

INSPECTION REPORT

Piper Hill High School

Manchester

LEA area: Manchester

Unique reference number: 105611

Headteacher: Mrs L Jones (Acting)

Lead inspector: Mr D Smith

Dates of inspection: 17th – 20th May 2004

Inspection number: 258973

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Special
School category: Community special
Age range of pupils: 11-19
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 110

School address: 200 Yew Tree Lane
Northenden
Manchester
Lancashire
Postcode: M23 0FF

Telephone number: 0161 998 4068
Fax number: 0161 945 6625

Appropriate authority: The governing body
Name of chair of governors: Mr A Hibbert

Date of previous inspection: June 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Piper Hill High School is a Community Special School located in Northenden, Manchester. The school is involved in the Wythenshawe Action Zone and Excellence in Cities cluster. The school has Beacon Status, Investors in People, Sports Mark Gold and has gained two Achievement Awards. Also the school received a National Training Award in 2003. There are one hundred and ten pupils on roll; sixty-one boys and forty-nine girls aged eleven to nineteen. Three pupils are placed from other Local Education Authorities. The pupils have a wide range of special educational needs including severe learning difficulties and a higher percentage with more complex learning difficulties than the average for similar schools nationally. In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils who are identified as autistic in the school. One hundred and nine pupils have statements of special educational needs and one pupil is undergoing statutory assessment. Forty-nine pupils are from minority ethnic groups and thirty-two pupils are in the early stages of English language acquisition. Both of these figures are very high when compared to similar schools nationally. Forty-five pupils are eligible for free school meals. Ten pupils are in public care and one pupil is a refugee. The school is due for re-designation as a Specialist Learning Support School. The headteacher has been seconded to Manchester Local Education Authority for the past eighteen months. The school is currently managed by the deputy headteacher in the role of an acting headteacher.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
17323	Mr D Smith	Lead inspector	Science
			Physical education
			Post-16 provision
			English as an additional language
13462	Mrs R Mothersdale	Lay inspector	
16722	Mrs N Buckingham	Team inspector	English
			Modern foreign languages
			Religious education
			Special educational needs
15600	Mr C Richardson	Team inspector	Mathematics
			Information and communication technology
			Art and design
			Design and technology
29452	Mrs C Emerson	Team inspector	Citizenship
			Geography
			History
			Music

The inspection contractor was:

Eclipse Education (UK) Limited
 14 Enterprise House
 Kingsway
 Team Valley
 Gateshead
 NE11 0SR

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The provision that the school makes is excellent and the school provides excellent value for money. The pupils and students achieve very well making very good gains in their learning as a result of very good teaching. The leadership and management of the school are excellent and the governance is very good. The excellent leadership and management at all levels are major aids to learning, particularly in the development of an outstanding ethos.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The curriculum provision is excellent and there are excellent opportunities provided that both enrich and extend the curriculum.
- Leadership and management are outstanding.
- The moral, social and cultural provision for the pupils is excellent overall, and this helps to create the excellent ethos in the school.
- Procedures for and the use of assessment to inform target setting and planning are excellent.
- Teamwork in all aspects of the school is excellent.
- Care guidance and support are excellent and consequently relationships throughout the school are excellent.

The school has made very good progress since the last inspection. The governing body has made very good progress in developing its role as a critical friend. All statutory requirements that relate to the school are now met. The school improvement plan now includes all of the aspects outlined in the last inspection. Monitoring the quality of teaching and learning is now well established across the school. Also, the school has placed a very effective emphasis on raising the quality of teaching and learning in the school and, as a result, it is now very good. The timetable is now balanced and lesson time is used very effectively to teach an excellent curriculum. Health and safety issues have been appropriately addressed.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement at the end of:	in relation to individual targets in:	
	Subjects of the curriculum	personal and social education
Year 9	Very good	Excellent
Year 11	Very good	Excellent
Year 13	Very good	Excellent

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

Pupils' and students' achievement is very good overall. They achieve well in English and very well in the development of their communication skills. Pupils' and students' achievement in maths is very good. Achievement in science for pupils in Years 7 to 11 is excellent. Pupils and students' achievement is very good in information and communication technology (ICT), religious education and music. Their achievement in physical education is very good and at times excellent. Pupils' and students' achievement in personal social and health education is excellent and also achievement in citizenship is excellent. Pupils who are in the early stages of English language acquisition achieve as well as their peers in the school.

