

INSPECTION REPORT

PEBBLE BROOK SCHOOL

Aylesbury

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110576

Headteacher: Ms Donna Jolly

Lead inspector: Ms Sue Aldridge

Dates of inspection: 26th - 28th April 2004

Inspection number: 258970

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 – 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll;	75
School address:	Churchill Avenue Aylesbury Buckinghamshire
Postcode:	HP21 8LZ
Telephone number:	01296 415761
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Howard Cox
Date of previous inspection:	7 th December 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Pebble Brook is a mixed community special school catering for secondary day and residential pupils. It currently has 75 pupils on roll, although it is approved for 120 places. All pupils have statements of special educational need. Seventy-one pupils have moderate learning difficulties; a small number have emotional, social and behavioural difficulties or severe learning difficulties. Boys outnumber girls by more than three to one. Although most pupils are white, 13 are of Asian origin; none of these is at an early stage of acquiring English. Overall, pupils' socio-economic circumstances are unfavourable; the number of pupils eligible for free school meals is high. Unusually, the school makes residential provision for pupils from other special schools, as well as its own population; a third of its pupils were resident at the time of the inspection.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
8810	Sue Aldridge	<i>Lead inspector</i>	Science; Personal, social and health education; Citizenship.
14032	Marion Saunders	<i>Lay inspector</i>	
21373	Richard Capel	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics; Religious education; Music.
21899	Gillian Lawson	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; Information and communication technology; Design and technology.

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The school's overall effectiveness is unsatisfactory. Although pupils' achievements by the time they leave the school are satisfactory, pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not achieve well enough in mathematics and science. Most pupils have good attitudes to their work and enjoy being at the school. Behaviour is satisfactory and pupils' personal development is good. Teaching is satisfactory. However, there are serious weaknesses in the curriculum, assessment and management, and the school provides unsatisfactory value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- All pupils achieve well in design and technology.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are prepared well for further education and work.
- There is a good range of extra-curricular activities for both day and residential pupils.
- The school encourages well the pupils' moral and social development.
- Parents and pupils regard the school well; relationships between pupils and staff are warm and trusting.
- The headteacher, who has been in post for two terms, has clear plans for improving the school.
- Teaching of mathematics in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory; music teaching is also unsatisfactory.
- Too little time is allocated to teaching the National Curriculum and religious education and, for no good reason, some classes have more time for certain subjects than other classes.
- The school has few ways of measuring its own success; it does not collect enough assessment information, has only recently set targets for raising whole-school achievement, and has not yet established performance management.
- Arrangements for the arrival and departure of pupils are not safe.
- Governors do not fulfil their statutory duties, and governance is unsatisfactory.

The school's effectiveness has declined since the last inspection and improvement is **unsatisfactory**. Very little action has been taken to extend the school's role in working with mainstream schools to support inclusion. Too little account has been taken of national developments in education. This inspection identifies weaknesses that were identified by the inspection team in 1998, namely assessment, staff appraisal and the safety of pupils during arrival and departures. The relatively new headteacher has examined carefully all aspects of the school's work and has drawn up suitable action plans to show how the many weaknesses will be addressed. There has been satisfactory improvement in the school's accommodation. Very good progress has been made since November 2003 in rectifying the weaknesses identified by the inspection of the residential provision, carried out by the National Care Standards Council (NCSC).

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement at the end of:	in relation to individual targets in:	
	Subjects of the curriculum	Personal and social education
Year 9	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory
Year 11	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

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

Overall, achievement is satisfactory. School leavers of all abilities pass a satisfactory range of externally accredited examination, and they move on to further education courses or to work. Where pupils do not achieve well enough in mathematics and science this is because of weaknesses in teaching, assessment and the curriculum. Across the school, achievement is satisfactory in the key subjects of English, information and communication technology (ICT), and religious education.

Pupils' attendance, punctuality and behaviour are **satisfactory**. Attitudes to the school and to learning are **good**; they are best amongst the oldest pupils. Overall, arrangements to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are **good**.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided is satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory. Learning is satisfactory; it is best in Years 8 to 11. In Year 7, pupils' behaviour occasionally gets in the way of their learning. The curriculum is unsatisfactory because it is not broad or balanced and does not meet requirements in science in Years 7 to 9. Resources are unsatisfactory in mathematics, music and ICT. Assessment is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11, but not in Years 7 to 9. Provision for pupils' care and welfare is satisfactory, as is the support, advice and guidance they receive. Links with parents and the community are satisfactory. There are good links with other schools, particularly for residential pupils, and good links with colleges.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Taken together, leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Leadership by the headteacher and other key staff is satisfactory. Governors are supportive and have a range of highly relevant skills, but they do not monitor the work of the school well enough to make sure that they fulfil their statutory obligations. Management is unsatisfactory; the new headteacher has inherited a school in which management is underdeveloped.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents particularly like the approachable staff, the interesting activities the school provides and the fair treatment of their children. Pupils are most positive about being trusted, having someone on the staff they can talk to, and being listened to. Pupils and parents alike feel that there is too little homework, and inspectors agree on this. Parents' and pupils' concerns about bullying were investigated by inspectors. Bullying certainly occurs, but it is not widespread and is dealt with effectively.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- improve teaching and resources in mathematics and music;
- ensure that sufficient time is allocated to teaching National Curriculum subjects and religious education and that all pupils have the same opportunities to learn and succeed;
- improve resources for ICT;
- improve assessment in Years 7 to 9 and ensure that sufficient assessment information is available to measure the school's success;
- ensure that arrangements for arrivals and departures are safe.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- ensure that the curriculum meets requirements in science in Years 7 to 9;
- ensure that a system of performance management for staff is in place;
- ensure that the school has an accessibility plan;
- carry out monitoring of the race equality policy.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

The standards reached by pupils are **well below expectations**, but this is mainly due to their considerable learning difficulties. Overall, achievement is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11, but unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9.
- Achievement in design and technology is good.
- In science and mathematics in Years 7 to 9, pupils do not achieve well enough.
- In music lessons, pupils' achievement is poor.
- There have been no targets set to raise whole-school achievement in the past, and those recently set are not based on sound assessment information.

Commentary

1. Achievement is best in Years 10 and 11. Last year there were nine pupils eligible for entry to external examinations. In mathematics and science, pupils were entered for the Certificate of Achievement through Edexcel. In mathematics, six pupils achieved merits and three were awarded distinctions. In science, one achieved a distinction, one a merit; and the rest all passed. Between them, pupils were awarded a number of modules by OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and Royal Society for Arts) as part of the National Skills Profile. Overall results are shown in the table below.

Total modules achieved as part of the National Skills Profile

Communication	Number	ICT	Motor Vehicles	Personal Skills	Catering	Horticulture
72	37	72	15	25	8	8

2. All pupils achieve well in design and technology. This is associated with good and sometimes very good teaching and with pupils' positive attitudes to their work in resistant materials and food technology. Pupils develop well their skills in designing and making, as well as in evaluating their finished products. Although there is no full accreditation for pupils in Years 10 and 11, most are successful in achieving recognition for catering.

3. In national tests in the summer of 2003, a small number of pupils in Year 9 achieved Level 3 in both science and mathematics. This suggests that they have the potential to be successful in GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) examinations in the summer of 2005, yet all Year 10 pupils are following Certificate of Achievement courses. The school recognises this weakness and has plans to introduce GCSE courses for its most able pupils in the future.

4. Similarly, the school recognises that the requirement to set targets to raise whole-school achievement has not been met in the past. Since her appointment, the headteacher has made sure that targets are set for summer 2005. However, these are not based on assessment data and are really a best guess. It is too early to say whether these targets are likely to be met.

5. There are two key factors that limit pupils' achievement. The first is the short time allocated to the teaching of subjects; this has a particular impact in Years 7 to 9, where most subjects are affected. In science, for instance, the very low time allocation results in a narrow range of topics being taught. There is too little emphasis on practical, investigative work, so pupils make less progress in this aspect than they do in gaining knowledge and understanding of science. Even in certain subjects where teaching is good, and where pupils make good gains in what they are taught,

there is not sufficient time to really deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding. As a result, their achievements are satisfactory rather than good. Both English and religious education are affected in this way. In English lessons, pupils achieve well in speaking and listening, and in reading; in writing, achievement is satisfactory. There are not as many opportunities for pupils to write in other subjects as there are for them to speak, listen and read.

