

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

**MILL GREEN SCHOOL**

**Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside**

**LEA area: St. Helens**

**Unique reference number: 131022**

**Headteacher: Paul Cronin**

**Lead inspector: Michael McDowell**  
**Dates of inspection: 28<sup>th</sup> June – 1<sup>st</sup> July 2004**

**Inspection number: 258949**  
**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 special  
**Age range of pupils:** 2 to 19 years  
**Gender of pupils:** Mixed  
**Number on roll;** 81

**School address:** Mill Lane  
Newton-le-Willows  
Merseyside  
**Postcode:** WA12 8BG

**Telephone number:** 01744 678760  
**Fax number:** 01744 678761

**Appropriate authority:** Governing body  
**Name of chair of governors:** Alan Griffiths

**Date of previous inspection:** 6<sup>th</sup> July 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Mill Green School was formed by the merger of two special schools, one primary, the other secondary, in 1998. The school has 87 pupils aged 2 to 19 years who have statements of special educational needs because of severe or profound learning difficulties. There are 35 girls and 52 boys on roll. Because of their special educational needs, the attainments of pupils on entering the school are very low. Most pupils come from within the Metropolitan Borough of St. Helens but a significant minority are drawn from neighbouring authorities. Because the school makes the only provision locally for students aged 16 to 19 with learning difficulties, a number of students join in Year 12. The majority of pupils and students are white and British. The home language of all pupils is English. The school aims to provide education of the highest quality within a safe and caring environment, so that each individual might reach her or his full potential.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1405	Michael McDowell	Lead inspector	Art, music, religious education.
9348	Mary Le Mage	Lay inspector	
10228	Susan Russam	Team inspector	Mathematics, information and communication technology, design and technology.
23587	Alastair Younger	Team inspector	Science, history, physical education, personal, social and health education.
27409	Sue Hunt	Team inspector	English, citizenship, geography, French.

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## **REPORT CONTENTS**

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS</b>	
<b>STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS</b>	<b>8</b>
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
<b>QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL</b>	<b>11</b>
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
<b>LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE</b>	
<b>SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 1 TO POST-16</b>	
<b>PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS</b>	<b>36</b>

## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The overall effectiveness of the school is good. It provides good value for money.**

The school meets the needs of its pupils and students well and, overall, teaching and learning are good. Achievement is good and there is very good support both for those with the most profound and complex needs and those whose potential attainment is highest. All who attend are very well guided and cared for. The school works very well to promote their best interests with a broad range of agencies. Leadership is effective providing a clear sense of high aspirations and purpose and management is good.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The achievement of students in Years 12 to 14, and of pupils and students with profound, multiple and complex learning difficulties, is very good because of the high quality teaching and learning opportunities provided.
- Higher achieving pupils develop their language and literacy skills very well, because of the curriculum support that they are given.
- The school provides a focal point for multi-agency support for children, pupils, students and their families and has very good links with the community and other schools.
- Teachers' ability to engage the interest and cooperation of their pupils and the use made of assessment to respond to individual needs are very good features of teaching.
- Good leadership and management have enabled the school to respond successfully to change and to improve.
- The accommodation for Foundation Stage is unsatisfactory and the Foundation Stage curriculum does not address early learning goals with sufficient clarity.

Since the last inspection, there has been a satisfactory improvement in the effectiveness of the school. Improved leadership and tighter management have led to positive changes. Most significantly, the quality of teaching is higher than it was. The key issues arising from the last inspection have all been addressed. Achievement for children in the Foundation Stage and pupils in Years 1 and 2, which was unsatisfactory, is now satisfactory. There have been significant improvements in monitoring and evaluating provision throughout the school and in assessment recording and reporting, including the procedures for statutory reviews of statements. Curriculum coordination is now established. The communication needs of pupils who cannot speak are met well.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement at the end of:	in relation to individual targets in:	
	Subjects of the curriculum	personal and social education
Foundation Stage	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>
Year 2	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>
Year 6	<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b>
Year 9	<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b>
Year 11	<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b>
Year 14	<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very Good</b>

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

**Achievement, overall, is good.** There are very few children in the Foundation Stage and they are taught in a single group, together with the small number of pupils who are in Years 1 and 2. Achievement made by children and pupils in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. By Year 6, pupils achieve very well in language and literacy skills, and they achieve well in mathematics, science and information and communication technology. Achievement by year 9 and by year 11 follows a similar

pattern and is also good. The achievement of the pupils with the most profound and complex difficulties is very good, as is the achievement in language and literacy of those pupils in Years 3 to 11, who are, potentially, higher attainers. Achievement in geography for pupils in Years 3 to 11 and in French for those in Years 7 to 11 is very good. The achievement of students in the post-16 classes is very good. In personal, social and health education achievement is good except for students in Years 12, 13 and 14, where it is strongly focused on workplace learning and the development of independent living skills, and is very good. Pupils and students achieve the targets set for them in their individual education plans. **Pupils' and students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, social, moral, and cultural development are good, overall.** Social and moral development are very good. Spiritual development, especially awareness of personal feelings, and sensitivity to the feelings and beliefs of others, is good. Cultural development is, also, good. Attitudes are good among the youngest children and pupils and very good among pupils and students from Year 3 to Year 14. As pupils get older, they become more aware of the needs of others and they are very willing to take on responsibilities. Behaviour is good and there have been no exclusions. Relationships within the school are very good. There is no racism, oppressive behaviour or bullying. Attendance and punctuality are both good.

### **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching is good.** It is satisfactory in the Foundation Stage but good for pupils in Years 3 to 9 and very good for those in Years 10 and 11. It is, consistently, of high quality in the post-16 classes and in the support unit for pupils with more profound and complex needs. Assessment is thorough, accurate and used very well to respond to individual needs. **Learning is good.** Pupils apply themselves and work hard. As they grow older, they increasingly attempt to do more for themselves. The curriculum is good, overall. It provides pupils with relevant learning opportunities and meets their needs well. The Foundation Stage curriculum is insufficiently targeted on the goals children should achieve by the end of reception and unsatisfactory in this respect. The curriculum offered to post-16 students is very relevant and very good. A strong feature overall, is the very good provision made for those with the greatest learning needs and for those with the highest learning potential. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory, except in the Foundation Stage, where they are unsatisfactory. Provision for care, guidance, and support is very good. Personal development is monitored very well and very good use is made of monitoring to guide pupils. The school works very well with other agencies to provide support for pupils and their families. Partnership with other schools and the community is very good.

### **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher leads the school well and he has been effective in bringing about improvements in what it provides. He is clear about the educational direction the school must take if it is to continue to develop. Overall, others in leadership roles carry these out well and in some cases, for example the post-16 provision or the support unit, very well. Management is effective. There is very thorough self-evaluation and staff professional development is good. Finance is carefully managed. Governance is satisfactory. The governors are strong supporters of the school, fulfil their statutory duties, and seek to obtain the greatest benefit for expenditure, however, their role, as a critical friend of the school is limited.

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

Parents are very satisfied with the school and those who attended the pre-inspection meeting or made their views known by questionnaire rated it highly. No issues were raised that had not already been fully discussed with the school and resolved. Pupils and students like the school and enjoy attending it.

### **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

The most important thing the school should do to improve is:

- Improve the accommodation and resources for the Foundation Stage and ensure that the curriculum offered to the children in it is clearly focused on goals that children should achieve by the end of reception.

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

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

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

Achievement is **good**. It is satisfactory for the Foundation Stage, which includes the small number of pupils who are in Years 1 and 2. It is good for pupils in Years 3 to 11 and very good for students in Years 12 to 14.

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

- There has been a general improvement in achievement.
- The targets set by the school are achieved or exceeded in most cases.
- Achievement is very good in geography for pupils in Years 3 to 11 and in French for pupils in Years 7 to 11.
- Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties achieve very well.
- Pupils in the literacy support groups achieve very well.
- Achievement for post-16 students is very good.
- Achievement for Foundation Stage children and pupils in Years 1 and 2 is less marked than that of older pupils and students.

#### **Commentary**

1. Since the last report, there has been a general improvement in standards achieved. This has been most marked among pupils in Years 3 to 11 and among students in years 12 to 14. In English, mathematics and science, the good standards previously achieved have been maintained in each age group but in English, the development of additional provision for higher attaining pupils has led to their achievements in literacy being boosted. The standards achieved by those pupils from Year 3 to Year 11 who attend the literacy support group are very good. The standards achieved by the third of the school's pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties have also improved. They achieve very well in relation to their individual targets in English/communication, mathematics, science, information and communication technology, body awareness and control, and personal, social and health education. In French and geography, achievement is now very good. Students in the post-16 classes now achieve very well. They meet their personal learning targets consistently and gain accreditation for their efforts from a broad range of accreditation bodies.
2. The school sets targets for achievement in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6, Year 9, and Year 11. These targets are based on the progress of pupils as measured by a suitable scale that is sufficiently fine-grained to show up the small gains that are made. Pupils are on course to achieve or surpass the current targets set for them. In the end-of-key stage targets set in 2001 for achievement in 2003, those in Year 6 met their targets in English and mathematics, and some exceeded the target in English and communication skills. A suitable scale against which to measure progress in science was not available in 2001 so realistic targets could not be set. Similarly, those in Year 9 in 2003 achieved the targets set in English and mathematics. In mathematics, the target in relation to shape, space, and measures was exceeded. The 2003 targets set for pupils in Year 11 were mostly met in English and mathematics. Once again, the lack of a suitable measure for progress in science in 2001 meant that a realistic target could not be set. More general targets set in 2001, including those for the gaining of nationally accredited awards, such as the English speaking Board certificates were met. Targets are set for each pupil at the meetings held annually to review their needs. These are incorporated into individual educational plans. These targets are achieved in the great majority of cases. Progress by pupils and students towards the targets set for them is overall, good.