The school makes excellent provision for pupils' moral, social and cultural development and the provision for spiritual development is very good. The pupils and students are a credit to the school, parents and themselves. They have excellent attitudes fostering excellent relationships and they become increasingly confident in school without fear of bullying or harassment. Their behaviour is excellent and this is reflected in the fact that there has only been one fixed period exclusion during the last reporting year. Attendance at school is good and pupils are punctual.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is excellent. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall, with some excellent teaching. Quality of teaching is excellent in science and consistently very good in mathematics, personal, social, health education and citizenship and music. It is very good in physical education with some excellent teaching. It is very good overall in ICT and religious education. The procedures and use of assessment are excellent leading to exemplary planning and target setting. Curriculum provision and the enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities, are excellent. The accommodation is good and the quality and range of the resources are good. The pupils and students receive excellent care, support and guidance. There are excellent systems in place for seeking and acting on pupils' and students' views. Very good links have been established with the parents. Excellent links have been established with the community, other schools and colleges.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are excellent whilst the governance is very good. The leadership and management of the acting headteacher and other members of the senior management team is inspirational. The school is forward looking and incisive self-evaluation is an integral aspect of the culture. The school is ambitious and has a deservedly high reputation. Members of staff are keen to learn from best practice in other schools and many also make a significant contribution to other schools, for example, through their Beacon work. Teamwork is a major strength of the school and this helps it to run exceptionally well. All members of staff play their part in developing an excellent ethos. The contribution of continuing professional development for all staff is excellent and this impacts on a shared and ambitious vision for continual improvement. Many of the policies and practices in the school establish models that help to promote continual improvement in other schools. The senior managers are supported and challenged by a very able governing body. The governing body ensures that statutory requirements are met.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The parents are very positive about the school and in particular appreciate the excellent information provided by the school. They are clear that they are kept up-to-date with their child's progress. They find the staff very approachable and support the school's fund raising activities. The pupils are extremely happy in their school and are prepared to work hard. They have an overwhelming positive attitude to learning and to their school. Pupils enjoy attending the wide range of stimulating and exciting clubs and after school activities.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

There are no issues for improvement.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils' and students' achievement is very good. This is consistent across the school and the large number of pupils and students that are in the early stages of English language acquisition and those in public care achieve as well as their peers in the rest of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' and students' achievement is at times exceptional.
- Pupils' and students' achievement in communication is very good.
- Pupils and students achieve very well in mathematics, religious education, ICT and music.

Commentary

1 Pupils' achievement in science is excellent due to the emphasis placed on investigative work and the exemplary use of assessment to inform target setting. The more able pupils plan, carry out and evaluate practical investigations with minimal support. They have the confidence to make predictions and monitor each stage of the experiment to see if it is progressing as expected. These young scientists use scientific terms with increasing accuracy and are developing an excellent understanding of what constitutes a fair test. The pupils, with more complex needs, respond exceptionally well to the quality and range of resources, used so imaginatively by the staff, to engage and explore the world around them. Year 10 pupils, with more complex needs, are challenged to make excellent gains in their confidence during a rebound therapy session. Many of the pupils and students' sporting achievement are exceptional and this has been recognised by the school gaining the Sports Mark Gold Award on two occasions. The school places an outstanding focus on the teaching of personal, social and health education across the curriculum. Consequently, the pupils and students achieve exceptionally well in relation to their personal development targets. Every opportunity is taken to make pupils and students aware of their rights and responsibilities and they respond by making excellent gains in developing their attitudes as worthwhile citizens. The students in the further education department make outstanding gains in their preparation for their placement when they leave school. Pupils and students have many opportunities to gain nationally recognised accreditation and awards. The school is extremely effective in developing new accreditation to meet the needs of particular pupils and students. An example of this is in careers education where the school has developed two accredited units, at different levels, in 'sensory careers – the work of the gardener' and had them validated by an external examinations board.

2 Staff work hard to include all pupils in very well organised strategies to develop their communication skills. This is important for all of the pupils and especially for the large number of pupils who are in the early stages of English language acquisition and the school's approach ensures that they all achieve very well. Pupils with more complex needs very effectively use a range of clues and technological aids to develop their ways of communicating. Other pupils achieve very well when using pictures, symbols and language to develop independence in their communication. Signing is used very consistently and, as a result, pupils and students make very good gains in their ability to sign. In the further education department, members of staff relate the teaching of reading to every day skills, for example, students manage their own lists when shopping in the supermarket and are very effectively encouraged to discuss newspaper headlines in a current affairs lesson. Pupils and students have many opportunities to develop their confidence to express themselves in a range of settings. An outstanding example of this is the success of two pupils in securing places on a "Shakespeare 4 Kids" event in Italy. This is a remarkable achievement.