6. The second factor that limits achievement is weak teaching. This occurs in mathematics in Years 7 to 9 and in music. Achievement is unsatisfactory in mathematics because planning is weak. Teachers do not plan well enough for pupils of all abilities. As a result, the highest and lowest attainers do not achieve as well as others. Too little emphasis is placed on using and applying mathematics skills, with the result that pupils do not progress as well in this aspect as they do in number work. Similarly, in science the pupils with the most pronounced learning difficulties are not set achievable objectives, so records show no achievement or progress for them at all. There was insufficient evidence to make an overall judgement on achievement in music because records have only recently been compiled, but pupils' achievement in lessons was seen to be poor. This was the result of weaknesses in teaching and pupils' unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour.

7. There are no differences in the achievements of boys and girls or in the achievements of pupils of different ethnic origins.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attendance and punctuality are **satisfactory**. Pupils' attitudes to school are **good**. Behaviour is **satisfactory**. Overall, the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are generally attentive in lessons and take part enthusiastically in the activities the school provides.
- The school has effective measures in place to promote and improve attendance.
- Provision for pupils' moral and social development is good. This is reflected in the positive relationships between pupils, the concern they show for each other, and their generally high levels of confidence and self-esteem.
- In a few lessons, behaviour is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

8. In most lessons, pupils are attentive and show high levels of interest in the content of the lesson. They can work well together on tasks and, when fully engaged by the topic, they work independently with high levels of concentration. An example was a Year 10 food technology lesson, where pupils listened carefully to the instructions and then worked independently to make a pizza base. Pupils are proud of their achievements and celebrate the successes of their peers. Attitudes improve as pupils move through the school, and this reflects their increasing maturity. A significant number of pupils take part in the good range of extra-curricular activities provided by the school. A wide range of activities is available for the boarding pupils, a number taking place away from the school premises. For example, several pupils attend a local youth club.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%) 2001/02

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	11.1	School data	1.9

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

9. The school has good measures in place to promote attendance. Attendance awards are given to those pupils who have had fewer than two absences in a term. All unauthorised absences are followed up on the first day of absence. This approach has resulted in improved attendance over the past six months, to a figure of 92.84 per cent. A few pupils take extended holidays abroad each year, which distorts the overall figures. The school is aware of the need to find ways of encouraging less enthusiastic older pupils to remain in education; for example, it is currently looking to expand the existing arrangement for one pupil to attend three days of work-based learning each week.

10. A positive feature of the school is the high level of self-esteem of the majority of older pupils. By Year 11 they are confident and mature individuals. Throughout the school, pupils are friendly, helpful and considerate both to adults and to each other. Frequent acts of kindness and concern for others were observed. In many lessons, there are good opportunities to promote both moral and cultural development. A good example was seen in a Year 10 English lesson, where pupils debated the morality of stealing in a situation where one could not be 'found out'. This discussion originated from their study of a book entitled 'Thief'.

11. For those pupils who board at the school, the school's provision for personal development makes a good contribution to their understanding of the responsibilities of living in a community. This has beneficial effects upon the whole-school community. The school encourages pupils to take decisions wherever possible, and this has recently included deciding upon the colour scheme for the recently decorated boarding areas.

12. The school has begun to be more proactive in promoting awareness of cultural diversity. Signs in different languages are provided, and the school has celebrated religious festivals such as Divali. The religious education syllabus makes a sound contribution, and assemblies are used to emphasise the various religions within the community. Art makes a good contribution to the pupils' overall cultural development. The school is aware that the provision of both cultural and spiritual development, whilst satisfactory, would benefit from more effective planning.

13. Overall, behaviour is satisfactory and sometimes good or very good, but there is a minority of lessons in which pupils' behaviour is unsatisfactory and this seriously affects the progress of the whole class. Most of the unsatisfactory behaviour is by the younger pupils and in those lessons where teachers have not planned appropriately for the needs of individuals. Behaviour around the school is satisfactory overall and for many pupils it is good. However, there were some examples of abusive and semi-violent behaviour where adult intervention was required. The school is aware of the need to be vigilant over bullying, and pupils report that when bullying does occur it is effectively dealt with.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	60	7	0
White – any other White background	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	12	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0

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

14. The school has a recently drafted behaviour policy that is significantly different in nature from the previous policy. This is not yet consistently applied across the whole school. Elements of the policy are evident within some classes, for example the merit cheque system of awards. There were seven fixed period exclusions during the last reporting year; these involved four individuals. All were appropriately managed, and the school compares favourably with similar schools nationally, as there were no permanent exclusions.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided is **satisfactory**. Teaching is satisfactory, although assessment is not. The curriculum is unsatisfactory because it is neither broad nor balanced; it does not meet requirements in Years 7 to 9. Pupils' care and welfare are satisfactory, as are the support and guidance they receive. Links with parents and carers, and with the community, are satisfactory.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are **satisfactory**, assessment is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good in English, religious education and design and technology, but unsatisfactory in mathematics in Years 7 to 9, and in music.
- Good relationships between staff and pupils help to promote learning.
- Too little use is made of ICT to support learning, and few members of staff give homework.
- There has been an increase in the range of external accreditation since the last inspection, but accreditation for high and low attainers is not yet sufficient.
- There is too little assessment of pupils entering the school, and staff do not make use of a national system of assessing pupils who progress in small steps.

Commentary

15. Although inspectors saw a significant proportion of unsatisfactory teaching, this was not a true reflection of the overall quality of teaching, for two reasons. Firstly, the school asked for a full audit of music, and teaching in this subject is unsatisfactory. Teaching was stronger in other subjects that were not a focus for the inspection, such as art and French. Secondly, the part-time working pattern of two design and technology teachers meant that fewer lessons in this subject could be seen during the inspection period than inspectors would normally have seen for a subject that was being inspected fully. Teaching in this subject is good overall, with a high proportion of very good teaching.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 40 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
0	7 (17.5%)	13 (32.5%)	16 (40%)	4 (10%)	0	0

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

16. A particular strength of the teaching is the good relationships that staff have with pupils, particularly in Years 8 to 11. There is clear mutual respect, and pupils know that in most lessons they are going to be challenged and expected to work hard. As a result, they are well motivated. Pupils are secure about making contributions because they know that these will be valued. In an English lesson, for example, pupils expressed views and made spontaneous observations about a video clip of a book based on the experiences of wartime evacuees. Most lessons proceed at a good pace, and pupils are engaged well throughout. Staff are careful to give pupils time, such as when one has a speech impediment or needs to work out a particular word when reading aloud. In Year 7, pupils with a range of complex difficulties are finding it hard to adjust to their secondary school, and their attitudes and behaviour occasionally get in the way of learning in lessons.

17. Good teaching and learning in English is characterised by a variety of interesting activities in each lesson. These include shared reading of appealing texts, opportunities for pupils to read individually, good questioning to assess pupils' understanding, and encouragement of discussion. Direct teaching of letter sounds helps pupils to develop their skills in decoding unfamiliar words. The three-part lesson is well established, and the Key Stage 3 strategy implemented well. In religious education a good range of resources supports pupils' learning about different religions, and the teacher brings the subject to life by including visits to places of worship and drawing well on pupils' own experiences of different religions. In design and technology, skills of designing and making are

carefully taught through explanations and demonstrations. Pupils are well prepared to take responsibility for healthy and safe practice, and they use machinery and equipment safely and competently. They work hard throughout lessons and help one another sensibly. In food technology, the teacher draws pupils' attention to links with other subjects, such as science and geography, and this makes learning more meaningful to pupils. A particular strength is the self-evaluation that pupils carry out; the most skilled are able to evaluate their products and identify ways of improving them.

