three-dimensional shapes. The very good classroom management and equally good relationships resulted in a happy, motivated class with all pupils achieving very well. Teachers take pride in their classrooms, displaying key mathematical vocabulary, samples of pupils' work and mathematical equipment to encourage and support pupils' learning.

46. Pupils from a nearby primary school have been joining those in Year 7 for a series of lessons. The subject manager organises and teaches the joint group and it is pleasing to see the maturity of the Hill Top pupils when they are in a position of seniority. They were extremely confident as they helped the younger pupils to take standing jumps, measure and compare the various distances. Co-operation and turn taking, improving the personal development of all pupils typified this part of the lesson. Once the data had been collected pupils went to the ICT room where they used a computer program to analyse their data and produce bar graphs as evidence of their activities. Attitudes in mathematics lessons are usually very good but in one

instance they were excellent contributing to very good achievement in estimating and measuring distances.

47. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The subject manager has accurately identified a number of issues for further development and is working in a well-planned sequence to raise achievement. He has correctly recognised that the recently introduced 'setting' is due for fine-tuning. The subject is well placed to improve. The newly adapted curriculum and assessment systems are in place and staff are incorporating them into their planning and teaching. In order to ensure consistency in teaching, the manager has produced useful guidance for 'Written Calculation'. He has also been active in monitoring teaching and more recently in coaching by demonstrating the teaching of mathematics to colleagues. This is proving to be effective. Staff are appreciative and open to innovative ideas.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

48. Overall pupils' numeracy skills are developed satisfactorily across the curriculum but they are not always given structured and planned opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in other subjects. There are examples of numeracy skills being promoted well such as timelines in history, measurement in design and technology and reading temperature charts in geography. There is scope for increasing pupils' achievement in mathematics through using deliberately planned opportunities in other subjects to apply and reinforce their learning in mathematics.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision for science is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good teaching has resulted in good learning and good achievement.
- Good provision for investigations motivates pupils well.
- Very good use is made of ICT to enrich and support learning.
- The very good accommodation and resources contribute to pupils' achievements.
- More attention needs to be paid to health and safety in some lessons.

## Commentary

49. By Year 9 pupils have a good understanding of, for example, respiration, materials and their uses, and the earth and beyond. They continue to make good gains in their knowledge and by Year 11, almost all achieve Entry level Certificate in modules such as *the environment*, *the maintenance of life structures* and *forces*. Pupils of all ages predict and give reasons for their answers. As they progress through the school they increasingly understand how to make their test fair and of the importance of limiting variables in their experiments. Recognising that boys outperformed girls in national tests last year, teachers have made a conscious effort to ensure girls are equally involved in discussion and investigations. This is beginning to show in girls' achievement.

50. Though not all science specialists, teachers have good subject knowledge. Lessons run at a good pace, with high expectations that pupils will put in a lot of effort. Pupils enjoy positive relationships with staff and work well. Support assistants are mostly used well to make sure all pupils are included although this is not always so during discussions when, on occasion, pupils with severe learning difficulties were not fully included. Pupils are encouraged to understand potential risks as part of their investigation. This they do conscientiously, though teachers do not always pay sufficient attention to health and safety, for example, in two lessons lab coats were open and flapping. One of these lessons was when pupils were working near gas jets. Furthermore, in another lesson in the laboratory, water on the floor was not dealt with.

51. The subject is very well resourced with good quality easily accessible equipment. ICT resources to support the subject are equally very good and used very well. For example, pupils use it to research information about the solar system, to sense the changes in heat during and investigation, and to record results. Pupils were especially motivated by an electronic microscope and intrigued by the structure of an earthworm and a beetle.