3. Where good standards of achievement in particular subjects were reported following the last inspection, these have been sustained. In geography and in French, however, achievement has markedly improved and it is now very good. In geography, which is taught to pupils in Years 3 to 11, this is because of very good subject leadership. This has strengthened awareness of the importance of geography throughout the school and has brought about the successful use of a broad range of resources, including information and communication technology, to teach the subject. Similarly, provision for French has improved, leading to very good achievement for pupils in Years 7 to 11 where it is taught. Teaching in French is very good. It is imaginative and stimulates the interest of the pupils and they enjoy it.
4. Pupils with more complex and profound and multiple learning difficulties spend most of their time in classes with their age peers. For a significant portion of each week they are taught in the support unit alongside a small number of pupils who have similar needs. Because these sessions are carefully targeted to reinforce and extend pupils' capabilities, learning is intense and pupils achieve a great deal more than expected. In particular, they extend their ability to respond and communicate but they move forward very well in all areas of the curriculum.
5. Curriculum support is made available for higher attaining pupils to help in their development of language and literacy. Pupils who are assessed as being likely to benefit are given structured individual and small group support. Those who are offered this support make very good progress in literacy and language skills. They improve their reading and develop handwriting and creative writing. One or two who have need of it are enabled to use "Moon" symbols, a tactile writing system for the visually impaired. The achievement of pupils who receive curriculum support is very good.
6. Over the years that they spend in the leavers' unit, they consolidate their communication, literacy and numeracy skills, and they develop a range of additional competencies in response to the very good programme and teaching that they are offered. Much of what they learn is centred around the world of work and the development of independence skills. Aspects of this are very challenging for the students who, nevertheless, accomplish a great deal. There is a broad range of external bodies that accredit their learning. Particularly noteworthy among the achievements of students are the success of so many in the English Speaking Board Certificate of Achievement Award, and also the attainment of silver level Youth Achievement Awards by four students in Year 14.
7. When last inspected, the achievement of children in the Foundation Stage was unsatisfactory in some areas. While achievements in the Foundation Stage, which in this school appropriately includes those few children who, by age would normally be in Year 1 or Year 2, is satisfactory, standards have not moved as much as they should. This is partly attributable to some weaknesses in provision, particularly accommodation and resources, which are unsatisfactory, and curriculum, which is not clearly enough focused on the early learning goals.

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

Pupils' and students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities are developed well. Attitudes are **very good** and behaviour is **good**. Pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is **good**. Attendance is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very effective management of pupils and students leads to good behaviour and very good attitudes to school.
- Spiritual and cultural development are good and moral and social development are very good.
- Relationships between pupils and students and between pupils, students, and staff are very good and contribute to the positive ethos of the school.

- Pupils' and students' personal development is promoted very well outside of lessons.
- Pupils and students enjoy school and attend well.

## Commentary

8. The school's systems for managing pupils' behaviour are very effective. These include individual behaviour plans for those who are particularly challenging and praise for good behaviour. Staff are consistent in the manner in which they attempt to improve pupils' behaviour and sustain positive attitudes. Voices are never raised and exchanges with pupils are calm. Much praise is given for pupils' and students' efforts and work, with care being taken to make clear exactly what is pleasing and good. This means that the pupils understand how they are intended to respond and behave. They behave well and their attitudes are very good. Teachers and members of the support staff provide very good role models for pupils and students and encourage them to think about how their attitudes and behaviour affects other people. Pupils and students are confident as a result and very eager to state publicly, as some did in assembly, how angry they have felt in the past when they have been bullied or shouted at.
9. The spiritual development of pupils and students is good. The daily assemblies for secondary aged pupils and students and classroom acts of worship for younger pupils, together with visits to churches and cathedrals provide spiritual experiences. In addition, during assembly, suitable music is provided so that pupils and students may listen and enjoy a quiet period of reflection. At these times good use is made of symbolism, for example, candles are lit. Prayers offered at assembly are frequently composed and read out by the pupils and students. The moral and social development of pupils is very good. They know right from wrong and they work well with each other in their learning and play activities. As part of their citizenship activities, within the ASDAN course that they follow, students have been involved in charitable events to help others. For example, they have taken part in the Macmillan Cancer Relief Crocus Walk. Pupils and students have the chance to work in a variety of social situations and take on responsibilities. For example, younger pupils help their class teacher and school by returning registers to the office. Older students take part in work experience and learn much about the world through this. They respond to the opportunities for social learning that this provides very well. Inspectors were told by a senior representative of a local building firm that the students placed there are highly thought of and are given a variety of responsibilities. Within the leavers' department, students run a mini enterprise business very successfully working as a team to produce and market a range of products. Pupils and students are exposed to a rich variety of cultural traditions both their own culture and that of others in art, religious education, music and other areas of the curriculum. For example, during Year 8 music lessons, African and Chinese songs related to festivals and celebrations and the dances that should accompany them, are learned and enjoyed. In an ambitious celebration of local culture, a local museum artist recently worked with the school to produce the stained glass panels in the main hall, this helped the pupils, and students appreciate the artistry associated with the long established local glass industry of St. Helens.
10. Relationships between pupils and students and between pupils, students, and those who teach and support them are very good. There is no bullying nor is there any other form of oppressive behaviour. Pupils and students trust the adults in the school. Because it is so evident that pupils are respected by all staff, they are prepared to tackle new skills or activities that might appear very challenging. For example, during a literacy lesson for pupils with profound and multiple disabilities, within the Support Unit, all were prepared to allow themselves to be enclosed in vast amounts of thin blue material and 'swim' their way out of it! Relationships are strengthened through day and residential out of school visits. These serve to build up trust, and the shared experiences that emerge from such visits and trips provide pleasurable memories for all. All of this contributes to the happy atmosphere in the school.

11. A significant example of the way in which the school works effectively to promote the personal development of its pupils and students is to be found in the School Council. Presently council members are drawn from the oldest students but thought is being given to extending the membership to include younger pupils. The elected members meet regularly to discuss the day-to-day life of the school and to consider solutions to difficulties that they identify or to make proposals for improvement. They have, recently, discussed developing the playground and changes to the school uniform. The council includes some members who are impressively articulate. They are very willing to greet visitors and explain the 'workings' of the council. In addition, members of the School Council produce a regular, highly literate, newsletter that informs parents and friends of the exciting events taking place in the life of the school.

**Attendance**

12. Pupils and students enjoy coming to school and want to do their best in lessons and activities. This has a very positive impact on their achievements. The school has maintained a good level of attendance since the last inspection. Pupils are seldom absent unless they are ill, have medical appointments or are on integration. Staff follow up any absences rigorously and ensure that there is always a first day contact with parents or carers. The pupils usually arrive at school on time, but are occasionally late due to delays in school transport due to traffic problems.

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	6%	School data :	0.1%
National data:	9.6%	National data:	0.1%

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

**Exclusions**

13. The school does not normally exclude pupils, and there have been no temporary fixed period or permanent exclusions in the last school year.

**QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The quality of education provided by the school is **good**. Teaching and learning are **good**, overall. Assessment is good, overall, and very well used. The curriculum is also **good** overall. It meets the needs of pupils and students well. Very good learning opportunities are provided for students in Years 12 to 14 and for those with the most profound learning difficulties and, more generally, across the age range, learning opportunities are good. However, as well as these, positive, and very positive, features there are some unsatisfactory elements in the Foundation Stage curriculum. Very good opportunities are provided outside of lessons to enrich learning.

**Teaching and learning**

Teaching and learning are good. They are best in classes for older pupils in Years 10 and 11, and for students in the post-16 classes. They are also very good in the Support Unit for those with profound and multiple learning difficulties and in the language and literacy support sessions for those with the highest learning potential. Teaching and learning are satisfactory for children in the Foundation Stage. Except in the Foundation stage, where there are weaknesses, assessment is good and is used very well.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching has improved
- In the Support Unit teaching is of very high quality
- Post-16 students learn and achieve very well because teaching is very good
- The language and literacy skills of those with the highest learning potential are promoted very well
- Teaching is frequently imaginative and successful in engaging the interests of learners
- For pupils and students beyond Foundation Stage, assessment is accurate and very well used
- Uncertainty about requirements in Foundation Stage reduces the impact of teaching on children's learning

## Commentary

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 54 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3 (6%)	15 (28%)	18(33%)	18(33%)	-	-	-

*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.*

14. The quality of teaching is good. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. In about a third of lessons observed at this inspection, teaching was very good or, sometimes, excellent. In many of the remaining lessons, it was good. This improvement is due, in part, to the improvements made by the school in the monitoring of teaching and learning and the greater opportunities for focused professional development and training of teachers that the school now provides. Under the performance management strategy adopted by the school each teacher now works towards professional targets that have been set for them based on observation of their classroom practice. They have taken the chances that have been given to them to deepen and broaden their professional understanding.
15. The Support Unit provides for the needs of those with the most profound and complex needs. Such pupils are timetabled to receive about a third of their teaching in the Support Unit. They follow an individualised programme that addresses their learning needs but which is also very strongly related to the requirements of the National Curriculum. The teachers in the Unit assess each pupil very carefully and make a thorough analysis of their learning characteristics. They use this information to decide the best methods to adopt in teaching each individual. Their understanding of the physical and emotional needs of their pupils is excellent. They also have a very good understanding of the curriculum requirements. Teaching in the unit is very lively. Each small group of pupils experiences, in the manner in which they are best able to do so, the full range of carefully choreographed activities that make up "the lesson."
16. The programme for students in Years 12 to 14 has been carefully developed over time to provide as many opportunities as possible for students to experience success and come to feel positively about themselves. Teachers have a very good understanding of their students, and they are very well informed about the broad range of accredited courses and relevant learning experiences that might be offered to them. They have very high expectations and this is readily to be seen in the challenging nature of the daily programmes of activities. Teaching methods are very well matched to the requirements of the students both individually and collectively. In some sessions, formal classroom lessons are taught. For example, when work in practical mathematics or developing speech, language, and literacy skills is taking place. However, in others, learning takes place in the context of a workplace or a domestic setting. Very good use is made of dialogue to enable students to think carefully and arrive at their own answers and conclusions. Students are strongly encouraged to exercise choice. Central to the successful operation of the post-16 groups is the work of the support assistants. They

work very effectively and sensitively often with the most vulnerable individuals to ensure that they get the most out the experience. As a result of the careful and well-judged efforts of the staff students are strongly engaged by the learning experiences they are offered. They respond whole-heartedly when undertaking tasks as diverse as cultivating vegetables or preparing snacks and sandwiches for sale. They achieve very well. Their experiences prepare them very well for experience of work or for college attendance and life after school.