18. Good teaching was also seen in art, where pupils were observed working sensibly on individual projects linked to aboriginal art. The teaching ensured that pupils had a wealth of ideas to draw upon, and careful teaching of skills enabled pupils to improve their own work or experiment with a different technique. Assessment in art includes self-assessment, and pupils are encouraged to identify how they can improve on their previous best. In French, the teacher plans a range of activities that challenge pupils of all abilities. Support staff ensure that all pupils are included in the lesson, and there are opportunities for pupils to speak, listen, read and write. As a result, pupils are well motivated and make good progress in lessons.

19. The key weakness in the teaching of mathematics in Years 7 to 9 is the failure to plan adequately for the full range of pupils' abilities. This results in pupils being given tasks that are too easy or too hard, or resources being used that are not appropriate for the ages or abilities of the pupils. In addition, too much time is spent on number work, and pupils are given too few opportunities to tackle mathematical investigations. As a result, the most skilful and the least skilful pupils do not learn as effectively as others and pupils do not improve well enough their skills in using and applying mathematics.

20. The teacher responsible for music is a musician but has not been trained to teach the subject, and finds it difficult to plan tasks and activities that offer a suitable challenge and appeal to pupils. There are too few resources for music, and this too restricts the range of activities. As a result, pupils are not well motivated in music lessons and they do not behave well. The teacher's skills in managing pupils' behaviour are not yet secure enough.

21. There are two developments that would better support pupils' learning across the school. At present, teachers do not make enough use of ICT for this purpose. It is used well in some subjects but not in others. Limited resources, as well as teachers' lack of confidence and skills, account for this weakness. Secondly, homework is not routinely given, and this limits the extent to which pupils consolidate and extend what they learn in lessons. The practice is well developed in art, where most pupils complete the tasks they are given and work completed at home is of a good standard. Pupils and parents alike expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of homework given.

Assessment

22. When pupils arrive at the school there is limited initial assessment, and records that accompany them do not always provide enough information to guide teachers in planning suitable tasks. As a result, it is some time before pupils are given individual objectives for literacy and numeracy, although there are common objectives to help pupils settle in, such as wearing school uniform. When pupils are set individual objectives they generally know what these are, particularly their personal and social targets. Targets are reviewed with sufficient frequency, but those that are not met are not always carried forward to the next session, and no explanation appears for this.

23. For pupils approaching school-leaving age, the school has increased the range of externally accredited courses available at the time of the last inspection, and the rigour associated with external accreditation means that assessment is satisfactory for these pupils. However, there are a few pupils for whom accreditation is not wide ranging enough, particularly those who are high attainers or low attainers. The school recognises this and there is a suitable action plan to address the issue.

24. In Years 7 to 9, where pupils are working at National Curriculum Level 1 or above, teachers assess their levels accurately and are able to plan suitable learning tasks and outcomes. However, for the small number of pupils who are working below National Curriculum Level 1 there is no means

of identifying what they should learn or of measuring the progress they make. This is because the school has not adopted the national system of using pre-National Curriculum levels (P scales) that has been available for some years. As a result, a few pupils are not accurately assessed at all. The lack of assessment information also limits the school's potential for measuring its own success.

The curriculum

The breadth and balance of the curriculum is **unsatisfactory**. There is a **good** range of extra-curricular provision. Overall, accommodation and resources are **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Not only is the school week well below recommendations, it is also further shortened by including three periods of leisure pursuits on a Friday afternoon. This limits pupils' achievements and opportunities for a broader range of accredited courses.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are prepared well for subsequent stages of education and employment.
- Not all pupils have the same opportunities to learn, because the teaching timetable lacks balance.
- There has been limited curriculum development since the last inspection.
- Resources are unsatisfactory in mathematics, music and ICT.

Commentary

25. Overall, the curriculum is unsatisfactory and progress since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory. The taught time in the school day has been extended but is still well below the recommended time. This has meant that some subjects do not have sufficient time to cover the programmes of study in enough depth; this limits achievement, particularly in science. Although all subjects of the National Curriculum are taught, as well as religious education and personal, social and health education (PSHE), the school is not meeting all statutory requirements. For example, the limited amount of taught time and the lack of cohesive planning and co-ordination do not ensure full coverage of the National Curriculum in parts of science and mathematics, and particularly the ICT component in those subjects in Years 7 to 9.

26. The limited teaching time also restricts the full range of examination courses. For example, in subjects such as art and design and technology, where pupils respond very favourably to teaching and achieve good results, they receive no external validation for their work. The taught time is insufficient to cover the examination syllabus in these subjects. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 gain OCR National Skills Profile accreditation, which covers some subject areas but does not meet the needs of all pupils. At present there are no accredited courses for English, physical education, French, history, geography, religious education, design and technology, art and music. There is no appropriate accreditation for the lowest attainers in the school, nor provision for entry to GCSE or similar examination courses for the highest attainers. The school is investigating wider ranges of accreditation to better meet the needs of the changing intake of the school. Preliminary planning is in place for staff training to enable preparation for new courses, but this is at an early stage.

27. The wider curriculum for pupils in Years 10 and 11 is developed well, with a strong programme for transition, very useful work experience placements and effective college links. This prepares pupils well for subsequent stages of education and employment and enables most of them to go into employment or straight into local mainstream colleges or specialist colleges when

they leave school. Very good links with careers education and the local Connexions service ensure that pupils have secure transition plans, and they are able to plan well for the future in a supportive and encouraging atmosphere. Pupils respond positively and gain socially and academically from these experiences and have a genuine understanding of the world of work.

28. Not all pupils have the same opportunities to learn, because the teaching timetable lacks balance. The teaching day is not evenly divided into periods, which makes it difficult to achieve this balance. Classes in the same year are allocated significantly different amounts of time in certain subjects, and there is no clear rationale for the differences.

29. Pupils, parents and staff greatly value the extra-curricular activities which enhance and broaden the curriculum. The school runs a variety of lunchtime and after-school activities, including pool, computer games, team games, gardening and art and craft clubs. Pupils experience a range of sporting activities, including golf, basketball, athletics and hockey. They work with a local football club to enhance their skills, and take part in inter-school athletics, swimming, cross-country and football matches. The school takes full advantage of the locality to offer outdoor education to pupils through sports fixtures and field trips and through visits to local environmental areas. Younger pupils also take part in an annual residential trip to an adventure centre. In all these activities pupils learn to be independent, and also to work in teams and enhance their social skills.

30. Although at present there is no organised outreach work, or inclusion activities in lessons, the leisure pursuits programme gives pupils good opportunities to work with other schools and in the community, and it enhances the curriculum. Pupils work on joint productions with their mainstream peers and perform for other schools and organisations; they give concerts and perform in charity events, which give them good social and cultural experiences. For example, a recent production of a rock musical with a local mainstream secondary school supplemented pupils' learning both academically and socially.

31. Overall, the match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is satisfactory, though the school has had some difficulty in appointing specialist teachers. This has been reconciled by using part-time teachers or by dividing specialist teachers' time between subjects. In some cases this has worked well, but in others it places unacceptable restrictions on the school timetable. Most teachers are suitably qualified and experienced. There are specialist teachers in most core areas. However, the number of teaching assistants is low compared to other similar schools and a few lack experience; as a result, support for pupils is limited.

32. There has been an improvement in the accommodation since the last inspection. The mobile classrooms have been refurbished and rewired and they provide a satisfactory learning environment. Several improvements have been made in the residential accommodation; it is bright and well maintained. However, there are improvements needed that the school is unable to fund, notably the renewal of the water supply; the school is waiting for a response from the LEA to the recent NCSC inspection to fund this. Most of the building is well cared for, and displays help to produce an attractive learning environment. The library, though small, is stimulating and well stocked and classrooms have a satisfactory supply of both fiction and non-fiction material. However, resources are unsatisfactory in mathematics, music and ICT. Some areas of learning also lack ICT software, which limits the extent to which staff can use ICT to support learning.