52. Pupils enjoy learning because of practical activities which hold their attention while developing their skills of observation and enquiry. The laboratory and grounds are used well to further this. For example, pupils in Year 7 feverishly searched the school garden for 'mini-beasts' as part of their work on habitats. Pupils in Year 9 are fascinated by child development and are following the development of their teacher's baby which is due in a couple of months time, commenting on the size of the foetus and how the limbs and digits are taking shape. Year 10 pupils showed keen interest as they investigated food energy. The interest of pupils in all age groups has been captivated by the Garden Project. Pupils have planned the plot considering security, sunlight, drainage and soil quality. They have designed the layout and costed equipment and plants. Following planting, all classes are now monitoring progress and eagerly awaiting the fruits of their labours.

53. Subject management is good. The co-ordinator is a science specialist and ensures the planned programme provides for pupils to investigate and expand their scientific vocabulary. Improvement since the last inspection is good with the introduction of challenging accreditation, improved assessment procedures and much greater use of information and communication technology, all of which contribute to improved achievement.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision for information and communication technology is **very good**

## Main strengths and weaknesses



- Achievement in ICT is very good because of very good teaching.
- Improvement since the last inspection is very good.
- The subject is very well managed and resourced.
- The use of information and communication technology in other subjects is very good.

## **Commentary**

54. Pupils achieve very well because teachers plan work that is relevant and interesting. For example, in Year 7, pupils have designed a business card for the Young Enterprise business “Chatterbox” and are considering taking the finished card to the supermarket which sells their product. Year 10 pupils have produced a presentation about a recent visit to a newsroom of a local newspaper, and those in Year 11 have designed an advertisement for a local computer firm. It is clear from the lively discussions that pupils understand the importance of technology in everyday life. During the discussion, older pupils were able to compare what they had seen in the newsroom with the equipment they use in school. Currently pupils are working on the production of a page for the local newspaper which will include articles, pictures and an advertisement designed by pupils and sponsored by a local firm. Recently, they have been awarded ‘highly commended’ for their news page in a national competition. Higher attaining pupils demonstrate very good skills as they work independently, choosing the most appropriate software package for their task. The majority of pupils access word processing, publishing, data-bases and graphics packages with minimum guidance. Pupils with additional special needs gain an understanding of cause and effect through using switches and age-appropriate resources in the well-equipped sensory room. The achievements of pupils in Years 10 and 11 are accredited through Entry Level Certificate.

55. Most of the very good teaching is by the co-ordinator. She has a lively, enthusiastic approach and very good relationships with all pupils. As a consequence, pupils respond to being treated as young adults by being mature and responsible. Pupils benefit because she has kept pace with the rapidly changing world of technology and has made very useful contacts outside school, arranging visits which put into context what is learned in school. Pupils with additional and more complex needs are taught by non-specialist teachers whose expertise is in their knowledge of teaching pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. This is appropriate and enables pupils to have access to technology at the right level. Literacy is very well promoted in all lessons, especially speaking and listening, but also reading and writing. The subject makes a good contribution to personal development through the raising of self-esteem and promotion of independence.

56. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection. The curriculum has been widened, enriched and made more relevant. The improvement in resources, including the sensory room, has been well planned and provides a range of opportunities for pupils of all capabilities. Ongoing assessment is informal, but pupils’ progress through the skills required for tasks such as word processing and making presentations is recorded well. The after-school computer club is well supported and activities such as the control of robots, and the making and application of transfers for T-shirts, are enjoyed enthusiastically. Staff greatly appreciate the support of the co-ordinator and the technician support other staff in the school.

## **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

57. Information and communication technology enhances teaching and learning in most subjects, but particularly English, mathematics, science, physical education and French. It is very well used in the classes for autistic pupils to produce communication resources. Assemblies are enriched by relevant Power Point presentations including photographs and the words of hymns which are suitably illustrated for those who have difficulty reading. The technician makes a significant contribution to the successful use of ICT around school, especially for the assemblies, and the sensory room.