3 The very good achievements of pupils and students in mathematics is promoted by the excellent use of assessment to set challenging targets. The use of individualised teaching programmes was very effective in enabling Year 8 pupils to very effectively match shapes. Pupils

and students with more complex needs, by using switches to control computer programs and electrical devices have access, and some independence, to learning. Pupils who are more independent learners are challenged well and as they progress through the school they increasingly use computers purposefully. More able pupils achieve very well in developing their word processing skills and use of the Internet. Pupils in Year 10 produce party invitations combining the use of text with clip art. Some students are able to access the Internet with confidence as they search for examples of dance music. Pupils make very good progress in their knowledge and understanding of the major world faiths. This is made possible by the range of teaching strategies and use of resources at an appropriate level for each pupil. The pupils achieve very well in their composing and performing of music. They gain the necessary confidence and achieve very well when performing in public.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils and students have excellent attitudes to school and display excellent behaviour both in and out of lessons. Overall, their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is excellent and they respond in an exemplary fashion to the responsibilities of the school community. Attendance is good and so is punctuality.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils and students are extremely happy in school and are prepared to work hard
- Pupils understand what the school expects of them and respond exceptionally well.
- Pupils live and learn in a rich and stimulating environment.
- Pupils value each other and celebrate each other's achievement.
- Pupils attend well but some of them have very long holidays in term time.

Commentary

4 Pupils and students have an overwhelmingly positive attitude to learning and to their school. They respond very well to the opportunities in school and genuinely enjoy their lessons and activities. Staff are very attuned to pupil's reactions and this is extremely effective when working with pupils in the experiential classes, as they can identify and promote each individual's enjoyment of an activity. For example, in a sensory art lesson, the teacher identified that a pupil favoured blue materials to create a geometric pattern from the contented whistling and humming sounds he was making when he was offered a choice. In a Year 10 science lesson, where pupils were identifying how they could inflate a balloon by creating a gas from a mixture of substances, pupils were enthralled and motivated by the experiments and worked very hard to complete a varied range of tasks within the lesson time. Pupils enjoy attending the very wide range of clubs and after school activities that are open to them.

5 Overall, pupils' and students' behaviour and their moral development, both in and out of school are excellent. Around the school, they are considerate to each other and friendships and relationships are excellent. They do not consider that bullying is a problem but do recognise that pupils behaviour can sometimes be difficult. The school has worked extremely hard on strategic behaviour management techniques and addresses perceived behavioural issues through individual pupil behaviour management programmes. The school is very proud of its successes in modifying pupils' behaviour. It has been able to see huge improvements in behaviour and contentment in individual pupils who had never succeeded in joining in classes in other schools, and who can now spend much of the day in the company of other pupils. Pupils understand what is right and what is wrong and religious education lessons offer strong moral choices and examples for pupils to follow. Class and school rules have been decided with pupils to give them ownership and shared responsibility for the moral standards in the school.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	61	1	
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	8		
Mixed – White and Black African	1		
Asian or Asian British – Indian	1		
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	24		
Any other ethnic group	14		
No ethnic group recorded	1		

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

6 Pupils and students have an excellent awareness of the differences in cultural beliefs, amongst their own school, and the wider society. The greatest respect and tolerance of the range of faiths amongst pupils is displayed, for example, by providing a separate prayer room for Muslim pupils during Ramadan, and ensuring that a Halal and vegetarian choice of food is always available at lunchtime or if food is to be prepared in a lesson. Cultural provision is greatly enhanced by an extremely wide range of out-of-school visits, for example to the Halle orchestra and theatre visits, and the involvement of artists and musicians in residence. There are many residential trips, locally, nationally and internationally and these provide excellent social opportunities for pupils to extend their social skills away from home. Excellent citizenship modules in the personal, social and health education programme emphasises the importance of community in our culture, and each pupils' opportunity and responsibility to exercise an individual choice.