17. Pupils with the highest potential in language and literacy receive very good teaching through the curriculum support programme. This is delivered by a member of the support staff who has received special training. A very thorough assessment of each pupil's learning needs is made and these are carefully analysed. Individual plans are then drawn up that have precise targets and clear strategies for attaining these. Within sessions, teaching is well focused on the targets and it makes good use of a broad range of resources including computers. There is good variety in the work provided. Pupils take to this provision very well. They come to believe in themselves as successful learners and to make good headway in achieving better reading and writing skills.
18. A strength of the teaching is the imaginative approach of teachers in putting their lessons across. They know that learning by doing is often more likely to be successful than more passive approaches. When students in Year 12 were working on their reading and writing, for example, their lesson involved a story about a seaside holiday. However, to help them recall the sequence of the tale and to ensure that they fully understood what they read, a wide range of "props" had been prepared. Students were led to match key words in the story to suitable objects amongst the "props" and to flourish their "prop" at the right place as the story was read. This led to great fun and very good learning.
19. Very good use is made of assessment to ensure that lessons are pitched at the right level for the individual and the group. A structured scale is used to record the very small gains that pupils, characteristically, make, in their learning in each subject. Knowing what pupils know, understand, and can do, helps to ensure that realistic targets for future attainment can be set. Individual plans set realistic targets that can be assessed for each pupil and these are taken into account by teachers when they plan their lessons.
20. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory rather than good. This is because there is some lack of clarity about the early learning goals towards which children should be moving. Planning does not always express these clearly and the purpose of activities, that may be worthwhile, is not, always, certain. As a consequence of this time, on occasions, is not used to the full. Good, well-planned activities do take place, for example, good tabletop work using toys to extend the language was seen, but frequently sessions and the activities within them lacked such a clear learning focus.

## The curriculum

The curriculum is **good**. Opportunities for enrichment are **very good**. The quality and quantity of accommodation and resources are **satisfactory**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum has improved since the last inspection, except for children in the Foundation Stage class.
- There is a very good curriculum for the post-16 students.
- Provision for pupils with additional special educational needs is very good.
- There are extensive opportunities for pupils to participate in enrichment activities that are interesting and relevant.
- Accommodation and resources for children in the Foundation Stage class are unsatisfactory.

## Commentary

21. Curriculum provision has improved since the last inspection, and it is now good. Pupils with more complex difficulties are well integrated in class and their needs are now effectively met. Curriculum planning has improved and includes better references to the National Curriculum programmes of study, including the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. Use is also made of a commercially produced and widely used programme for pupils with learning difficulties that is called the EQUALS curriculum. This has resulted in better continuity and progression of pupils' learning. There is less emphasis on topic work and a greater focus on teaching discrete skills, knowledge, and understanding within subjects, such as information and communication technology. The curriculum is particularly effective in providing good opportunities for mathematics, literacy, communication and personal, social and health education and aspects of design technology. The citizenship curriculum for post-16 students is more comprehensive than elsewhere in the school where it is still at a developmental stage. The school follows the guidance of the locally agreed syllabus with regard to planning and provision for religious education. However, the curriculum for the children in the Foundation Stage class remains unsatisfactory. Planning remains unsatisfactory because, as in 1998, it is insufficiently linked to the guidance for the Early Years curriculum. Throughout the school, pupils' learning opportunities are broadened and enhanced by the many opportunities to go on visits and residential trips. They visit local shops, garden centres, and historical places of interest. These very good opportunities have been maintained as a strength of the curriculum since the time of the last inspection.
22. The curriculum for post-16 students is very good. The range of learning opportunities is based upon acquisition of basic skills. It is well adapted to the students' needs and is enhanced by opportunities for taster courses at St. Helens College, project work and leisure activities. Students are able to consolidate their earlier learning and have it accredited by external agencies. There are opportunities for careers education and advice and for work experience. Students undertake mini-enterprise initiatives and have opportunities to develop their independent living skills in the flat. Each student has a record of their achievements that reflects their progress whilst at school. These also provide good evidence of how well the curriculum prepares students for their lives after school. The very good provision for post-16 students owes much to its co-ordination and management.
23. The school makes very good provision for the growing number of pupils who have additional special educational needs. The curriculum includes very well planned elements to enable these pupils to learn effectively. Teachers and support staff know their pupils very well and have a good understanding of their needs. Staff have been trained to manage pupils' additional disabilities. Therefore, within their planned programmes, they make good use of specialist facilities, including the soft play area, aquatherapy, aromatherapy, music therapy, and a relaxing light room. Within this, therapists and medical staff also make valuable contributions, and are frequently class-based to maximize their input. Therapy support is integrated into pupils' timetables so that, if appropriate, they can be sensitively withdrawn from their class lesson to receive the help they need. The school receives good advice and support in how to meet the needs of pupils with learning or visual impairment from visiting specialist teachers who regularly share their expertise with class teachers and support staff. Staff in the Support Unit make very good contributions to meeting the needs of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and complex needs through the specialist work they undertake with individuals in mathematics, English, and science.
24. Pupils' learning takes place in a range of interesting and stimulating venues beyond the classroom. These opportunities add valuable experiences to enliven both teaching and learning. When some of the older pupils were reminded about where they had been and what they had done, they had a good recall of some of their favourites. These included visits to Southport and Speke Airport – one pupil reminding everyone that it is now called John Lennon Airport, because he was famous and came from Liverpool. Others preferred their trip on the Mersey Ferry and visiting the Liverpool Maritime Museum. Other pupils have recently returned from a residential field trip that ranked a firm favourite, despite one or two admitting to being

homesick at first. Regular use is also made of more local facilities for swimming and horse riding. Within the school itself, there are specialist facilities for design technology, food technology, science, and physical education. These provide for some leisure activities such as Boccia and for the teaching of more specialist modules as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and ASDAN. Good provision is also made for the most able pupils who benefit from additional help with more challenging and demanding work provided by the curriculum support team.

25. Whilst accommodation and resources overall are satisfactory, they are unsatisfactory in the Foundation Stage class, which is a sharp contrast to the very good provision for the post-16 students. The youngest children have inadequate space in which to play outside and they do not have enough toys. This lack has been identified as an area for action by the school. The classroom area is small and lacklustre, but it is not organized to make the most of the space available. Resources are not well stored or organized and many of them are old and dirty. This creates an overall impression of a lack of care. The oldest students are currently able to enjoy the benefits of recent investments in their learning environment. It is a bright, spacious, well-equipped, and well-decorated area. The students are appreciative and take good care of their surroundings.

### Care, guidance and support

The school meets a **very high** standard in the care, welfare, health, and safety of its pupils. It provides **very good** support, advice, and guidance for its pupils, based on the monitoring of their achievements and personal development. The extent to which pupils' views are taken into account is **good** throughout the school, increasing as the pupils become older.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of relationships between adults and pupils is very good, adding to the pupils' self-confidence and trust in staff and enabling them to develop well.
- Arrangements for pupils' care and welfare are very good, involving all relevant services.
- Throughout the school, pupils receive very good support and guidance to help them make progress in their education and personal development.

### Commentary

26. Throughout the school, there are clear indications of very good relationships between pupils and adults. Teachers are patient, kind and very supportive which means pupils feel very secure and results in them being always willing to contribute ideas in lessons. Teachers show great skill in taking pupils' responses and finding some way of building on them to make the contributions valid. This contributes to pupils feeling valued and special and ensures that they continue to contribute in the classroom. Adults who give additional support in the classrooms all have a tactful, sympathetic approach to developing skill in pupils whether they are focusing on developing language skills, or giving more general educational or welfare support. These contributions build confidence in pupils. One pupil who initially declined to attend a meeting later agreed if she could have a specified member of staff with her. This was a very clear demonstration of the trust that exists between pupils and adults in the school.
27. The school has an extensive range of care and welfare initiatives to maximize the benefit pupils can gain from the educational opportunities offered. A range of therapists visits the school on a regular basis giving physiotherapy, speech and language, and occupational therapy support. However, the school thinks that the amount of therapeutic support provided is insufficient, although provision identified on statements of special educational need is made. Other medical professionals hold clinics in the school on a less frequent basis. In addition, the school has nursing support on the premises. This ensures that a health professional is available to administer medication and advise teachers and parents on pupils' health matters or comfort. Because the health needs of pupils are overseen so rigorously, minor ailments are

spotted early and pupils comfort is given high priority. This ensures that pupils are enabled to attend school as much as possible and, because they are as physically comfortable as possible, they are enabled to focus on their learning. The school has developed a process for ensuring that multi-agency support provided to the school is clearly focused, efficient and gives maximum benefit to the pupils. Each term the school holds a meeting involving all outside agencies working with pupils, where specific circumstances or general issues are addressed. Professionals from these agencies are very supportive of this approach. They say that because all services are fully informed, it ensures that nothing falls between the cracks of several services and similarly things do not get addressed twice. It is an excellent initiative to ensure a full picture of pupils' needs is known by all involved services.

28. Pupils are very well known by the adults in the school, especially those who work with them on a regular basis. Adults have an in-depth knowledge of the needs of the pupils and a similar knowledge of the strategies being employed to address these needs. The school has a number of specific initiatives created to ensure pupils can obtain maximum benefit from their time in school. These initiatives include additional curriculum support for the more able pupils to develop their skills in particular areas of the curriculum, intensive interaction for pupils who have profound difficulties in some areas to enable them to make progress and the opportunity for individual pupils to receive some of their learning in a mainstream setting. As a result, pupils receive very good individual advice and tailored support throughout the school day and over their time in school. Advice and support is further developed for pupils after the age of 14 with the involvement of an adviser from Connexions and a transitional social worker. These additional advisers spend significant amounts of time in school and become a source of genuine support and guidance to the pupils preparing for life after they leave school.

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

The school has established **very good** links with parents, other schools, and the local community

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

- The information provided for parents is very good, enabling them to be fully involved in their children's learning.
- The school has very good links with the local community, which enhance the learning opportunities for pupils.
- Links with other schools enhance opportunities for pupils.