## HUMANITIES

The provision for history and geography is **satisfactory**

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Nationally recognised courses motivate pupils in Years 10 and 11 to achieve well
- Use of appropriate resources is inconsistent limiting pupils' understanding of some topics
- ICT is used effectively to develop pupils' research skills

### Commentary

58. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Despite teaching being shared by all staff rather than by specialist teachers, the standard of teaching has improved and there is now no unsatisfactory teaching in either history or geography. The teaching of **history** is good and pupils achieve well at the end of Years 9 and 11. This is because teachers plan well, share the lesson objectives with pupils and review previous learning before embarking on the main part of the lesson. Pupils are therefore reassured and prepared well for the challenges of the lesson. In a Year 9 lesson, for example, good use of activity cards based on comparisons of Celtic and Roman settlements not only reinforced understanding of the subject but also encouraged all pupils to discuss their work with higher attaining pupils responding well to the opportunity to work independently. However, in another instance, older pupils though making good use of literacy skills to make inferences and empathise with the men involved in trench warfare were restricted in their understanding by the lack of suitable resources.

59. Teaching and learning in **geography** are satisfactory. Achievement by the end of Year 9 is satisfactory but the use of resources is inconsistent, inhibiting achievement in some lessons. Where there is high expectation of participation and high emphasis on pupils thinking and voicing explanations, they achieve well. A good example was when Year 7 pupils listened to a description of the 1985 Mexico City earthquake and volunteered explanations for 'cataclysmic' and described 'vibration' in their efforts to analyse the impact of an earthquake.

60. In both subjects, teachers follow national curriculum topics adapted to the educational needs and interests of pupils and this works well. In geography, there is an effective balance between geographical enquiry, the study of places and a consideration of environmental change. In history, chronological understanding and empathy with the past are combined with the development of enquiry skills. Information and communication technology is used well to support research and enquiry. For example pupils researched the voyages of Captain Cook and Christopher Columbus and searched for information about South African culture. In both subjects pupils are given good opportunities to develop numeracy and skills as they produce rainfall graphs and pie charts, use their knowledge of scale to work out distances or write imaginatively about North American Indians.

61. A particular strength of the provision is the very good opportunities for pupils to achieve accreditation based on interesting topics such as Women's Campaign For The Vote, Life At The Western Front and Natural Hazards including volcanoes and earthquakes. Pupils are clearly motivated by accreditation and by the end of Year 11 achieve well in both history and geography.

### **Religious education**

The provision for religious education is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good, and the subject well managed as a result of which pupils of all capabilities achieve well.
- The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development.
- Resources are used effectively to support teaching and learning and to make learning relevant.

### **Commentary**

62. As at the time of the last inspection most lessons are taught by the subject manager. She has good subject knowledge and makes lessons interesting and relevant to pupils' lives. Lessons are conducted with urgency and high expectations of behaviour and of the work pupils will produce. Each lesson, pupils are expected to record what they have learned though this is mostly using single words or phrases. While the classroom layout lends itself well to most lessons, on occasions it affected pupils learning. On one occasion pupils were learning about the Hindu belief of puja. As part of the lesson, the teacher prepared a puja tray. However, the items were small and the labels with key vocabulary could not be seen from the back of the room. Though background music burning incense were used to create an atmosphere, the full impact of the occasion was missed because pupils were sitting in rows craning to see what was on the tray.

63. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorder are taught by their class teacher. They achieve well because the teacher provides sensory experiences and all adults support what is said by using signs and symbols. For example, in a lesson about objects that are special to Christians, in turn, pupils held a heavy metal crucifix, and some were surprised by the weight. While using the sign and symbol for cross the teacher expected all pupils to vocalise thus improving communication. Pupils then learned the sign for 'special'. They made good progress because of the calm atmosphere where they felt secure, and because of the close teamwork and high expectations of all adults.

64. By Year 9, pupils have a suitable understanding of Christianity and are aware of the creation stories of different faiths and of the traditions and meaning of, for example, a Jewish wedding. Pupils increase their knowledge of understanding of major world faiths as they progress through the school and by Year 11 achieve Entry Level Certificate for units in Hinduism and Christianity. Comparing, for instance, why people marry, considering choice and arranged marriages, the importance of marriage and the vows that are taken.