Care, guidance and support

There are **satisfactory** arrangements for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety. Provision of support, advice and guidance based on the monitoring of pupils' progress is **satisfactory**. The involvement of pupils through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The arrival and departure arrangements criticised at the last inspection remain a hazard.
- There are very good procedures for ensuring health and safety in the classroom.
- Pupils feel confident and secure in the school and with the adults who support them.
- Arrangements for making pupils feel secure when they start at the school are good.
- There is good guidance and preparation for pupils leaving school.

Commentary

33. At the last inspection the arrival and departure of pupils from the playground was identified as an issue to be addressed through ensuring a clear separation of pedestrian and motor traffic. Whilst the school has responded by painting yellow lines to make the distinction, these are generally ignored by pupils and their use not fully enforced by staff. The mix of pedestrian and motor traffic remains a hazard and is perceived as such by the pupils themselves. The school should urgently re-examine the current arrangements.

34. The school has a comprehensive system of risk assessment for almost all school activities and environments. Each classroom has its own risk assessment, which also relates to each year group. In some cases, the needs of individual pupils are identified. This is very good practice. Child protection procedures have recently been re-written and incorporate all the recommendations of the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) inspection from November 2003.

35. Pupils are positive about their relationship with the adults in the school and speak warmly of the help they receive when it is needed. They are confident that there are adults who will deal with incidents of minor bullying and name-calling. The school administrator plays a key role in providing a welcoming and supportive haven for pupils in need of it. Whilst the various informal arrangements provide satisfactory support for pupils, there is not yet a formal system of pastoral support in place. Within the boarding provision there were no complaints about care practice, and there are good relationships between adults and pupils. The school has made very good progress in addressing the issues raised by the recent NCSC inspection.

36. Individual contact is made with pupils moving into the school and there is good liaison with the primary schools from which pupils come. The residential unit is currently rewriting its induction booklet to provide more information for pupils and their parents/carers.

37. The majority of pupils leave school to move into training or directly into work, with about a quarter going to college. The school's comprehensive arrangements for work experience, consisting of three separate blocks, create a good opportunity for pupils to sample a variety of work placements. A number of pupils receive offers of full-time employment following their placements. Careers education is provided during Year 10 as part of PSHE. Careers advice and guidance through Connexions is available until age 25, giving good continuity of provision.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's links with parents and the community are **satisfactory**. There are **good** links with other schools and colleges

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Information to parents about the school and about pupils' progress is good.
- The transition arrangements for pupils leaving school are good.
- There are good links with other schools and with the local college.

38. The school provides two formal opportunities each year for parents and carers to discuss the progress of their child. Reports are comprehensive. Parents and carers receive regular newsletters of good quality, giving information about the school and more general information which may be of interest to them. The parents' questionnaire indicated that all parents responding were satisfied with the school's contact with them. Review meetings are well attended by parents. The inspection team, who found that homework is given only sporadically in most subjects, found that parents' concerns about the lack of homework are justified. A notable exception is art, which is set weekly, although not completed by all students. There is no homework policy in place, but the home/school agreement, which has been signed by most parents, states that homework will be provided at parents' request.

39. Pupils are well prepared during their final years at school for the move into further education, training or work. The school provides appropriate careers education, and the comprehensive system of three three-week work experience placements makes a very good contribution both to pupils' understanding of the world of work and to their self-esteem. Preparation for work placements is thorough and pupils look forward to the experience. The school hosts an evening for parents and further education providers to help parents understand the range of future provision available.

40. The school has close links with the local college, Aylesbury College, which eases the transition for those pupils moving there for further study. Good links also exist with two secondary schools. Pupils take part in leisure activities with the adjoining grammar school, and there are strong and developing links in music and performing arts with a local secondary school. The artwork of Pebble Brook pupils is also displayed at the Mandeville Arts Festival. Within the residential unit there are good links with other residential schools and other special schools. These provide both for social events for pupils and support and development opportunities for staff. The school's role in supporting special educational needs in mainstream schools is underdeveloped; the new headteacher recognises that this is an area for further development and has taken steps to make local mainstream schools aware of what Pebble Brook provides.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Governance is **unsatisfactory**, governors do not ensure that important statutory requirements are met. Leadership provided by the headteacher and other key staff is **satisfactory**. Management systems and procedures are **unsatisfactory** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The governing body does not monitor the work of the school closely enough and is unaware of key weaknesses.
- Many of the management procedures necessary to monitor, evaluate and improve the achievement of pupils are not in place.
- The recently appointed headteacher has made a good start by reviewing the school's aims and quality of its work, seeking expert help and support, and devising plans to guide further development.
- Senior staff are committed to making the changes necessary to improve the work of the school.
- There is unsatisfactory leadership and management in a few subject areas.
- Application of principles of best value is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

41. The headteacher joined the school two terms ago and has made a good start in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of its work and in developing action plans to provide a framework for improvement. The headteacher has taken over a school which has few procedures in place for monitoring and evaluating its work. She is making good use of expertise from outside the school to support the staff, who are all committed to making the necessary improvements. Although the

headteacher and staff show that they have the capacity to make rapid improvements, for instance, in response to the issues identified in the inspection of care standards in November 2003, much still needs to be achieved across other areas of the school.

42. The governing body is interested and supportive, but it is not monitoring closely enough the work of the school and its efforts to improve. The governors do not know enough about the quality of what is provided for pupils to enable them to challenge the senior management team. Governors do not have a sufficient grasp of the progress made by pupils and of the quality of teaching in the school. They are hampered in this by the lack of an effective system of assessing the progress of pupils and of systems for monitoring the quality of teaching. Governors have appropriate committees but these often fail to meet regularly, for example the personnel and pay and finance committees. Weaknesses that were identified in the last inspection have not been addressed and key statutory requirements are not being met. The performance management of staff is still not fully in place, the requirements of the National Curriculum are not being met in some subjects, and statutory policies such as an accessibility plan are not in place. Governors have begun to make plans to improve the effectiveness of the monitoring visits they make to the school, by ensuring that these are regular and that they have a focus drawn from the school improvement plan. The governing body has begun to work effectively with the new headteacher.

43. The headteacher has worked closely with the staff and governors to review the vision and aims of the school. She has provided a clear vision for the school and its development, and staff have welcomed this. The senior management team and staff in leadership positions are committed to the inclusion of all pupils and to promoting a positive ethos. The headteacher has begun to lead changes to improve the school's approach to the management of behaviour. However, there is currently a lack of consistency in the senior management's approach to dealing with day-to-day occurrences of poor behaviour.

44. The current role of the staff who lead curriculum areas is being reviewed. The headteacher is beginning to lead the curriculum well, but the leadership and management of other areas and subjects, for example assessment and mathematics, are unsatisfactory. There is not a clearly defined role for other staff who lead areas of the curriculum. They do not have a sharp enough focus on the co-ordination of the area across the school and on monitoring and evaluating the progress of pupils. There are few instances where staff work as a team, especially in areas of the curriculum. However, there is an effective team of care staff ably led by the head of care, and a group of learning support staff who are managed well by the headteacher and who work well together.

45. The school has few effective and established ways of monitoring and evaluating the quality of what it provides and the outcomes it achieves. Regular whole-school self-evaluation is unsatisfactory and does not provide the headteacher and governors with enough on-going information to enable them to take effective action. Systematic and well-understood procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are not in place, and performance management for staff is in the early stages of being implemented. Assessment and the tracking of the progress of pupils are not effective and do not supply the headteacher and governors with the data and information they need to judge the effectiveness of the school.

46. There is a policy for induction, but it is not being implemented well enough, and new staff do not feel that they have had a proper induction to the school. Staff have access to professional training and appreciate the support of the local education authority advisers and of staff from other schools who offer their expertise. For example, an experienced music teacher from a local secondary school is giving valuable support to the teacher responsible for music, who was not trained as a music teacher.