#### **Commentary**

29. Because the school serves a wide geographic area and almost all pupils are transported to school by the local authority, there is very little opportunity for parents to have casual, informal contact with the school. To address this, the school will always attempt to meet a parent's request to come into the school for any reason affecting their child's progress or wellbeing. Staff always respond to parents' requests to talk to them and if necessary, members of the school staff visit parents in their home to provide information and support. The home/school diaries are a very good means of keeping both home and school fully informed about the part of the pupil's life for which they are not present. This is important as events at school or home may well impact significantly on the pupils behaviour or wellbeing. The formal channels of communication are very good. The written information available to parents about the progress their children make is good overall with some excellent practice. This occurs when pupil's achievement is very clearly expressed using the appropriate descriptions and grades from national standards as well as describing the experiences the pupil has had and their responses to them. These annual reports coupled with the very well organized Records of Achievement give parents a very clear picture of their children's progress. Each term parents are invited to discuss their children's Individual Education Plan with the staff of the school. This keeps parents fully informed about ways in which they can support their children beyond the school day. Parents are also able to acquire skills in MAKATON signing and the use of PECS (picture

exchange communication system), in order to support the growing communication skills of their children.

30. The school has very good links with the local community. Very good use is made of visits and shopping trips into the local community to support the learning of pupils. Visits into the community beyond the immediate vicinity of the school offer pupils a wide range of experiences to enhance their learning. Older pupils benefit academically from being able to follow courses of study at two local colleges. These pupils also benefit socially by being part of a larger student body. Local businesses support the school in a variety of ways. They offer work experience placements for older pupils, accompany the school on visits, and make significant donations of materials and money to develop the teaching resources. The school newsletters are sponsored by local businesses and are a very high quality means of keeping parents informed of the day-to-day life of the school. Significant parts of the newsletters are produced by pupils, whose self-esteem is greatly enhanced by seeing their work reproduced in such a professional manner.
31. The school has developed very good links with a number of local schools, both primary and secondary. These links enable Mill Green School to offer a range of opportunities for some of its pupils to work alongside pupils receiving their education in a mainstream school. These opportunities cover a broad spectrum. A number of pupils from Mill Green attend a mainstream school for one session, or longer, each week and one pupil from a mainstream school attends Mill Green for two days each week. All of these arrangements are tailored to the specific needs of the pupils involved. Their progress is carefully monitored against objectives set for the experience. There are clear benefits to the social or personal development of the pupils involved but there are also academic benefits. For instance, one pupil has progressed from a Year 8 food technology group to a Year 9 group and is coping well with the increased expectations of him.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are **good** and governance is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The leadership of the headteacher is good
- There is very thorough self-evaluation and staff professional development is good
- Finance is carefully managed
- The Governing Body's role as a critical friend of the school is limited.

### **Commentary**

32. The headteacher, in post for three years, has successfully created a distinct identity for the school, which is leading to consolidation of much good practice and the erosion of weaknesses. He has subjected himself to the scrutiny of staff and outside agencies, such as the Transformational Leadership Questionnaire Project and New Visions Course for Newly Qualified Headteachers and the information gleaned from these consultation exercises has greatly helped to develop his leadership qualities. Provision for post-16 pupils has been greatly improved. This is largely due to the very good leadership and management of the co-ordinator. However, provision for the Foundation Stage, whilst satisfactory, remains weaker than that for the rest of the school and has not been given sufficient prominence in the drive for improvement. This is why the school improvement plan is satisfactory rather than good. Following the merger of two schools to form the present one, Mill Green did not have an easy passage in adapting to a single identity but early problems have been overcome through sensitive leadership and staff are now pulling together well as an effective team.

33. Teachers are regularly observed in the classroom. By ensuring that teachers have the opportunity to self evaluate at the end of these observations and with scope for them to choose a focus for the observation, staff recognise that they are fully involved in the process of school improvement. All teachers are also fully involved in formal performance management procedures, which are well managed. Support staff are also well included, though less formally, in performance management, through annual staff development interviews. All staff have access to a good programme of professional development opportunities, recently accredited by Investors in People. Each year all staff are consulted through a detailed questionnaire, which elicits their views about every aspect of the school. These views are carefully collated to identify common celebrations and concerns. Many subject leaders have developed good plans for improving provision in their areas of responsibility. The headteacher is given good support by the senior management team who have clearly defined areas of responsibility.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	1,646,077
Total expenditure	1,539,239
Expenditure per pupil	19,002

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	79,981
Balance carried forward to the next	106,838

34. The headteacher, governors and administration staff, are carefully managing finance. They compile good projections of likely funding for the next few years to help them plan for a secure financial future. Unnecessary spending is carefully avoided and the school is good at securing extra funding from outside the budget. From a position where the school had concerns about an insufficiency of funding in future years, there is now a surplus, which has been carefully earmarked for well considered projects, such as improving ICT resources for pupils and staff and the refurbishment of accommodation. The school is well prepared for Workplace Reform, having already addressed many of the issues identified in legislation. Staff have been fully consulted, unnecessary paperwork is being cut and all teachers are given suitable curriculum development time.
35. The governing body works effectively in support of the school and ensures that statutory requirements are met. Many members are recently appointed and there are plans to increase the number of governors in the near future. This is an important development because too large a proportion of governors at present are either parents of pupils, parents of ex-pupils or staff. This demonstrates the strong commitment these parties show to the school but it also limits the governing body's capacity to act as a critical friend. There is good attendance at meetings and governors glean good information from the headteacher's reports and target-setting reports. At present, however, no individual governors are assuming responsibility for checking for themselves what provision is made for different subjects or the efficacy of the school's monitoring systems.

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

### **AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE**

There are very few children in the Foundation Stage. They are included in a class with a small number of pupils in Years 1 and 2 whose special educational needs make it appropriate that they also follow the Foundation Stage curriculum.

The overall provision for children in the Foundation Stage is **satisfactory**.

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

- The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection.
- Children are keen to learn and they are given good encouragement to do their best and behave well.
- There are weaknesses in the quality and range of learning opportunities that are planned and offered that limit the effectiveness of teaching, and accommodation and resources are not used to best effect.
- Assessment systems and information are not used well enough to track children's progress.

#### **Commentary**

36. At the time of the last inspection, the quality of teaching in twenty-five per cent of lessons was unsatisfactory. During the present inspection, in each of the areas of learning in which teaching and learning were observed, these were satisfactory. There are many positive features in the provision. There is a good ratio of staff to children and this ensures individuals receive a high level of adult support.
37. Children are happy and contented when they arrive in school. They are familiar with secure daily routines and know which of their classmates are due in school on that day. The start to the day is relaxed and unhurried. Attending to personal care needs and comfort are the first priorities and these help ensure that children are ready to learn. They eagerly select their favourite toy or game and enjoy sharing these with any willing adult. Sometimes they find it difficult to give up items to other classmates, but adults are good at prompting their co-operation. In response to regular and consistent praise and encouragement from adults, the children are motivated to behave well and learn as independently as they can. They show the confidence to tackle new tasks and opportunities to take responsibility for day-to-day routines are also helping their personal development.
38. During the inspection, insufficient evidence was available to make judgements in all six areas of learning. The reasons for this included the fact that the activities listed on the timetable did not always fully correspond to those expected in a Foundation Stage class, and that within sessions that were observed teaching was not always taking place. Since 1998, there have been significant changes to the curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage but these changes have not yet been firmly embedded in the practice of the school. It is, therefore, only possible to make judgements about provision in the areas of personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy and creative development. Good care is taken to ensure that those children who only attend on a part time basis are given similar learning opportunities to those who are full time. The weakness in the curriculum arises because timetabled activities are not related to the six areas of learning, the early learning goals, or the stepping-stones. Nor is there any regular overarching theme or topic identified. This results in disjointed learning experiences under isolated lessons of design technology, information and communication technology and science. 'Continuous provision' that identifies a focus per lesson is also too vague. There is a lack of clarity in teachers' planning. Information is not specific enough about how children's skills and understanding are to be built upon and maintained over time and how priority needs in individual education and behaviour

plans are to be addressed in lessons. Improvements to curriculum planning would result in better use being made of both the limited accommodation and resources because items not directly related to the planned activities could be removed and not be the cause of added distractions and clutter. The roles and responsibilities of each adult are not always sufficiently well focused which results in staff reacting to children's needs rather than being more proactive in directing their learning.

39. Children enter the Foundation Stage with very low levels of attainment. They are very limited in what they know, understand, and can do. Some effective use of assessment procedures provide staff with information about what children know, understand and are able to do. This information forms the basis of individual education and behaviour plans, which are formally reviewed at regular times in accordance with the school's policy. Unfortunately, between reviews they are not used well enough to monitor and track the progress the children are making. There are insufficient links between what is being taught and how this is relevant to what children need to learn next.
40. In the area of **personal, social, and emotional development**, the children's achievement is satisfactory. Teaching is also satisfactory. Relationships with adults are good. In lessons, children gain confidence and try hard to succeed. There are well established routines and children feel secure in their surroundings. However, at times the demeanour of individuals is allowed to override these routines and this causes confusion for some less mobile children. When all children are prepared to participate in activities such as circle time they can take turns selecting items from the 'feely bag' and avidly watch others explore the shape, size and texture of different items. Less mobile children, or those who have significant communication difficulties, acknowledge their pleasure by eye contact, smiling or reaching out to others. Children are familiar with different areas of the school and do not become anxious in less secure settings such as the hall, dining room, or specialist teaching rooms.
41. Children's achievement in **communication, language, and literacy** is satisfactory. Teaching is also satisfactory and adults try hard to stimulate children's communication skills through using varied strategies and different resources. Children, who are able, enjoy participating in the morning welcome song, whilst others show pleasure in listening to the familiar tune. Children can access a range of technological aids and switches that enable them to contribute answers to questions. For example, in one lesson good use was made of a 'jelly bean' switch for children whose fine motor control is poor and precluded them from using more standard switches. Effective opportunities are included throughout the day for children to work individually with adults in role-play situations, using puppets, and developing their ability to recognize and use pictures and symbols to express themselves. On occasions, staff do not have high enough expectations of the response they expect from individuals. For example, they may model a response they expect a child to make but then be satisfied with a half-hearted effort. At times staff do not provide good enough role models in their own use of language, when they use baby like terminology such as 'doggie' and 'bow-wow'. Children show little natural inclination to look at books or share a book with an adult, in spite of a suitable range being available in the classroom.
42. Opportunities provided for promoting children's **creative development** are satisfactory and their achievement in this area of learning is satisfactory. In spite of both the indoor and outdoor areas being small, a suitable range of activities is made available for children to choose. The level of concentration children can sustain is variable, most are very demanding of staff time and attention. Throughout the day children have access to a limited range of outdoor play equipment, which stimulates creativity. In the classroom, resources are better and children can wander, explore, and develop their ideas using large construction equipment, paint, sand, and water. There are clothes for dressing up and a role-play area. Several children are still at the stage of putting everything in their mouths or choosing to suck a dummy. These children demonstrate their level of creativity through their sensory exploration of texture, form, shape, and space. The children respond in a variety of ways to what they see, hear, smell, touch, and feel. Opportunities to experience these in a variety of settings such as the design technology room, in cookery, the light room, soft play area and when

swimming or in the aquatherapy area compensate well for the restrictions imposed by the lack of classroom space. They are delighted in the tactile contact with 'cuddly' fabrics, sand and soft and squashy collage materials. The use of musical instruments promotes children's knowledge and understanding of how sound is created and how they can create their own rhythm or join in with a clapped beat. They are as confident as older pupils are to participate in singing their favourite songs in assembly.