65. Since the last inspection, there has been an increase in the number and quality of resources, especially for teaching world faiths. This motivates pupils well and contributes to

their achievement. Furthermore, pupils are gaining an increased respect for the beliefs of others, which, alongside the expectation that they think deeply about how religion influences peoples' lives, contributes significantly to their personal development. In addition to objects special to each faith, very good use is made of visiting speakers to talk about particular celebrations and what their religion means. For example, a Muslim visitor spoke about the key features of a Mosque, carefully explaining the reason for the cleansing room and the purpose of the Mihrab Wall. Pupils were fascinated by the bright colours of the prayer mat and recalled from previous lessons that Muslims turn to Mecca when they pray. Visits to places of worship such as Durham Cathedral enable pupils to put their learning in context.

66. Subject management is good. In addition to co-ordinating religious education, the manager oversees daily worship and plans themes which complement and support what is being taught. She has adapted the Locally Agreed Syllabus to include work on the Northumbrian saints so pupils become aware of their cultural heritage. She ensures homework is relevant and makes pupils think about the meaning of religion having identified this as an area for improvement. For example, pupils in all age groups wrote special prayers which were compiled into an anthology and used in worship.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and Technology**

There was insufficient evidence to make a judgement on provision in design and technology.

67. From the lessons observed, records examined, and finished products seen, pupils achieve very well in the area of **resistant materials**. They work in wood and plastic and learn skills which will be very useful long after they have left school. Design and evaluation form an important part of the lessons, which are taught enthusiastically by a specialist teacher. Pupils are very aware of the rules for safety putting on protective clothing, goggles, or shields without being told to and routinely clear away without being asked. Pupils have produced a variety of high quality practical items such as a kitchen roll holder, bird table, letter rack and key fob using a range of tools including saws and hammers, the jigsaw, turning lathe and sander. The teacher demonstrates well but expects pupils to work independently and show initiative. Assessment and recording are very good. By Year 11 pupils achieve Entry level Certificate. Relationships are excellent and mutual respect evident.

68. Only one lesson in **food technology** was observed. This was taught by a non-specialist supply teacher and was found to be unsatisfactory. This is partly because she is not a specialist and because she has had to develop the subject from scratch. Though pupils made stuffed peppers, the elements of design and evaluation were missing, and the organisation and slow pace of the lesson reduced learning opportunities. Nevertheless, relationships were very good and autistic pupils were fully included.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Art and design**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good, as a result of which pupils achieve well.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant, giving pupils a wide range of experiences, which also support their cultural development.
- Good displays throughout the school brighten the environment and raise pupils' self-esteem.

## **Commentary**

69. The specialist art teacher establishes a relaxed, happy atmosphere, in which pupils grow in confidence knowing that their efforts are valued. The appreciation of pupils' work is also shown through the displays of work around the school, of which pupils are very proud. The teacher provides support and advice, where these are needed, but also encourages pupils to be as independent as possible, giving them opportunities to develop their own ideas. Accordingly, pupils achieve well in lessons and over time, learning to work in a variety of styles, using a range of materials, and producing two and three-dimensional pieces. This is an improvement from the last inspection.

70. Pupils produce drawings and paintings; they make collages and 3D objects, such as for a display of the seashore. Pupils' appreciation of the art of other cultures is increased as they learn to work in the styles of well-known artists such as Matisse and Hockney and are introduced to the art and design of different cultures. For example, pupils in Year 8 are learning about the Spanish architect, Gaudi and using his work as the basis of drawing and collage. Others have developed work on North American Indian themes. Pupils are interested and enthusiastic and work hard to achieve well. Pupils in years 10 and 11, who take art as an optional subject, gain units of achievement, while those who wish are able to take GCSE art, and last year pupils achieved very well, with three pupils gaining a 'C' grade and one a 'D' grade. This year, three pupils completed the course. They are justifiably proud of their work and are happy to explain how they developed the pieces. They speak knowledgeably about the displays of framed examples of work which support learning and celebrate achievement.