Financial information for the year April 02 to March 03

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	702,748
Total expenditure	745,795
Expenditure per pupil	11,300

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	29,702
Balance carried forward to the next	-13,339

47. The school manages its resources satisfactorily. The last full local authority financial audit in May 2002 found the school's financial procedures to be generally good. However, there is some difficulty in balancing the budget, because roughly eight per cent of funding is paid retrospectively each term. The headteacher has begun to make sure that funding is linked to the areas in the school improvement plan. The school applies the principles of best value satisfactorily in its purchasing decisions, but the governors are not yet routinely evaluating the effectiveness of its spending by monitoring the impact on raising achievement. In addition, the school does not currently consult pupils and parents well enough, and although the headteacher is using local comparative data to help evaluate the performance of the school in its use of resources, the lack of assessment data is hampering her ability to compare the outcomes. The school's procedures for ensuring best value are unsatisfactory overall.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French was not a focus for this inspection. Two lessons were seen, and in both of these teaching and learning were good.

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good, with the result that learning and achievement in lessons are good. However, teaching time for English is low. This limits pupils' achievement, which is satisfactory nonetheless.
- Speaking and listening skills are well developed and the majority of pupils have made effective gains in reading.
- The National Key Stage 3 strategy is implemented well.
- The low amount of taught time restricts the range of accreditation that can be offered to meet the wide range of needs of the pupils and limits pupils' achievement in writing.
- Software resources to support teaching and learning are limited.

Commentary

48. Overall, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Achievement is good in lessons throughout the school and occasionally very good because of the teacher's effective planning and the high quality of the teaching.

49. Pupils achieve well in speaking and listening. Although many pupils lack confidence when they enter the school, most are soon able to express themselves and speak clearly. Teaching has a strong focus on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills, and effective planning supports the different needs of various groups of pupils. Drama makes a good contribution to pupils' speaking and listening. For example, in a Year 8 mime lesson, pupils discussed their different performances and constructively criticised one another's efforts, thus improving their skills. In Year 7, pupils are able to discuss their reading, expressing themselves clearly and retelling the story accurately and enthusiastically. Although speaking skills are better developed than listening skills in younger pupils, both these skills develop rapidly in later years. This is due to the good opportunities for pupils to listen and speak actively in several subjects. These take the form of structured discussions, end-of-lesson sessions, role-play, drama, and presenting work to others. Even those pupils with more severe speech and language difficulties make good progress, because there is effective support in the classroom and helpful programmes designed by the speech and language therapist. By the time pupils leave school, they have clarity and confidence in speaking and use their listening skills well.

50. Achievements in reading, for the majority of pupils, are good. A small minority of pupils who have great difficulty in acquiring reading skills make limited progress but the school uses every possible means to bring about improvement, including expert assessment, visiting consultants and one-to-one specialist teaching. The most skilled pupils in Years 10 and 11 are confident readers, though their understanding sometimes lags behind their reading ability. Teachers use a range of strategies to develop pupils' comprehension skills, including good questioning, direct teaching, clear, well illustrated worksheets and carefully chosen books appropriate to the pupils' age. They place great importance on checking that pupils understand the main elements in the texts. In a Year 11

lesson, which started with a short poem, the teacher's good questions and prompts showed that all pupils had understood both the literal and underlying meaning, and a lower attaining pupil shared his views on the poem, showing good understanding. The least skilful pupils read texts appropriate to their age. The pupils have good opportunities to practise their reading skills in daily reading sessions, where teaching assistants and teachers hear pupils read. There are good resources, including video clips, well-chosen books and extracts from plays, poems and news articles. These help to bring the activity to life, and the pupils make good progress. Carefully selected visits to the theatre, and participation in drama, enrich the curriculum and give pupils great pleasure in live performance.

51. The English co-ordinator pays good attention to the Key Stage 3 strategy and the framework for teaching English, and lessons in English are active and engaging. However, the limited time available for teaching English means that pupils make slower progress in writing, and particularly in extended writing projects. Most pupils enter the school with very limited writing ability and have particularly low levels of attainment in it. They make steady progress because of skilled and effective teaching which is well matched to individual needs. However, very few pupils write at length, and note-taking skills and drafting and redrafting skills are underdeveloped. A few older higher attaining pupils write in cursive, well-formed script and spell simple vocabulary accurately. Some lower attaining pupils who have difficulty forming letters neatly are beginning to use ICT to produce very attractively presented work. Pupils are beginning to use more interesting vocabulary in their descriptive writing and to write more creatively and for a range of audiences, including letters, advertising posters and electronic mail. They are encouraged to use ICT to support their work in English and are competent in using computers to write. However, limited resources, particularly in software, restrict pupils' experience in both ICT and English.

52. The quality of teaching is good, and in some lessons very good. Teachers tell pupils exactly what they are going to learn, and lessons have a clear focus. A good balance of praise and challenge motivates and encourages pupils, and the high quality of relationships between pupils and staff ensures that pupils grow in self-confidence and maturity. The best teaching places emphasis on explaining effective ways of working, and lessons move forward at a fast pace. An example occurred in a part of a Year 7 lesson where pupils were looking for words beginning with 'sh' and using them in sentences. The teacher produced a range of stimulating interactive activities which reinforced and extended their knowledge and understanding. The lesson was conducted at a fast pace and, although the teacher's expectations were high, she showed pupils how to reach their targets in small, manageable steps, thus helping them to succeed.

53. There has been a satisfactory improvement in English since the last inspection. Planning has improved and is now good. Assessment is thorough and effective, with close reference to the National Curriculum Attainment Targets in recording progress. Pupils' progress is systematically recorded through end-of-module assignments, teacher assessment and moderated writing assignments. The department is developing the use of P scales so that it can record more accurately the attainments of the least able pupils in small steps, and track progress over time.

54. Overall, the co-ordination of English is satisfactory. The leadership is good. The co-ordinator has a clear and appropriate development plan and a clear vision for the future. She monitors the implementation of the literacy policy and whole-school approaches to spelling. However, her evaluation and monitoring role is restricted by the very small amount of non-teaching time available to her. The co-ordinator has worked closely with the local education authority literacy adviser and attends National Literacy Strategy meetings. She is implementing the Key Stage 3 strategy well. Year 10 and 11 pupils take the OCR National Skills Profile Accreditation course, and the school has plans to provide new methods of accreditation, including ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network), to meet a wider range of need.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

55. Language and literacy are promoted satisfactorily within other subjects, with a strong emphasis on speaking and listening in all lessons. For example, pupils discuss their work, extend their vocabulary and develop their reading and writing skills in ICT, citizenship, PSHE, religious education, design and technology and food technology. However, the widespread use of worksheets does restrict opportunities for extended writing on occasions.

Development points for the subject are:

- to increase taught time and opportunities for writing in other subjects;
- to introduce external accreditation for older pupils;
- to improve software resources.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- In Years 10 and 11 achievement is satisfactory; in Years 7 to 9 unsatisfactory teaching results in unsatisfactory achievement.
- The leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory; staffing difficulties in the recent past have contributed to underdevelopment of the subject.
- Good relationships between staff and pupils promote learning in lessons.
- There is not enough use of ICT to support pupils' learning, and too little homework is given.
- There has been a decline in the quality of provision and in the achievement of pupils since the previous inspection.

Commentary

56. Achievement in mathematics is unsatisfactory overall. Achievement is unsatisfactory in Years 7, 8 and 9, but satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. This is mainly due to some good teaching and to a suitable framework to guide planning and assessment, afforded by the accreditation systems used. Moreover, older pupils are given opportunities to apply and consolidate their knowledge and understanding in mathematics in other areas. However, a few higher attaining pupils in these later years are not entered for examinations that fully recognise their achievements.

57. Most pupils in Years 10 and 11 make satisfactory progress in areas such as basic number, converting data into graphs and applying the correct unit of measure to various everyday problems. The least skilful pupils sometimes spend too much time on basic number work, with teachers giving too little attention to how they might present work in a different and stimulating way. Teaching is satisfactory overall in Years 10 and 11. In a lesson on probability, the teacher established good relationships with the pupils and provided stimulating practical activities which engaged and motivated the pupils. Pupils were able to make good progress during the lesson as a result of clear explanations of what can be a difficult concept to understand. Throughout the school there are no effective systems in place to record any progress the pupils have made during the lesson, and to use this to adjust what is planned for the next lesson.

58. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 do not make as much progress as they might, especially the lowest and highest attaining pupils. Teachers have begun to implement the Key Stage 3 National Strategy by providing the pupils with whole-class learning objectives and structuring their lessons to include an introduction and a review of learning at the end. However, they are not planning in sufficient depth to meet the wide range of needs found in each class. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 make most progress in number work and in activities such as telling the time. However, pupils spend too much

time completing too many worksheets. There is little evidence of pupils being given the opportunity to use and apply their knowledge and understanding in mathematics through stimulating investigations, or by using ICT and relevant software to support their learning. Other aspects of the mathematics curriculum, such as data handling, are not given sufficient attention. Teaching is unsatisfactory overall. Although teachers have good relationships with the pupils, they do not give enough thought to planning activities to meet their different learning needs. Nor is there enough attention to ensuring that support staff are aware of what each pupil they are working with needs to achieve during the lesson, and how it is to be achieved. In a very few lessons teachers questioned the pupils well to check if they had understood, but they did not always make effective use of support staff. Often, support staff work with the lowest attaining pupil all the time because the activity is too hard for the pupil to tackle with any degree of independence. This means that other pupils lack the benefit of assistance and a few pupils become dependent on support. Resources used in lessons are often old or inappropriate for the particular pupils' needs and abilities. For example, a pupil with poor manual dexterity could not cut up nets of a cube. Using small squared paper, and the support assistant had to do this for him. There is very little use of homework as a means of consolidating pupils' skills.

59. The leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. The recently appointed subject leader is unclear of her role and little has been done to improve the subject since the last inspection. However, this must be seen in the light of considerable staffing difficulties in the past, and the short time the current subject leader has had to make an appreciable difference to the provision in mathematics. Little thought has been given to how to adapt the nationally available secondary and primary numeracy strategy to the needs of the pupils. The quality of provision and the achievement of pupils have declined since the last inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

60. Overall, pupils' mathematical skills are used satisfactorily in other subjects. There are opportunities for pupils to use their skills in design and technology to measure and weigh ingredients. Opportunities are also made available in science and ICT, especially in areas such as graph work. However, there has been no co-ordination between teachers of mathematics and teachers of other subjects to look at how this might be planned and assessed.

Development points for the subject are:

- improve assessment, recording and planning for pupils of different abilities;
- ensure that all aspects of the subject are given a suitable emphasis;
- improve resources for learning, including ICT;
- provide suitable work for pupils to do at home.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' achievements are satisfactory in Years 10 and 11; all leave with nationally recognised certificates.
- In Years 7 to 9 achievements are unsatisfactory, because too little time is allocated for teaching science and the subject does not meet requirements.
- The achievements of the least able pupils in Years 7 to 9 are not recognised; no records are kept to show attainment and progress in investigative and practical skills.

Commentary

61. In Years 10 and 11, pupils' achievements are satisfactory. This is because the school allocates more time to the teaching of science in these years, so the course content is covered adequately. In addition, the rigorous assessment associated with the externally accredited course helps to ensure that pupils continue to build on their knowledge, skills and understanding. Last year, all Year 11 pupils achieved at least a pass in the examination, and this year all are set to do the same. A weakness at this stage is that the two Year 10 classes do not have the same time allocation; one has a half an hour more per week than the other.

62. In Years 7 to 9, too little time is allocated to teaching science, with the result that the pupils have a narrow range of experiences. Pupils make better progress in their knowledge and understanding of science than they do in acquiring investigative skills. Although planning covers all the attainment targets in science, there is less emphasis on investigative work; the teacher is limited in the extent to which this can be provided because there is no technician support. All preparation and clearing away has to be done by the teacher. Assessment is unsatisfactory, because although the teacher identifies different learning outcomes these are not realistic for the least able pupils, so records show no achievement for a small number of pupils. There are plans to implement a national system of assessing pupils whose achievements are below National Curriculum Level 1 (P levels). Pupils' progress in acquiring investigative skills is not recorded, either.

63. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Plans for the subject are put into practice faithfully, and best use is made of the teaching time available by keeping a good pace to most lessons. The teacher keeps an eye on the time and ensures that pupils move from one task to another. Pupils' individual targets are incorporated well into science lessons. For example, pupils were asked to lead groups in certain tasks, and this addressed their personal targets well. Pupils are monitored and supported by the teacher, and teaching assistants are deployed well to support pupils who need this most. Pupils particularly enjoy the practical tasks they are set. In a successful Year 9 lesson, pupils used pink and blue litmus paper to test a variety of substances. They were able to establish which were acids and which alkalis, and good questioning by the teacher helped to clarify pupils' understanding. Pupils with literacy difficulties were given a suitably adapted sheet on which to record their results. There was good risk assessment associated with the lesson, and the teacher explained the dangers carefully to pupils. In a double lesson, Year 11 pupils successfully solved a 'crime' by analysing evidence which consisted of a fingerprint, a hair sample, and a minute piece of fabric. This was a challenging task, and pupils worked thoughtfully and sensibly, discussing their ideas and opinions with one another. The task saw pupils considering what type of fingerprint they had and enabled them to see that forensic evidence is not always clear-cut.

64. There is limited use of ICT in science, and the requirement to use data logging in Years 7 to 9 is not met. There is only one computer in the laboratory. The teacher makes use of the Internet to download relevant information, but access for pupils is limited. One unsatisfactory lesson was seen in Year 7; too much time was spent in dealing with low level disruption for teaching to be successful.

65. Since the last inspection, provision for the subject has deteriorated; leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. The 1998 report on science stated that the time for teaching science had increased and that pupils' progress in Years 7 to 9 was good. At that time the subject leader was a subject specialist. The current co-ordinator is relatively inexperienced and is not a subject specialist. He has worked hard, has attended relevant training and has been well supported in developing his skills and expertise in the subject. He is also aware of where the shortcomings lie and has suitable plans to address these. Development points are:

- to increase teaching time for science in Years 7 to 9;
- to introduce the use of P levels in Years 7 to 9;
- to assess and record the acquisition of practical and investigative skills in Years 7 to 9;
- to meet subject requirements and make greater use of ICT to support learning;
- to improve behaviour management skills;
- to provide technician support for the subject.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Improvements in planning and organisation have enabled the co-ordinator to develop ICT skills and understanding more fully.
- Effective implementation of the Key Stage 3 strategy has led to good planning.
- Teaching and the achievement of pupils in Year 11 are good.
- The use of ICT in subject areas is unsatisfactory.
- Resources in ICT are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

66. Pupils' learning and achievement are satisfactory in Years 7 to 10 and good in Year 11. Sound leadership, a satisfactory curriculum, and effective development of the Key Stage 3 strategy have enabled standards in this subject to be maintained since the last inspection, even though there have been changes in intake and staffing. The curriculum is planned around the development of key ICT skills through the use of the computer suite, and this is effective. Some work is planned across subject areas, within the computer suite, for Years 10 and 11 in conjunction with their OCR examination courses, and this is also successful. However, the use of computers within individual subjects and in classrooms is an area for development.

67. Overall, pupils' achievement in ICT is satisfactory. In Year 7, pupils use basic word-processors, desktop publishers, and design programmes. They develop a good familiarity with the keyboard and are beginning to manage files. Lower attaining pupils develop better co-ordination, which they employ to process basic text, such as headings, single sentences or short paragraphs. In one lesson on the use of databases, pupils began to search for information and classify it. The teacher's good organisation and preparation of simple booklets and aids to learning supported the pupils satisfactorily. However, pupils' learning was slow because most pupils needed considerable support. Learning could have been accelerated with better resources, for instance an electronic whiteboard. By this means, more direct whole-class teaching would have been possible and small steps in the process clearly demonstrated. Throughout the lesson there was good emphasis on the English skills that pupils were also developing elsewhere. Pupils showed a good understanding of technical vocabulary, such as 'field', 'data', 'record' and 'classify'. Older pupils in Year 9 build on the skills they have learnt and begin to model and use spreadsheets and to analyse data. They use the Internet to search large databases for information and to prepare a multimedia presentation.