## **SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 2 TO 4 AND POST-16**

### **ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

#### **English**

Provision in English is **very good**.

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

- Achievement, and the quality of teaching and learning, has improved since the last inspection.
- Very good use of sign and information technology leads to high achievement in communication.
- Pupils and students of all levels of capability are given access to books and their confidence, as readers, increases.
- Achievement in writing is well promoted.
- Good teamwork has been a major factor in improving provision.
- Skills in literacy and communication are very well promoted during lessons in other subjects.

#### **Commentary**

43. Achievement is very good, because, while pupils and students of all abilities do well in their English lessons, those who have more complex needs, including visual and hearing impairment and profound and multiple learning disabilities, are taught for a significant part of each week in the support unit where they achieve much more than expected. In addition, those pupils, across the age range, who are, potentially, the highest attainers, greatly benefit from language and literacy support and, they too, develop their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills very well. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. It has been brought about by the improvement in the quality of teaching that is, chiefly, very good and, on occasion, in the support unit, excellent. Students in the post -16 classes are provided with many very good opportunities to develop and extend their communication and literacy skills. Their work is skilfully related by their teachers to the broad range of practical experiences that they are offered. These include experiences in the work place and in running mini-business enterprises. Their work in language and literacy is assessed by external examination agencies such as Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and the English Speaking Board (ESB). In 2004 thirteen students in Year 12, nine in Year 13 and six in Year 14 are in line to gain ESB certificate of achievement awards. This represents very good achievement.
44. Achievement in communication, including signing, and the conventional skills of speaking and listening is very good throughout the school. Where necessary, signing is used, consistently and effectively, by staff, pupils, and students. Additionally, the school makes very good use of a wide range of resources, including simple switch operated devices that deliver a pre-recorded response, to encourage and enable pupils and students, who have little or no spoken language, to take a full and active part in discussions and join with others in making choices. Those pupils and students who have oral language skills, are very keen to engage visitors in conversation, and, within lessons, relevant, lively and informative discussions take place. By Year 9, higher attaining pupils have developed sufficient confidence to talk about their own

ideas and feelings and to relate these to the feelings of characters in the stories they read or hear. In, for example, a lesson that featured a shared story that explored the feelings of a dolphin in danger, some were able to express what they might feel in similar circumstances and make a comparison.

45. Throughout the school, pupils are confident readers. This is, particularly, the case for those with the highest potential for learning who are supported by the Curriculum Unit for Language and Literacy. They are encouraged within the unit to believe that they will read successfully and the individual support with which they are provided plays a very vital role in their progress. In addition, within classrooms, there is some very good practise to ensure that all pupils, no matter what their learning difficulties might be, have access to books. For example in a Year 3 literacy session, a visually impaired pupil was provided with an appropriate sensory book that he was able to interpret. He was able to explain to his teacher that the duck, that was the subject of the book, "had paper ruffles." In addition, he was able to recognise the main character from the Big Book – 'Mr Gumpy's Outing' because his teacher made very good use of objects of reference. The Support Unit for pupils and students who have profound and multiple learning difficulties, works very hard to ensure that those who attend can access literature by way of many sensory experiences.
46. There is a good emphasis within lessons on helping pupils and students develop the motor movements that are required for writing. Younger pupils have regular opportunities to practise handwriting skills using pencils or felt pens and make good progress in learning to hold a pencil and make marks on paper. A number of high attaining pupils can form letters and write simple sentences. Many pupils find learning to write difficult but teachers are skilled at helping them record using other methods. For example, visually impaired pupils use Moon symbols to convey meaning, with extra support these pupils can write simple sentences and form appropriate questions and statements. The Language and Literacy Support Unit plays a vital part in improving the standards of writing within the school. Higher attaining pupils belong to a creative writing group in which their practical reading skills are fully utilised to stimulate ideas for story writing. Pupils in Year 11 who cannot sufficiently sustain their writing to fully record their work have made good use of a symbol system to create sentences. They use this technique, at which they are adept, in carrying out aspects of their ASDAN Transition Challenge Award.
47. The subject leader, who in addition, is the teacher for children in the Foundation Stage, finds it difficult to co-ordinate English throughout the school, however, she has worked hard, with a great deal of assistance from the Curriculum Support nursery nurse to set up a successful department. Lesson plans are monitored regularly, however the monitoring of lessons is very much in the developmental stage. The subject leader agrees that although assessment has improved greatly since the last inspection because of the introduction of PIVATS, a commercially produced assessment scale which identifies very small steps in learning, there is still more fine-tuning to do. The real strength within English is the efficient teamwork among the staff that does much to ensure that pupils achieve their full potential. The subject contributes well to the social, moral, spiritual, and cultural development of the pupils and students.

### An example of an outstanding English lesson

A Literacy/drama lesson enables pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, (PMLD) to respond to the experiences of sun, sea and sand on a holiday abroad. The classroom is an aeroplane taking all within it to our holiday destination in the sun. The roar of the engines ceases when we land. Our luggage for a successful holiday appears and, of course, includes our sun hats and sunshades, sunglasses, buckets and spades. We feel the heat, and the glare of the sunshine and sand around our toes and fingers. Sea spray flicks against our skin. It is a lesson to stimulate communication. The teachers and learning support staff provide the effects and intersperse the action with music and singing. The pupils are carried away by the experience and show, by all the means at their disposal, their enjoyment. They are greatly excited when they are covered in 'waves' of flimsy blue netting and they happily make the greatest efforts to escape from this sea. When they do so, they are "dried" and massaged with soothing sun oil. As a result of the whole experience and the very positive support that the teachers and the learning support assistants offer, the pupils made excellent progress in developing their responsive and communicative skills.

### Language and literacy across the curriculum

48. The arrangements to develop pupils' and students' language and literacy skills across the curriculum are good and pupils and students do very well in applying these skills in all subjects. This is because the chosen systems to augment spoken and written language, PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) and WIDGIT( a computer generated symbol system) are used consistently throughout the school to help pupils and students communicate and record their work. Teachers and other staff take full advantage of all opportunities to stimulate conversation. This was shown well during a Year 10 numeracy session on ordering numbers in which the teacher encouraged pupils to talk about who had the correct number. Again, MAKATON signing and PECS symbols are used very well in conjunction with the target language when French is being taught. Outside formal lesson times, pupils are eager and encouraged to talk. At lunchtimes, pupils and students were eager to talk to inspectors about what they were eating and what their favourite food was.

### French

Provision in French is **very good**

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The target language is used consistently.
- Teaching is very good. It is imaginative and sometimes excellent and results in pupils thoroughly enjoying the 'French' experience and achieving very well.
- Leadership in the subject is very good.

#### Commentary

49. French is taught to Year 7 to 11 pupils, mainly by the subject leader, who, while not a language specialist, has excellent language and signing skills. She is, therefore able to reinforce meaning with sign, simultaneously, as she speaks the target language. She has a clear understanding of methods and approaches appropriate for the pupils of this school focusing appropriately on oral work with only a very small amount of written work. Teachers use French fluently and very well throughout the lessons, but they also explain in English whenever necessary. They are very positive in their responses to pupils' efforts and this reinforces their confidence in attempting to speak in French.
50. Teaching is imaginative and well pitched at a level that matches the pupils' capabilities and understanding. Lessons are very good and, on occasion excellent. Very effective use is made of music and singing and learning is reinforced by the careful use of objects of reference that, for some pupils, are an essential way to prompt recall. Lessons are fun and give the pupils a

very vivid picture of French life and culture. As a result of the very good teaching they are given pupils are who have difficulty in saying English words clearly, nevertheless listen carefully and make very great efforts to pronounce the French words. Pupils greet each other in French and are able to understand and pronounce everyday words and phrases to do with themselves, their families, their friends, and the foods they like and dislike. Their achievement is very good.

51. Leadership has been very effective in raising standards of achievement and improving the provision for French. Over time, a very good range of resources has been built up. There is, however, too little computer software and this deprives the teachers of an important tool for extending and bringing variety to learning. A clear and progressive programme for teaching and learning has been put in place so that the pupils continue to make progress as they move from class to class. The subject leader keeps the provision for French under review and monitors both the outcomes of learning and the quality of teaching where others lead in lessons.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There has been good improvement since the last inspection and teaching and learning are good.
- Most pupils achieve well because of good quality teaching and their own, very positive, attitudes to learning.
- Systems to assess pupils' work are good and well used.
- The subject is well led and managed satisfactorily.