7 Pupils and students respond very well to the school's expectations and philosophy to celebrate personal achievements and raise self-esteem. Spiritual development is enhanced by collective acts of worship, assemblies and opportunities in religious education lessons to share the faiths and beliefs of other religions. Pupils are enterprising, raising money for national and local charities, for example, in a sponsored walk. A sense of responsibility is cultivated and peer mentoring encouraged through the "Buddy system". A pupil questionnaire identified that pupils did not always feel trusted to do things on their own, and the school is determined to address this and improve pupil's perceptions of their own self worth.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (91.8 %)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.2%	School data	0.0%
National data	8.5%	National data	0.5%

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

8 Attendance is good when compared to similar schools nationally. Punctuality is also good, both to school and when arriving at lessons. Increasingly, families are taking their children away for holidays during school time and the school is seeking ways of addressing the problem of extended holidays, where parents do not bring their children back to school when they are expected to. Virtually all other absences are because of pupil's medical conditions and most parents do very well to have their children ready for school, on time, in the morning.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is excellent. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and, as a result, pupils and students achieve very well. The consistent use of excellent assessment procedures leads to exemplary planning and target setting. The curriculum provision is excellent and the enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities is also excellent. Accommodation is good and the quality and range of the resources are good. Members of staff provide the pupils and students with excellent care, support and guidance. The school has developed excellent systems for seeking out and responding to the views of pupils and students. Links with parents are very good. Excellent links have been established with the community, other schools and colleges.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is very good and assessment is excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent procedures for assessment ensure that pupils' learning targets are very well matched to their individual needs.
- In some lessons, the pupils and students are challenged exceptionally well to make excellent gains in their learning.
- An excellent contribution from the teaching assistants helps to develop exceptional teamwork.

Commentary

9 A very clear framework ensures that appropriate assessment procedures are applied consistently throughout the school. Consequently, all staff have a very accurate understanding of the progress that the pupils make and plan work at exactly the right level of challenge. During their first six weeks at the school, pupils are assessed to establish their skill levels in English, mathematics and science. This is now being extended to include ICT. The assessment is updated annually and enables the school to track the pupils' progress and determine how well they are doing in different areas of the curriculum. Information gained is acted on very effectively. For example, strategies were put in place to boost pupils' writing skills after an analysis of assessment results showed that they were achieving less well in this area. Detailed recording of pupils' progress in lessons and during, or at the end of, subject modules is used to set individual learning targets for each subject. The targets are used to ensure that work set is very accurately matched to individual pupils' needs in all lessons. Progress against these targets is evaluated each term. A strength of the assessment process is that wherever possible, pupils and students are involved in setting their targets and evaluating their own progress. Assessment is very carefully monitored by an assistant headteacher to ensure that teachers are consistent and accurate in their judgements.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 63 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6 (10%)	31 (49%)	21 (33%)	5 (8%)	0	0	0

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

10 In a significant number of lessons staff have exceptionally high expectations and challenge the pupils and students to make excellent gains in their learning and their achievement is outstanding. In these lessons, planning is fully informed by the teacher's knowledge of their subject and this ensures that the special educational needs of all of the pupils and students are met. In the teaching of science energy and enthusiasm, combined with meticulous preparation of the resources, promotes pupils' abilities to enquire and investigate an extensive range of topics in science. Also,

the teaching of science, to pupils with more complex needs, is stimulating and inspiring and ensures that the pupils make the very best gains in their experience and participation in exploring their environment. This expertise and the excellent resources are used exceptionally well to develop pupils' communication skills. The teaching of rebound therapy captivates and enthral the pupils and challenges them exceptionally well to push forward the limits of their experiences. Excellent planning and a strong focus on external accreditation challenges Year 12 students to make exceptional gains in their awareness of the world of work.

11 All members of staff make a very valuable contribution to teaching and learning and, as a result, the pupils and students achieve very well. The teaching assistants are fully involved in the assessment and planning of pupils' work and are able to take a prominent role in lessons. Some of the teaching assistants lead lessons as higher level teaching assistants and this helps to promote the exceptional ethos and teamwork in the school. Consistent behaviour management and excellent relationships are a particular strength of the teams and this enables them to combine exceptional levels of care with the development of an environment that promotes learning. The quality of the relationships is enhanced by the shared quality time that the staff and pupils enjoy during the excellent range of extra-curricular activities. These activities help to promote pupils' and students' very good learning and their excellent personal development.