68. Pupils in Year 10 have a developing understanding of the systems in a computer, and they are increasingly able to use their new skills to gain access to text and images on the Internet to enhance their work in other subjects. With pupils in Year 11 they follow the OCR course and develop the National Skills Profile. Year 11 pupils complete, with successful results, the OCR Entry Level Certificate, 'Using IT'. By the time they leave school, pupils are familiar with a range of publishing skills for the production of posters and birthday cards and can use programs for multi-media presentations. They use the Internet to search for information on a variety of topics and use electronic mail for both formal and informal communication. Lower attaining pupils enjoy using the computer and can set up small databases and convert them into spreadsheets; using control skills, they devise patterns with the use of an on-screen 'turtle'. In one good Year 11 lesson pupils learned well because they were enthused by the technology. They wrote e-mail invitations to a party to friends and followed the replies with further instructions (maps and directions) enclosed in an attachment. They were highly motivated by what they saw on the screen and were delighted to see the response to their work. This enthusiasm, and the knowledge that they were preparing for a section of their OCR examination, enabled them to concentrate for comparatively long periods. Most pupils behave well in ICT. They use the computers sensibly and take care of all the equipment.

69. The quality of teaching and learning is generally satisfactory, and one good lesson was seen for the older pupils. A strength of the lessons is good preparation and planning. This leads to a

smooth start to the lesson, where pupils know quite clearly what they are supposed to do. The teacher uses the Key Stage 3 strategy well to plan lessons and structure his teaching. The patient, thorough approach and the good management of pupils enable lessons to proceed at a reasonable pace and make effective use of time. However, some of the resources in the ICT suite, particularly the older computers, are not able to run the most recent software, and there are delays while programmes are started, or fail to start, which affects pupils' learning. The teacher has secure knowledge of the subject and the pupils' needs. His confidence and enthusiasm spreads to the pupils and helps them to be successful. Pupils clearly enjoy using computers. They respond well to the teacher and work co-operatively together. Occasionally, end-of-lesson group discussions are too lengthy, and some pupils lose interest and time is wasted.

70. The co-ordinator has a clear vision for the future of ICT, and his plans for developments are realistic and well thought through. He has worked hard to develop a good policy, long-term planning, systems for record keeping, and assessment systems. The co-ordinator has provided an effective training programme for learning support assistants and works individually with teachers on planning for ICT in their area. He recognises that the use of ICT in subject areas is inconsistent, and further training for individuals is planned.

71. Resources for the subject are unsatisfactory. There is a legacy of under-funding in ICT, which is taking time to redress. At present there are sufficient computers in terms of quantity, but many of them are more than six years old and cannot successfully run some of the more powerful software. Most classrooms have a computer, but they are liable to break down and some do not run the most modern software. There is only one laptop and no interactive resources such as electronic whiteboards, which would enable pupils to present their work to others in highly sophisticated ways. There was no evidence of pupils' use of digital cameras or other similar equipment in ICT, and there is limited software in some subject areas.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

72. There is a satisfactory use of ICT to support learning in some areas, for instance in art, English, citizenship, careers and PSHE. However, the use within individual subject lessons is a weakness; inspectors saw very few computers used in lessons other than in ICT. The school recognises that more needs to be done in mapping ICT across the curriculum, devising cross-curricular links and developing teachers' website knowledge, and has suitable plans for doing this.

Development points are:

- to improve the resources for ICT, both hardware and software;
- to increase staff skills and confidence in using ICT as a learning resource;
- to increase the opportunities for pupils to use ICT in other subject areas.

HUMANITIES

One geography lesson and one history lesson were seen, and on each occasion teaching and learning were satisfactory.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The teaching of religious education is good and sometimes very good.
- Pupils generally have good attitudes to their learning.
- Too little time is allocated to religious education in Years 9, 10 and 11.
- There is a good range of resources, including a wide range of religious artefacts.

Commentary

73. Achievement in religious education is satisfactory overall. Pupils achieve well in lessons, as a result of good and sometimes very good teaching. For some year groups, however, there is not enough time allocated for religious education, and this limits the progress the pupils can make. On some occasions, because of the time taken by pupils to get to the lesson after break in the afternoon, there is little more than 20 minutes of teaching time available.

74. Teaching is good overall. During one lesson, pupils in Year 8 were beginning to identify religious furniture and artefacts in a church and, in responding well to very good questioning by the teacher, showed that they knew the difference between a crucifix and a cross. All pupils were included well in question-and-answer sessions and waited patiently, and in silence, while the teacher elicited a response from a pupil with a severe speech impairment. Despite very little time for the lesson, a teacher of a Year 9 class had planned and timed the activities well, and through good questioning and direct teaching enabled the pupils to make satisfactory progress in finding out five things about Islam. However, the short lesson meant that the teacher did not have enough time to help the pupils extend and consolidate what they had found out and understood. Lessons are usually well planned and visits are made to places of worship. The teacher establishes good relationships with the pupils, is sensitive to their own religious beliefs and brings their knowledge of these into lessons. The attitudes of pupils and their relationship with the teacher and other pupils are usually good. The teacher has a good knowledge of the subject, and the management of the behaviour of pupils is usually strong and enables them to concentrate and contribute effectively to discussion.

75. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The subject leader is not a specialist religious education teacher but has been proactive in developing the subject and making contact with other special schools to discuss and plan the improvement of provision. Resources are good overall and the teacher has recently purchased a set of new, bright and colourful textbooks. The curriculum meets the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus. There is a relevant development plan in place and a satisfactory new system of pupil records, both of which are being evaluated over this year.

76. The quality of provision and the achievement of pupils in religious education have improved since the last inspection. Teaching is now good overall.

There is only one development point:

- to increase the time allocated to teaching religious education.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Achievement in Years 9, 10, and 11 is good.
- Teaching and learning in lessons in Years 9 and 10 are very good.
- Pupils enjoy both food technology and resistant materials and are delighted by the high standards of their products.
- There is no overall co-ordination for the subject. Both the design and technology and food technology teachers are part-time and come into the school for two days a week. This means that the overall development of the subject is limited.
- Accreditation is limited.

Commentary

77. Pupils achieve well and make good progress in design and technology. Younger pupils in Years 7 and 8 make a range of products, using plastics, graphics, material, wire and wood. Their design skills are emerging well and higher attaining pupils produce very competent work in wood, showing good developing skills in using tools and knowledge of joining techniques. Pupils in Year 9 combine wood, metal and plastic to produce wind chimes, bird feeders and systems for plastic bag storage. In the lesson seen in Year 9, pupils were working on structures. They understood that rigid structures need to have some movement, and the teacher's good questioning and useful prompts helped them discover the strongest shapes for supporting weight. Pupils used paper tubes they had made to make one large structure, using an assembly line technique, with each pupil having his or her own part of the design-and-make process. Pupils worked co-operatively and enthusiastically; good examples of previous 'factory assembly line' structures were on display. Pupils pay good attention to evaluating their work and can make clear, constructive and pertinent remarks about their own products and those of others.

78. In food technology, pupils in Year 9 know the importance of the safe handling of food, particularly when the weather is hot. They make small vegetable tarts, using frozen puff pastry. In a very good lesson, the most skilful pupils explained clearly the techniques they had used when previously making different kinds of pastry. The clear and expert teaching helped them to understand the correct treatment of frozen food as they learned the methods of preparing and cooking vegetables in pastry. Lower attaining pupils made good progress in developing their own dexterity in the skills of slicing, chopping, and arranging and presenting vegetables. Most pupils make very good gains in understanding finishing techniques and in making judgements on quantity and consistency.

79. In Year 10, pupils showed their skills in making fresh pizzas. The teacher's very good demonstration elicited a range of questions about the process and showed that pupils knew how yeast works, how to prepare and use garlic, and what waste matter can be used in compost. Higher attaining pupils made good links with learning in science and geography. At the end of the lesson pupils made good comments on the value of pizza in making vegetables more palatable and discussed its value in terms of a balanced diet. They evaluated their products thoroughly for taste, texture, appearance and value.