### **Commentary**

52. Since the last inspection, provision has improved well. At that time assessment, recording and reporting systems and the use teachers made of the information were unsatisfactory. These are now good and individual education plans are specific and of a better quality. The quality of teaching has also improved. It is now good. As a consequence of these improvements, most pupils achieve well and in those lessons that are very well taught pupils make very good progress. Most pupils are provided with a good range of learning opportunities. The Key Stage 3 strategy in numeracy has been sensitively modified to meet the needs of pupils and there is a good focus upon enabling pupils to use and apply their mathematical skills.
53. In discussion, pupils speak very positively of the work they are given to do in their mathematics lessons. This was evident in the lessons observed where the pupils sustained good levels of concentration. The quality of teaching observed was good. Pupils' attitudes were never less than satisfactory because they were well motivated and keen to learn. This contributes to their achievement always being at least satisfactory. The consistent strengths in teaching throughout the school are in teachers' good knowledge and understanding of the subject and the way in which they adapt the lesson content to meet the needs of all pupils in their class. They use resources well to match the work to pupils' ability. Care is taken to ensure that additional help is available to support the least able and that the most able are provided with sufficiently challenging tasks. Consequently, all pupils have equal access to a broad and balanced range of learning opportunities. In the lesson that was less than effective the shortcomings were brought about because it was not planned well enough. The lesson was late in beginning and there was a lack of organization so other adults were not clear about what to do. Many pupils had behavioural problems that were made worse by constant interruptions by other staff collecting and returning individual pupils from other activities. As pupils move through the school, the quality of teaching they receive changes from satisfactory

in Years 1 to 6, to good in Years 7 to 9, and to very good in Years 10 and 11. Therefore, the progress they make is most marked in Years 10 and 11.

54. Within teaching, a significant strength is the thoroughness and constructiveness of teachers' assessments. The information is detailed and it provides evidence of even the smallest steps pupils make in gaining new knowledge and understanding. Individual pupil records are well maintained and they provide comprehensive data about what they know, understand, and can do, as well as what they need to do next. From this information it is also clear to see how, over the past couple of years, the school has begun to analyse trends over time, and, in particular, strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. For example, assessment data showed that aspects of number were more effectively taught than other elements of the National Numeracy Strategy. It also showed that since the introduction of the national numeracy strategy the quality of the curriculum has improved and teachers are more secure in their own knowledge and understanding of the subject.
55. In discussion with the co-ordinator, it is evident she has a good knowledge and understanding of improvements made since the last inspection, and what still remains to be done. Good links with other similar schools have helped in developing and improving provision through sharing ideas and experiences amongst colleagues. The co-ordinator has observed colleagues within most classes teaching numeracy and has provided training for those who lacked confidence in their own ability. Resources have been audited and any shortages addressed, so that there is now a good range of materials available. The co-ordinator has rightly identified the need to improve cross-curricular work with information and communication technology, but this is hampered by the recent theft of most of the school's hardware. Because the co-ordinator teaches in the post-16 department it is at times difficult for her to liaise with and advise colleagues based in other buildings on the school site.

#### **An example of an outstanding mathematics lesson.**

The lesson was characterised by the provision of activities that were meticulously planned and prepared. The learning environment was vibrant; pupils were totally immersed in their learning and they sustained astonishing levels of interest. The teacher's own vitality generates in pupils a high level of excitement and interest. Because of her own very good subject knowledge and confidence she can quickly move learning along from simple recognition of numerals to 3 on to counting on and back from random starting points between 10 and 20. Her vast array of teaching strategies makes it easy for her to bring learning to life and make new concepts accessible to the pupils. Her relationships with the pupils and other adults in the class are excellent. As a practitioner, she is an excellent role model and colleagues soon replicate her approach just as effectively. This ensures that pupils working in different groups are all receiving the same high quality of adult support. By the end of the lesson, progress has been excellent. For example, one pupil could explain how her pie chart, produced on the computer, was a pictorial representation of the data she had collected about favourite pets. Other pupils were clear about using a Venn diagram to record their data. Pupils who lacked the ability to share their learning verbally were given excellent help in using alternative systems to communicate their new knowledge and understanding. Overall, staff provided innovative and inspirational challenges to engage pupils in learning.

#### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

56. Provision for the development of mathematical skills across the curriculum is **good**. Mathematics, literacy, and communication skills are inextricably linked. In the development of citizenship, post-16 students learn about mini-enterprise and profit and loss factors. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 learn to count money and recognize coins so that they can pay for refreshments when they are out on visits. In food technology pupils are involved in weighing and measuring ingredients and monitoring the time it takes food to cook. Good account is taken of developing mathematical vocabulary and applying it to chronology in history and distance and location in geography.

## SCIENCE

Provision for science is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject is well led and managed and is developing well.
- Teaching is good overall; it is good for pupils of secondary school age and excellent on occasions for those who have profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- Achievement is slightly lower for younger pupils because teaching is slightly weaker and tasks less well matched to individual ability.

### Commentary

57. Good leadership and management over the past two years have successfully contributed to raising standards. There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection and there is a particularly good *Science Action Planning and Evaluation* document to direct future improvement. A specialist teacher now teaches all pupils in a very good, well-equipped laboratory. This is particularly well suited to secondary aged pupils and those at post-16 and, as a result, these pupils are achieving well. As the only teacher of science, the co-ordinator is able to keep a close check on the progress that pupils are making and to develop the subject through good links with other similar schools in the area. Samples of pupils' work are carefully evaluated and matched to descriptions of similar work being completed in other schools. This provides a good means of comparing standards and rates of progress with pupils in other schools and ensures that expectations remain realistic yet challenging.
58. Teaching is good overall. Pupils over the age of 11 are taught well. Expectations are high and pupils are successfully encouraged to join in with lessons, contributing to discussions and participating in the wide range of practical tasks, which add interest and variety to pupils' learning. Pupils respond particularly well to the teacher's imaginative use of an interactive whiteboard, which helps them to show what they have remembered from previous lessons before embarking on new tasks. In a good lesson for post-16 pupils, for instance, each pupil took a turn in sorting images projected on to the whiteboard, distinguishing between alive and not alive, before moving on to connected activities about how humans grow and survive. When pupils break up into small groups to perform simple experiments support staff offer invaluable support, ensuring that all pupils are included in all learning activities. One of the most invaluable skills of all staff is that they strongly encourage pupils to do as much as they can for themselves, thus promoting independence. By the time pupils leave they have completed many pieces of work that contribute well to ASDAN units of accreditation, often with close links to their personal, social and health education. In the Support Unit for pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties, very effective steps are taken to make the National Curriculum programmes of study accessible. This is done very successfully, as on occasions, teaching and learning in science are excellent.
59. Pupils up to the end of Year 6 achieve satisfactorily. The difference in achievement between pupils of different age groups is largely due to the teacher's relative inexperience in teaching younger pupils with severe or profound learning difficulties. A 75-minute lesson for pupils of reception age and in Years 1 and 2 was too long. The principles of pushing and pulling were well demonstrated by making use of a wide variety of simple musical instruments but making noise with the instruments and singing along to it soon took over from the science activity and the scientific content quickly became secondary to the 'music'. In addition, these younger pupils have considerably fewer communication skills than the older ones and staff tend to do too much for them, reducing the pupils to the status of observers rather than participants. In a Year 3/4 lesson, the chosen activity was not best suited to the limited dexterity of several pupils. To demonstrate the changing properties of materials, pupils were asked to mould faces using a synthetic product that hardens on heating. The material is intended for use in precise, small scale modelling and the least able pupils had very little involvement beyond watching staff make the faces.

### An example of an outstanding science lesson

In a science lesson for Year 11 pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties, the topic, "forces," was explored through practical, sensory demonstrations. Pupils saw how materials changed their shape when balls of different sizes were squeezed through a woven nylon tube. They felt the breeze from fans as the draught created pushed the paper fish that they were holding away from them. They pulled a model car up a ramp and watched as the force of gravity overcame friction to make it run down again. Throughout, the message of the lesson was reinforced with the key words about "pushing", "pulling" and "changing shape" being endlessly repeated and even sung. The pupils responded as well as they could. Expressions changed as the lesson engaged their interest and they tried their very best to push, or, to hold, or, just to acknowledge the feel of the breeze on their faces. Their learning was both active and excellent.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision has improved since the last inspection and pupils respond to good teaching and learn well by accessing technology through a range of adaptations.
- Pupils, including those with additional special educational needs, achieve well and show very positive attitudes to learning.
- The subject is led and managed well and the co-ordinator has a good knowledge and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in provision.

### Commentary

60. Recently the school has been the target of a series of burglaries and this has resulted in the school's stock of hardware being seriously depleted. However, staff use that which is still available creatively and this minimized any disruption to pupils' learning. Prior to these unfortunate incidents, the school had improved the quality and quantity of learning resources. There are still plans to continue with further improvements in the near future. Most teaching areas have computers with touch screens and in the science laboratory there is an interactive whiteboard. Pupils use a wide range of switches and communication aids to access the curriculum. Those in the primary department have access to a small suite of personal computers. However, this was not seen in use during the inspection because the computers in it had been stolen. Teachers' planning, records of pupils' work and assessment information relating to their progress over time indicate that teaching is at least satisfactory. In the secondary department it is good, with some very good features. Older pupils are taught more effectively because their teachers have a better knowledge and understanding of the subject. Work is challenging and all adults who support pupils' learning make individuals work hard. For example, in a Year 9-10 lesson, each pupil had to show how well he or she could use different items of technical equipment frequently used in everyday life. These included accessing a music keyboard, cassette player and battery operated toys using appropriately adapted switch mechanisms. In the same lesson they also used the touch screen computer to record their learning while the teacher extended pupils' learning of new skills through programming a "roamer," then estimating and testing the distance it needed to travel to knock down several skittles. More specialized use of information and communication technology by curriculum support staff and those who work in the support unit is also good and enables pupils with the most complex needs and the most able make good progress.
61. From discussions with pupils and observing them in lessons it is evident that they find this aspect of the curriculum exciting, stimulating and highly motivating. In a Year 7-8 lesson, for example, individuals were very keen to share a set of headphones with the visitor so that she too could enjoy the story and music selected by the pupil. During the plenary, at the end of a

Year 10 lesson, all pupils, some with adult assistance, were eager to recount how they had acquired new skills. These ranged from activating a fan using a flat touch plate to recording the sequence of steps required to make chocolate brownies using the 'clicker' programme on the computer. Throughout this time they were very aware of the needs of others and used both signing and PECS to aid the understanding of their classmates.

62. The co-ordinator has a high level of expertise. He uses this well to train, support, and help less confident colleagues. This is only one of the ways in which he exerts good, clear leadership in developing the subject and creating an effective team of information and communication technology practitioners. He has diligently assessed and evaluated the strengths and weaknesses in the subject and has devised a manageable and realistic development plan. The curriculum is secure, although there is some lack of consistency between the practice in the primary and secondary departments. Systems of assessment, recording and reporting are also not consistent throughout the school, but the proposed purchase of a good quality assessment format will rectify this shortcoming. Since the last inspection good improvements have been brought about in ensuring a balance between the discrete teaching of information and communication technology and using it to enhance teaching and learning in other subjects.