71. The curriculum is well planned, giving pupils in Years 7 to 9 opportunities to learn about and to experiment with, pattern, line, shape and texture. They look at different types of sculpture and architecture. This provides a firm foundation for those who continue the subject into Years 10 and 11, leading to accredited courses, in which they have further opportunities to develop skills and ideas and extend these into more 3D work, and to work with printing and textiles. There are many opportunities provided to enrich the curriculum, for examples pupils are taking part in a project to design giant figures, linked to work on Spain, and with the support of an artist in residence. They go on visits, for example, to look at sculptures in the town centre, and to art galleries such as the Baltic Centre.

## Music

Provision for music is **very good**

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good, as a result of which pupils achieve very well, an improvement from the last inspection when both teaching and achievement were judged to be good.
- Pupils have a wide range of musical experiences, both within the curriculum and through extra-curricular activities.

### Commentary

72. The school benefits from having a specialist music teacher who teaches most of the classes. Lessons are very well planned to develop pupils' musical abilities and lively presentations engage pupils' interest. Pupils are challenged to attempt different tasks, and are very enthusiastic in lessons. They are introduced to a range of musical experiences, and musical language is reinforced through all of these. Pupils recognise the sounds of different instruments and are often able to name them. They listen carefully to music and describe what they have heard, for example, when listening to winter music or folk music. When composing music, they show a high level of concentration and are very keen to perform what they have written. Because of the very skilled teaching, they make very good progress in, for example, composing a fanfare. The teacher has very high expectations of both learning and behaviour, which enables pupils with autistic spectrum disorder to be included with others for music lessons. Relationships between adults and pupils are very good; as a result of which pupils have the confidence to perform for others. They comment favourably on the work of others and are beginning to develop evaluation skills.

73. The music curriculum has been very well planned to ensure that pupils have opportunities to perform, to listen to music and to compose. All pupils in Years 7 to 9 have weekly lessons. The scheme of work gives pupils access to different types of music from different periods and of different cultures. Because the teacher is also a dance and drama specialist, pupils in Years 10 and 11 have an expressive arts option. The teacher has developed units of work which have been accredited under the AQA units of accreditation scheme and, this year, one pupil has been entered for the GCSE course. Pupils' musical understanding is enhanced by opportunities to participate in activities such as a recorder group and a percussion group, both of which play for school assemblies. The percussion group has also performed for other schools. Annual productions of musicals and Christmas concerts give many pupils an opportunity to extend their musical experiences, and visiting musicians further enhance pupils' understanding. The teacher works with others to develop cross curricular themes, for example, work on Spain being developed in art at the instigation of the music teacher, was being followed up in music by the writing of fanfares to announce the arrival of giant figures. All of these experiences make a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development.

74. The teacher has effectively developed the subject, with clear schemes of work being in place, ensuring that all aspects of the curriculum are covered. Careful monitoring and assessment of pupils' progress ensures that lessons are targeted to their needs, so they achieve well.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision for physical education is **very good**

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Achievement in physical education is very good.
- Excellent assessment procedures form an important part of the very good teaching.
- Pupils benefit from the specialist knowledge and wide experience of the very good co-ordinator.

### **Commentary**

75. Pupils achieve very well in a range of sports, athletics, dance, fitness and swimming because of very good teaching and a very wide range of challenging activities. Each year group covers a wide range of ability, so progress is measured against previous performance. Pupils learn skills at a good rate, demonstrating, for example in cricket, the correct grip and windmill action when bowling, and the right stance for batting, and can explain why. They understand the importance of warming up, and how exercise affects the body. Self-evaluation and the observation of others lead to improvement in performance. The emphasis on working to improve their personal best means that all experience success, with a corresponding increase in self-esteem and confidence. Lunchtime clubs and inter-house competitions allow pupils to further develop and their skills. Year 11 options include swimming, snorkelling, fitness training at the local swimming pool, squash at a local squash club, as well as basketball, netball, badminton, cricket, athletics, table tennis, and orienteering on site. Pupils are gaining accreditation at Entry Level Certificate.