80. Pupils are delighted with their work in both food technology and resistant materials. In a very good Year 10 lesson where pupils were all working on individual projects, a striking feature was the ease and confidence with which pupils independently used large machinery to achieve their purposes. They were well schooled in health and safety measures and needed no reminders to use protection for their eyes, heads and hands. They demonstrated how each machine should be used to ensure safety. Pupils are proud of their work and are pleased to show their results, to explain how

they were achieved, and to show modifications to their original designs. Higher attaining pupils have strong design elements to their projects and their work is very well finished. Most pupils show good development of skills in using a variety of hard materials and in techniques of finishing. They are competent in using a range of hand and electric tools and show pleasure in their use and in helping one another to use them. A Year 10 girl using a hand saw was having difficulty in keeping steady the large piece of plywood she was using. Another pupil working nearby quietly came over and held the wood steady for her. When she finished, they both looked at the line she had cut and nodded mutual agreement that a good job had been done.

81. Teaching in both resistant materials and food technology lessons is good, with some very good features. Teachers are skilled and knowledgeable. They value pupils' work, and pupils enjoy these lessons and are highly motivated. An analysis of pupils' work shows that they achieve well. Both teachers plan well for their courses and have produced a satisfactory policy and scheme of work. However, there is limited work in ICT in resistant materials because of a lack of ICT equipment. The ICT component is done in the ICT suite as part of the OCR national skills course. Both the design and technology and food technology teachers are part-time and come into the school for two days a week, and there is no subject co-ordinator. This means that the overall development of the subject is limited. The overview of the subject as a whole and the role of evaluation and monitoring are underdeveloped, and this has an impact on the breadth of pupils' work. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 successfully complete well ordered coursework folders. However, there is no discrete accreditation for design and technology; some elements are covered by the OCR National Skills accreditation, but this does not meet the needs of all of the pupils.

Development points are:

- to provide suitable accreditation for older pupils;
- to improve the leadership and management of the subject.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Two art lessons were seen, and in both of these teaching and learning were good.

Music

Provision in music is **poor** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The pupils are not achieving as much as they could in lessons.
- There are weaknesses in teaching, including managing the behaviour of pupils.
- The leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory.
- There are not enough appropriate resources to match the abilities of the pupils; and the systems for assessment are unsatisfactory.
- There has been a worsening in the quality of provision and the achievement of pupils since the previous inspection.

Commentary

82. Achievement in music lessons is poor. Pupils achieve very little in most lessons, due to their unsatisfactory behaviour and lack of concentration and to weaknesses in teaching. Very little work was available for scrutiny during the inspection and a judgement is not possible on how much pupils achieve over time. During lessons, pupils are beginning to learn to use the new keyboards that have recently been purchased. Pupils in Year 7 can identify middle 'C' on the keyboard and a few pupils in Year 8 can identify the notes 'C' and 'D'. Pupils in Year 8 are beginning to identify and play longer and shorter notes on the keyboard. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 10 are beginning to

explore how to change sounds on the keyboard to represent other instruments, such as the trumpet. School productions and assemblies are providing limited opportunities for pupils to sing, and the music teacher has begun to record pupils singing to a guitar accompaniment on the computer.

83. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory. Few effective strategies are employed to control the behaviour of the pupils, who in the main have unsatisfactory attitudes to their learning in this subject. Too much teaching time is spent on controlling behaviour. Lesson objectives are sometimes set which are too difficult for the pupils to achieve, and they lose concentration and begin to misbehave. Where pupils have very structured tasks and appropriate support, more progress is made, but in the majority of lessons seen the pupils were not productive, acquired little new knowledge and were unable to work independently. On the one occasion when the teaching was satisfactory the pupils were well supported by a member of support staff, and the majority of pupils began to concentrate on the task at hand. The teacher taught individual pupils how to play their tunes well and some progress was beginning to be made. However, not enough use is made of the plenary at the end of the lesson in order to hear what individual pupils have learnt and to correct mistakes. There were no facilities to record what the pupils had achieved on the keyboard.

84. The leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. The subject leader is not trained to teach music and is unclear of the co-ordinator role. However, some improvements have been made, for example the purchase of new electronic keyboards and the recording of pupils' singing on to a computer as a record of assessment. Little thought has been given to how to adapt the nationally available primary and secondary units of work in music to the needs of the pupils. Currently, resources do not provide a wide enough range of simple instruments for pupils to play. Although the resources and assessment procedures are unsatisfactory, the teacher is aware of this fact and has given thought to the purchase of an additional range of smaller percussion and wind instruments. The advice and support of a specialist music teacher from a local secondary school has been sought and this is helping to improve both teaching and the planning of lessons.

85. The quality of provision and the achievement of pupils in music have declined since the last inspection.

Development points are:

- to improve teaching, the assessment and recording procedures, and the resources for learning.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

86. The subject was not a particular focus for this inspection. In the single physical education lesson observed, teaching and learning were both good.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, social, health and citizenship education

Provision in personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9; not enough evidence was available to make possible a judgement on achievement in Years 10 and 11.
- The subject is broad; it is taught through other subjects as well as in discrete lessons.
- Good use is made of the local community to enrich the curriculum.
- Citizenship forms an integral part of the programme and it meets statutory requirements.
- Although teaching and learning in lessons are good, there are weaknesses in assessment.

Commentary

87. The subject is well established in the school's curriculum; it is taught through many subjects. In Year 7 science, for example, pupils learn about food, exercise and staying healthy. Since citizenship became a requirement, the co-ordinator has audited the curriculum and has ensured that requirements are met. The breadth of learning experiences is increased by links with the community. These give pupils access to a good range of work experience placements, and some of these have led to pupils finding subsequent employment. Visits and visitors are used well to broaden pupils' experiences. For instance, a visiting group has been in school to promote drugs awareness through role-play and drama.

88. There was limited evidence on which judgements could be made during the course of the inspection. Most of the discrete lessons are taught on Fridays, and the work of Year 11 pupils was not available for scrutiny because of the unanticipated absence of their teacher. It was possible to see that achievement of personal and social targets is satisfactory, but not to make a judgement on how well pupils acquire knowledge and understanding through the taught programme.

89. In the lessons seen, teaching was mostly good. In a Year 8 lesson, pupils were busy working in pairs to identify safety items and to find out how these are used. The pupils played an active part, and all contributions were sensible. Pupils learned from each other because the teacher insisted on 'hands up' and others listened carefully. A good pace was maintained throughout, and by the end of the lesson each pupil had made a poster illustrating a safety item, such as a medicine cabinet, with the key placed on the top of it. In a Year 10 English lesson, pupils reading the book 'Thief' considered the different circumstances in which persons might take something that doesn't belong to them. There was a clear link between this task and pupils' individual social objectives. The issue of peer pressure was explored, and one pupil defined this clearly. Because pupils were divided into groups, and adults chaired groups well, all pupils were encouraged to express a view. The lesson made a strong contribution to pupils' personal development.

90. Teachers maintain suitable records which show what pupils know and understand in the subject, and residential staff contribute to these. However, the school has not yet started to use P levels to identify the small gains that some of the least able pupils make. A further weakness in assessment is that when pupils do not meet their individual targets, as occasionally happens, the targets are not carried forward to the next individual education plan (IEP), and there is no explanation recorded. Nonetheless, most targets are achieved by pupils across the school, and many pupils know what their personal and social targets are and what they need to do to improve.

91. The subject is ably led by a knowledgeable co-ordinator who has produced plans to guide teachers in preparing their lessons; she monitors teachers' planning and provides support for staff who need it, but is unable to observe teaching because she herself is teaching when PSHCE lessons are in progress. The school does not yet have sufficient assessment information to be able to measure the effectiveness of teaching or the curriculum. Whilst leadership of the subject is satisfactory, management is not.

Development points are:

- to monitor teaching, learning and achievement in PSHCE;
- to introduce the use of P levels to enable teachers to assess the achievements of the least able pupils;
- to ensure that when targets are not met they are carried forward to the next IEP, or an explanation is included in the written review.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

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