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

63. The subject is very well used across the curriculum in most classes, but more could be done in some classes of younger pupils. For example, opportunities were missed in a Year 7 lesson where pupils were learning how to handle and collate data. As well as recording their heights as a block graph on paper, the more able, particularly, could also have used a computer program to record their work. Examples of very good use of information and communication technology were observed in the Support Unit. Digital photographs are used well across the school to record pupils' experiences and these build up into valuable personal records for each pupil.

## **HUMANITIES**

No lessons were seen in history but inspectors looked at teachers' planning and records and at evidence of pupils' work. Sufficient teaching and learning were seen in geography and religious education to allow a judgement about provision to be made.

### **History**

64. The co-ordinator for history was interviewed and samples of pupils' work, and photographs of activities, were looked at. History is taught to all pupils up to the end of Year 9. Teaching of the subject alternates with that of geography but of the two, history is the 'poor relation', being taught for only one term per year against geography's two. This stretches the coverage of National Curriculum programmes of study and results in a few topics being very thinly covered. Nevertheless, statutory requirements are met. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. There is good, detailed planning for each year but insufficient records of pupils' achievements are kept. A well-organised history week is eagerly looked forward to by most pupils. During the week, pupils are given the chance to role-play the experiences that people in bygone times lived through. Many other subjects contribute successfully to pupils' learning during these activities, for instance in the preparation of food the Romans might have eaten, or the sports they participated in. Frequent visits to historical sites also add effectively to pupils' understanding of history. A trip to Wigan Pier, for instance has helped pupils to see how people lived in Victorian times. A good photographic record is kept of these activities and it clearly shows pupils enjoying themselves and participating wholeheartedly.

## Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject is taught imaginatively with effective use of the local area so that pupils respond positively and achieve very well.
- The subject leader has worked very hard and enthusiastically to develop geography across the school.

### Commentary

65. Only one lesson was seen during the inspection week, however, records and the past work of pupils and students show that achievement is very good. Geography is taught every week, in two out of the three terms each year, alternating with history. It is taught very well making very good use of local resources. In an example of very good practice in teaching, pupils in Year 3 and Year 4 learned much about the effects of weather on people and objects. Pupils had great fun experiencing rain, sun, wind, and snow with staff recreating different weather conditions. In response to this, the pupils made up sentences to describe the weather by using symbols. Geography is taught in an interesting way both through conventional approaches and less conventional means. Over time a broad experience is given. Pupils become familiar with aspects of the local area, with climate, with the language of direction, with elements of economic activity such as modes of transport and with the use of geographic skills, for example the conducting of traffic surveys. The local area is used well, sometimes to bring to life the study of other places and climates. Pupils in Year 9, for example, visit Delamere Forest and compare it to the tropical rainforests of South America. In addition, pupils made use of time spent on a sponsored walk to identify local landmarks. The study of far away places is established. Last year, Year 8 pupils looked at and responded to aspects of the culture of Australia during a multicultural week. Through an adventurous simulation, they experienced sailing on the Great Barrier Reef.
66. The subject leader has enthusiastically developed a whole school approach to geography. She has produced a very comprehensive scheme of work based on the National Curriculum Programmes of Study and a commercially produced curriculum for pupils with severe learning difficulties. The subject is very much an exciting part of the school curriculum across the age range. Learning in geography supports the courses for students in the post-16 groups well, particularly their work for ASDAN accreditation and for the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme. Geography contributes strongly to the spiritual, social, moral, and cultural development of pupils and students. There are very clear processes for assessment and assessments are well recorded. Good use is made of assessment to plot the progress of pupils against an appropriate scale. The subject leader has ensured that information and communication technology is used well. Teachers include ICT use in their planning, for example use of the ROMA programme to help pupils establish the language of direction. She has acquired good resources and because of her leadership, the subject has improved greatly since the last inspection.

## Religious Education

Provision for religious education is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of achievement for pupils in Years 3 to 11 have been maintained and the curriculum is satisfactory.
- Students in post-16 classes have many opportunities to develop appreciation of the relationships between themselves and others.

- Teaching is imaginative and promotes learning well.
- Leadership has brought about steady improvements in provision.

## Commentary

67. Because of their special educational needs, it is appropriate that the school includes the few children in Years 1 and 2 in the Foundation Stage class. This provision and children's achievement in relation to their early learning goals is reported elsewhere. The achievement of pupils in Years 3 to 11 is good, as it was at the time of the last inspection. They receive religious education that meets the requirements of the local agreed syllabus for religious education. Use is made of a commercially produced scheme of work designed to meet the specific needs of pupils with severe learning difficulties. Pupils come to know the identities and characteristics of world faiths, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and they become familiar with artefacts connected with worship in these religions. They know that there are special days and festivals in many religions and that these are marked by specific rites and celebratory customs. They develop growing awareness of similarities and differences between religions and through activities, including music, they learn to respond empathetically to aspects of the faiths on which they focus. What pupils know, understand, and can do is assessed using a suitable scale. Over time, records of these assessments show that almost all make significant learning gains.
68. In the class for students in Years 12 to 14, ample opportunity is given to enable emerging knowledge and understanding of the world faiths to develop, and for moral issues to be discussed and related to belief. As part of a unit of work on world studies, activities that develop awareness of aspects of customs in diet and dress associated with a world faith are undertaken. Students are given opportunities to visit buildings and people associated with a faith and to show what they have learned by enacting it for the school. They learn the value of peace and silence and come to understand the usefulness of times of reflection and prayer. Many opportunities arise within the daily activities in the post-16 classes for moral discussion, expressions of care for one another and the environment, and for taking part jointly in decision making both about themselves and in the common interest.
69. In lessons observed, an imaginative approach to the teaching of religious education captured the interest of pupils and led, on occasion, to very good learning. For example, in a very good lesson on the customs and practices of Buddhism, pupils responded very positively to the chance to accompany a record of temple chanting, with drums and other percussion instruments. They displayed great empathy and feeling for this prayer form. When asked about the feelings that the music that they were hearing and making called up, they said that it gave them a feeling of calm.
70. There have been steady improvements in the provision for religious education. Despite receiving confusing advice from local sources that implied that the teaching of religious education was not obligatory for special schools, the subject leader has sensibly gone forward with plans to ensure that all pupils and students in the school receive it. She has made a sound start in developing a scheme of work for pupils across the age range that fully reflects the requirements of the local agreed syllabus. The achievement of pupils and students may now be measured by less impressionistic means than formerly, because a graded scale is now in place, against which what they know, understand and can do may be evaluated.

## CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

Too little teaching and learning in physical education was seen to allow a judgement about provision to be made. However, in design and technology, art and design, and music, sufficient lessons were observed to allow a judgement.

## Physical Education

71. Teachers' planning and records for physical education were looked at and parts of two lessons for older pupils and students were seen. Information was taken from wall displays and from an interview with the co-ordinator. The full National Curriculum programme of study is taught, with allowances being made for the limited physical abilities of many pupils. Planning for lessons is satisfactory but contains very little information, other than the allocation of extra support, about how activities will be varied for pupils of different ability, especially those with profound or multiple difficulties. The two lessons observed were satisfactorily taught. In a Year 7 athletics lesson, pupils successfully completed a beanbag race, taking turns to pick up a bag, negotiate the length of the hall, and place the bag in a bucket. They recognised the importance of waiting for the whistle before starting. A weakness was that nothing was planned for pupils who were not doing this and they spent long periods sitting on a bench next to support assistants when alternative activities could easily have been arranged. In a 16 plus lesson, pupils participated in a game of *Boccia*, having taken care to warm up properly. The teacher gave clear instructions, referring well to past activities; pupils participated enthusiastically and threw or rolled balls with a good degree of control. One thing that weakened the lesson was that support staff were insufficiently involved, because they were 'minding' individuals rather than working with them to promote more strenuous activity. All pupils are involved in residential courses, which promote outdoor and adventure activities such as canoeing and orienteering. Photographs show them participating enthusiastically. These courses, participation in the Merseyside Disabled Games, and frequent participation in competitions and events in other schools make a significant contribution to promoting pupils' personal and social development. There is a good range of resources and the hall is a suitable venue for indoor activities. Facilities for outside activities are much more limited; there is, for example, only a very small grassed area for games. Nevertheless, good use is made of local facilities, such as swimming pools and the nearby park.

## Design and Technology

Provision for design technology is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject has been led and managed well since the last inspection.
- Methods of assessing pupils' achievements are rigorous.
- Children in the Foundation Stage are given design and technology lessons that are insufficiently focused on their early learning goals, and throughout the school, aspects of the subject are not included as the responsibility of the co-ordinator.

### Commentary

72. The subject co-ordinator no longer teaches at the school. Nevertheless, he returned during the inspection to discuss the developments for which he had been responsible since the school was last inspected. From these discussions and an evaluation of planning documents, good progress has been made in addressing the weaknesses found in 1998. As a subject specialist, he has adapted the curriculum well and has imaginatively linked programmes of study to the experiences of the pupils.
73. Records of what pupils know, understand, and are able to do are comprehensive. They indicate that progress pupils make over time in relation to their own ability is satisfactory and in some aspects of their work, it is good. For example, groups of older pupils have been involved in several projects such as designing and building seating and other outdoor furniture in the courtyard. The efforts of others who designed and made stained glass panels are permanently displayed as a record of their high standard of work. An evaluation of pupils' records show that not only their level of attainment is meticulously recorded, but also how well they co-operated with their classmates. These provide good evidence that the subject is popular and pupils

show positive attitudes to learning because rarely is the box 'refused task' ticked, but almost always boxes labelled 'full participation' 'excellent work/behaviour' are completed.