The curriculum

The curriculum provision is excellent. Opportunities for enrichment of the curriculum and the provision of extra-curricular activities are excellent. The accommodation and the quality and range of the resources are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is a major strength of the school in the way that it enables every pupil to have full access to the National Curriculum and endorses the schools' inclusive ethos.
- The 14 to 19 curriculum is also excellent and prepares pupils and students very well for the next stage in their lives.
- The school provides a wealth of stimulating activities that make a major contribution to the pupils' and students' personal development.
- The excellent sensory provision.

Commentary

12 The development of the curriculum, since the last inspection, has been innovative and the three specific strands means that the learning needs of each pupil and student are fully and often imaginatively met. The experiential, supported and independent curricular strands are very clearly planned and every subject is planned in the same way, incorporating this philosophy. The curriculum is the backbone for all that the school does. Teaching and learning styles, together with the wide range of communication systems, have been developed in order to ensure that all pupils have equal access to it. Detailed modules of work support teaching and learning, which in turn are linked very clearly to lesson plans. The school is always trying to improve and will take calculated risks if it thinks the pupils will benefit. It sees its inclusion philosophy as a fundamental right for all pupils and has a strong determination and a positive attitude to seeking ways of removing any barriers in the way of achieving this aim. Currently, some pupils have sessions in local high schools and these links are always under review and monitored closely.

13 When pupils move into Year 10 and beyond, the curriculum is enhanced by a very good range of accredited courses. These are being extended to meet the needs of the more able pupils and students. There is excellent provision for work-related learning via work experience placements for some pupils and also for the development of life and leisure skills. Careers guidance, college links and the experience of running their own mini-enterprises of making sandwiches and potted plants promotes their personal and social skills extremely well. Pupils work very conscientiously,

showing a great deal of pride in their achievements. They receive excellent preparation for the next stage in their learning.

14 The curriculum is greatly enriched by an excellent range of extra-curricular activities in the form of lunchtime and after school clubs as well as visits in to the local community and residential visits. These widen pupils' horizons enormously, giving them experiences they may not otherwise have had. They support personal and social development exceptionally well. All pupils have the opportunity to participate in a club of their choice, giving them rich and varied experiences and a voice and some control over what they want to do. The choice of activities includes music, sports, video, tactile toys, light stimulation, ICT club, art, singing/sign club, cookery, yoga and gardening. The clubs have something for everybody regardless of their ability and it is a joy to see them gain so much pleasure from their activities. The extensive range of clubs and activities is testimony to the commitment of the staff and this helps to promote the excellent ethos in the school.

15 The design and organisation of the sensory provision is excellent and this, combined, with the expertise of the staff ensures that pupils are encouraged to do their best. The library is small and pupils have to access it from the outside, which is not ideal. In contrast to this, the sports hall is a very good resource and extensive use is made of sporting facilities in the community.

Care, guidance and support

The provision for pupils' care, guidance, health and safety is excellent. Pupils have excellent access to well-informed support, advice and guidance. Excellent systems are in place to consult and involve pupils in the work of the school. Induction arrangements are exemplary.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Whole-school health and safety procedures are in place and child protection procedures are extremely clearly defined throughout the school.
- The involvement of pupils, through seeking and acting on their views in tutor groups and through their involvement in the school council, helps to promote the excellent ethos.
- The school gives excellent support, advice and guidance to pupils because there are excellent relationships between pupils and staff.
- Induction opportunities have a very significant impact on pupils' confidence and ability to settle when they move into the school.

Commentary

16 Procedures for health and safety and child protection are exemplary. School governors are closely involved in all these areas. There are on going health and safety audits of the premises and rigorous provision for risk assessments to ensure pupils safety on school trips. All staff are aware of the arrangements for child protection and the identity of the designated person for child protection and her deputy. The staff value the support of the school nurse in this provision. The school works closely with other agencies, such as social services, to make sure that any additional support, where necessary, is quickly sourced. Personal care of pupils is extremely dignified and respectful. School and medical staff regularly update staff training on care of pupils. For example, to ensure that strategic behaviour management programmes for pupils are consistently applied, lunchtime supervisors are trained in the positive management of behaviour. Feeding programmes for pupils are rigorously structured so that they do not impinge on the dignity of the pupil or restrict their social involvement with others at lunchtime. Pupils are all encouraged to take part in healthy exercise and the whole school has a weekly routine of vigorous exercise in the gym to pop music at the start of the school day. This is an excellent initiative and reflects the exceptional ethos of the school.