76. Excellent assessment, including ongoing assessment in lessons, leads to very good target setting, which helps pupils to understand how they can improve. Assessment results are recorded and monitored to ensure overall progress. Lessons are very well planned, with the starter and plenary activities contributing significantly to literacy, numeracy and science. Very good teamwork and the well thought out grouping of pupils mean that all are challenged at the right level. Relationships are very good and expectations high so and pupils respond with enthusiasm. Personal development is promoted very well as pupils are expected to take responsibility, show initiative, work together and to support each other.

77. There has been very good improvement in the provision for physical education since the previous inspection. Pupils benefit from the experience and contacts of the co-ordinator who, with the help of senior pupils, organises 'Girlsport' across the region, and moderates for GCSE in a number of schools. This year pupils have had professional coaching in soccer, rugby, dance, netball, golf and fitness. They took part in soccer and athletics activity days in Gateshead International Stadium, and played netball in the Disability Festival, finishing second in a competition between Local Authorities. Pupils who show special talents are given every opportunity to develop and use their gifts. The school has achieved Sportsmark, and is aiming for gold in 2005.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

Provision in PSHCE is **very good**

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Achievement is good because of good teaching.
- The taught programme is very well supported by other subjects and through daily routines.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' personal development.
- Recording achievement could be better as could opportunities for pupils to record their thoughts.

## **Commentary**

78. Teachers plan well ensuring activities are relevant to pupils' needs. Stimulating resources, including the use of computers, maintain pupils' interest. Pupils pay close attention so learning is quickly established. Relationships between staff and pupils are very good. Adults provide good models of how to behave appropriately showing respect for pupils. Lessons are conducted with good humour and a useful exchange of ideas. Teachers provide very good opportunities for pupils to improve their conversational skills and to consider the merits of the arguments of others. While pupils of all capabilities record their work, all too often this consists of supplying missing words or phrases with few occasions provided for them to write at length or for different purposes.

79. By Year 9, pupils recognise though everyone is an individual, all need the same conditions, such as water, shelter, friendship and safety to survive and flourish. When considering 'difference' they have an awareness of how first impressions of clothes and ethnicity can be misleading. In discussion, pupils have a suitable understanding and mature attitude to substance misuse. An investigation into how litter can be dangerous has made pupils more conscious of their environment. As pupils progress through the school their understanding of human rights and responsibilities increases. By Year 11 they achieve Entry Level Certificate covering topics such as a 'healthy lifestyle', and 'sex and relationships'. Their knowledge is increased by work in college which reinforces that done in school and the school motto 'We enthuse for lifelong learning'. Pupils acquire self-knowledge through considering 'Who I am', their strengths, achievements and their plans for the future. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorder are encouraged and helped to make sense of the world around them through very structured days, sequencing their timetable using symbols, and through visits. For example, pupils have visited a supermarket, and a factory which produces teddy bears as part of ASDAN vocational education.

80. Teachers pay great attention to pupils' personal development. They want them to do well so pupils respond really well, growing in confidence as they progress through the school. Pupils' self esteem improves through social targets in individual education plans and opportunities to take part in assemblies and school productions. They increase their social skills as they realise the importance of making eye-contact, of speaking clearly and performing to a large audience. Every opportunity is taken for pupils to express their opinion in lessons and through school council. As a result, pupils grow in confidence. Recently, three pupils represented young people from Gateshead at a conference at the Department for Education and Skills. The subject is further supported by high quality displays around the school, including life-size, eye-catching boards showing pupils fulfilling the aspirations of the school song 'You can do it if you try'.

81. Subject management is good. A lot of work has been done to extend the provision for citizenship. An audit has been conducted to check on coverage in other subjects. History makes a particularly good contribution to the subject as pupils consider, for example, the morality of war, the feelings of soldiers, and women's right to vote. Though some work has been done on recording using levels in a commercially produced package, this does not



always sufficiently reflect the knowledge and skills pupils have acquired. It is not possible to make a judgement on improvement since the last inspection as the subject was not recorded in the previous report.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

*Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7). In a special school such as this, standards achieved are judged against individual targets and not against national standards.*