74. During the inspection, the subject was being taught by a temporary teacher. The co-ordinator had provided comprehensive planning in order to aid lesson preparation. As a result, all the lessons observed were taught satisfactorily and pupils made steady progress. There is a good range of resources available and lessons are taught in a well-equipped specialist workshop. There is also a separate specialist facility for food technology. In spite of efforts to enliven the environment in both rooms with examples of pupils' work on commercially produced posters they are both drab and appear uncared for.
75. Currently food technology and work related to textiles are aspects of the subject that are not co-ordinated by the design technology co-ordinator. This is a weakness. There is also a lack of clarity about the terminology for the subject used throughout the school. Class timetables refer to home economics and craft design technology. Another weakness is the quality, range, and appropriateness of learning opportunities provided for the children in the Foundation Stage class. Because of their age and ability, these children are taught an Early Years curriculum based on the six areas of learning and not the subjects of the National Curriculum. Their creative development needs to be provided for as part of an ongoing range of varied experiential activities and not as a discrete lesson taught in the workshop.

## **Art and Design**

Provision in Art and Design is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Leadership is good and the weaknesses noted in the last inspection, for example, monitoring, curriculum and resources have been rectified.
- Teaching and learning have improved since the last inspection and they are now good.
- Pupils enjoy art and they are enthusiastic learners and they achieve well.

### **Commentary**

76. There is good leadership in art. The co-ordinator, while not a specialist, has a strong interest in the subject. She has developed her knowledge and understanding of the curriculum over the two years that she has held the post. There is now agreement about the scheme of work that is to be followed by pupils from Year 1 to Year 11. This is based on the EQUALS curriculum, a commercially produced programme for pupils with severe learning difficulties. As subject leader, she sees the planning of her colleagues who teach art to their own classes, and she offers advice and support. Assessment in art is now good. The subject leader collects and collates the assessments of pupils' achievement in art and also collects samples of their work. In doing this, she maintains oversight of the outcomes of teaching. As yet, she has not had the opportunity to directly observe the teaching of her colleagues. She has built up resources and these are satisfactory. However, pupils would benefit from a greater provision of drawing boards and easels so that they do not have to do their drawing on the hard, horizontal surface of the classroom tables which prevents them from keeping their drawings in their line of sight and it makes pencil control harder to achieve. The subject leader is aware that it is an anomaly that all work in clay is done as part of technology rather than art. The purposes of work in these subjects are distinct and the present arrangement limits opportunities for expressiveness when working in clay.
77. Teaching and learning were inconsistent at the last inspection but they are now good and this is an improvement. Teachers in each age group plan their work effectively, basing it on the range of activities for making things as specified in the curriculum. In the Foundation Stage, which at present appropriately includes children aged 6 and 7, there is an emphasis on exploring paint and sand play. This work is focused on themes. Techniques of sticking,

papier-mâché, and sprinkling are introduced and used to make collages, masks, and textured pictures. By the end of Year 6, pupils are drawing on paper, manipulating materials and combining media. They use brushes, hands, and rollers to apply paint. As pupils move up through the school, techniques such as weaving and photography are introduced and they begin to learn about the work of significant artists. Older pupils in Years 10 and 11 visit galleries and take part in competitions and these activities stimulate their desire to make art for themselves.

78. For students in the post-16 groups, art still plays a significant role in their education. The clearest example of this is the exceptional work that students have carried out with the aid of skilled professionals to complete a stained glass window project and the painting of murals as an element of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. All this signifies that there is now teaching that is carefully planned to match pupils' capabilities and to challenge them to achieve more as they develop and improve their competencies over time. In the lessons observed, teaching and learning were consistently effective. A significant factor in each of the lessons observed was the enjoyment that pupils derived from making art. Younger pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6, applied themselves well without too much adult help and showed high levels of interest as they worked on making a crocodile mosaic. In a Year 9 class, pupils worked hard at their drawing and colouring as they made a pattern for a tablemat with a biscuit motif. One pupil showed exceptional ability in drawing, rendering the outline of the biscuit she was drawing, and its surface marks, very accurately. Other pupils took particular pleasure in filling in the drawings they had made with colour. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 thoroughly enjoyed colouring the papier-mâché "piñatas" they had previously made using brushes, rollers and frequently, their hands, to apply paint. In all of these examples, pupils' interest was captured by the task and sustained by their satisfaction in what they achieved. Generally, they learn well and achieve more than might be expected.

## Music

Provision for music is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good and they consolidate the standards set at the last inspection.
- Leadership of the subject is good and provision is effectively organised.
- Pupils enjoy music and achieve well.

## Commentary

79. Where it was possible to observe teaching and learning in classes for pupils in each of Key Stages 2, 3 and 4, the overall standard was good. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are taught with younger children as a Foundation Stage class and they work towards their early learning goals in creative development. Their work is reported elsewhere in this report. The last inspection noted that the teaching of music was good, with well-planned lessons and suitable musical activities being provided, but assessment was weak and its use was limited. Since then, teaching has continued to develop. It is now on a firmer footing because teachers, who all teach music to their own class groups, follow the curriculum chosen by the school, and this makes for continuity and development in learning over time. Assessment is now established and teachers make use of a common evaluation scale to judge their pupils' standards. Teachers frequently bring an enthusiastic approach to their lessons that thoroughly engages their pupils who respond by being eager to participate in making music. Assessment is very well used to ensure that what pupils are asked to do matches their capabilities and gives them every chance of extending their achievement. In very good lessons for pupils in Year 8 and Year 10, the teachers' approach was particularly imaginative. Very good use was made of music to develop a positive and joyful response. The contribution of the learning support assistants to the lessons was very good.

80. Leadership in music is good. The co-ordinator, while not a specialist music teacher, is a musician, and, over time, he has prepared himself very well for his role by attending many in-service training courses, to build up a wide range of useful musical resources. These include a variety of instruments, chiefly percussion, conveniently stored on a trolley for general use, and the development of a sound room with a sound beam that is used effectively by teachers to give individual pupils a therapeutic experience. The subject leader gives advice and help to colleagues and he has begun to collect and collate the assessment records of each pupil so that more can be learned about their rates of progress. He is keen to promote the use of music within other subjects and more generally within the life of the school. As yet, he has not had the opportunity to monitor teaching and learning but plans to do this are in place. Music makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development because the music of many cultures is encountered in music lessons and the role played by music in, for example, worship in world faiths is explored in lessons in other subjects.
81. Pupils derive great enjoyment from music both within their lessons or when it is used, as at assemblies, to set a mood. They are encouraged to move to music and to dance whenever this is practicable. By doing these things, they extend the range of their bodily movements and their co-ordination. For many, these matters are important learning goals. Pupils' self-confidence increases during some exciting music lessons to the degree that they are willing to, for example, dance alone – albeit with some adult support – in a circle of classmates. The achievement of pupils in Years 3 to 11 is good. They extend their self-control, listening carefully and responding physically to a wide range of music. They sing enthusiastically and use selected percussion instruments to accompany recorded music. They appraise, as best they can, their own performance and that of others. Some higher achievers in Years 10 and 11 extemporise musical patterns using percussion. Most are aware of keeping time and when they are playing together make their music faster or louder in response to signs given to them by their teacher. Their achievement is good.

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

Too little teaching and learning in citizenship were observed to allow a judgement about provision to be made. There were, on the other hand, many opportunities to see lessons in personal, social and health education, (PSHE), across the age range.

### **Citizenship**

82. There is clear evidence from teachers' planning that work in citizenship is varied and interesting. However, it often forms part of lessons in PSHE in the primary and lower secondary departments of the school. It features very strongly for Year 11 pupils and in the Leavers' department when it is taught in modular units for ASDAN. In a lesson in Year 11 pupils worked hard to identify and share likes and dislikes in how the media presents news. It was an interesting and personalising feature of the lesson to include the school newsletters in this. This gave the lesson additional impact and interest.

### **Personal, Social and Health Education**

Provision in personal, social, and health education is **good**.

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

- Staff fully understand the importance of the subject and weave aspects of it into most lessons and activities.
- There is very good provision for pupils at Post-16.
- Pupils are helped to become increasingly independent.
- Teaching is good overall and a significant amount is very good.

## Commentary

83. Pupils' PSHE is at the forefront of much of the school's work. It is described in the school's prospectus as 'pervading the whole curriculum' and it does so successfully. As a result, achievement is good. In a Year 9 art lesson, for instance, pupils personal qualities were enhanced, as they were encouraged to evaluate their own and others' work; in a Year 8 music lesson, pupils were helped to express themselves through dance and to appreciate one another's efforts. There are many instances of science making a valuable contribution to pupils' health education, particularly relating to personal hygiene and there is a particularly sensitive sex and relationships education programme. Good quality provision has been maintained since the previous inspection. The curriculum is very well developed to ensure that pupils are helped to understand their difficulties whilst remaining optimistic and learning how they can make a contribution to looking after themselves and helping others. It is very closely linked to the citizenship curriculum.
84. Post-16 pupils achieve particularly well because their curriculum is extremely well planned and gives them a very wide range of opportunities to prepare for life on leaving school. These activities include preparing their own breakfasts and snacks, participating in mini-enterprises, work experience and college taster courses. Careers education includes independent counselling and builds very effectively on what pupils have achieved in Years 9, 10 and 11. Pupils respond particularly well to the increased responsibility they are given and they make considerable strides towards increasing independence. Most pupils who leave at the age of 18 or 19 do so with external accreditation such as OCR Accreditation for Life and Living Skills as well as AQA unit awards in a wide range of work-related topics such as gardening.
85. Pupils are effectively helped to understand, and contribute, to their personal care routines. This gives them increasing dignity as they become less dependent upon staff. The school's strong and effective drive to improve literacy and communication skills helps pupils to express their feelings and to let adults know when they are thirsty, hungry, or uncomfortable. Those pupils with little or no speech are helped to use signs and symbols to make their feelings known. At lunchtimes, pupils are helped to make sensible choices about their diets and at various times throughout the school day they are given simple responsibilities, such as returning registers to the office. This latter activity is also of great benefit in helping younger pupils to find their way around the school.
86. Separate PSHE lessons are usually well taught and there is a significant amount of very good teaching. Energetic, enthusiastic teaching of a Year7/8 class very effectively demonstrated the benefits of teamwork. Pupils were fully engaged in conversation about different sorts of teams and about the importance of working together and helping each other. Very good use of signing and symbols to aid communication ensured that every pupil contributed to the lesson and achieved its aims very well.

## 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	4
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	3
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
<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	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	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	2
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>	<b>3</b>
The governance of the school	4
The leadership of the headteacher	3
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	3

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