17 The school regularly seeks pupils' views through its own questionnaires and in this way finds out what they like and what they want to develop. Tutor groups provide a time when pupils can decide what they want their representatives on the school council to do for them, and this is an excellent opportunity for the school to get to know pupils' views. Through the school council the

school has discovered that pupils want a school bag to take books and work home in, and the new Piper Hill bag, with logo, is almost ready for sale. Pupils have a clear sense of belonging and commitment to the school and this is an essential foundation for the excellent ethos in the school.

18 Staff care about their pupils and the tutor groups offer a secure network of relationships for pupils, for example, when they need an adult to go to if they have any worries in school. Tutor groups are central to the support and guidance of pupils and help to promote the excellent relationships throughout the school. Pupils receive excellent guidance through personal, social and health education on healthy eating, looking after themselves and helping to ensure they stay safe. The school is sensitive to parents' views on sex education, and so, although the school nurse offers specific guidance on sex education to girls in the further education department, if parents are not happy for their children to attend, the school does not press them to. The school has a good range of resources for pupils' health education, such as a Body Board for sex education and personal hygiene lessons, or, as in one lesson, a laminated bathroom cabinet so that pupils could decide what is safe, and what is dangerous, among bathroom essentials. Pupils with special educational needs are closely monitored and they receive excellent support and guidance.

19 Induction arrangements for new pupils are extremely effective. The school works closely with its partner primary schools to ensure the effectiveness of pupils' transition from Year 6 to Year 7. Staff attend Year 6 annual reviews, go to see prospective pupils in their primary schools and meet parents to discuss any individual concerns and arrangements.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has very good links with parents and carers. It has excellent links to the community, and other schools and colleges.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Links to other schools and colleges provide excellent inclusive opportunities for pupils and students and this helps to promote their excellent personal development.
- The school makes excellent use of opportunities and skills that exist in the community to enrich pupils' learning and well being.
- Parents and families support the school and there is regular day-to-day contact and consultation with parents. They receive excellent information.

Commentary

20 The school is tireless in exploring and consolidating its links with other schools and colleges. This offers pupils an extraordinary range of opportunities to experience different activities and challenges. Two pupils are travelling to Bologna, Italy, with a group of mainstream pupils to perform Shakespeare's Greatest Hits in the main piazza. Drama specialists from Newall Green College of Performing Arts are rehearsing a joint pupil production of Macbeth in school, to be performed with pupils from another school. Through a sports development project, pupils can, for example, participate in table tennis tournaments, play in football matches and use specialist gym equipment in other schools. Transition arrangements are meticulously organised for Year 14 students and involve extremely close liaison with a range of residential and further education colleges. The school is in partnership with other schools in the area through the Wythenshawe Education Action Zone. An important outcome of this provision has been the identification of Pre-Key Skills Profiles necessary to support the excellent careers programme and work experience placements for pupils in the local community. Pupils took part in the opening and closing events of the Commonwealth games, joining two hundred pupils from local schools in Wythenshawe, and thousands of other children from schools across Manchester. An unforgettable experience for them.

21 The school is exceptionally outward looking in its links with the community. It uses local leisure resources for further education students so that they know how to use an accessible sports facility or activity when not in school. The school has worked extremely hard to build up a varied

range of work experience placements, for example, at Manchester Airport. An ex-student and community organisations help to maintain the school's variety of gardening habitats. This includes a friendship garden, sensory garden and vegetable plot. They have also developed further areas for leisure pursuits, for example outside of the further education bungalow. Volunteers support the school by looking after the schools resources, such as their bikes, or fundraising, such as the local cricket club and the regulars of a local public house. Two minibuses are invaluable to the school to access a huge variety of educational visits in the Manchester area and beyond. These include art galleries and historical houses that help to promote pupils' very good learning and excellent cultural development.

22 Annual written reports sent to parents are exceptionally detailed and helpful. Parents said they are kept completely up-to-date with the progress and achievements of their children. Consequently parents are supportive of the school and this helps to develop pupils' and students' extremely positive attitudes to the school. They find the staff very approachable. Parents are provided with excellent information about the school through regular newsletters, open days, celebrations and special events. This helps to promote the very good links with parents and carers and, as a result, they encourage their child to work hard and they achieve very well. Parents have access to day-to-day information through home/school diaries and planners and by telephone calls from staff or health professionals in school, such as the school nurse, speech therapist or physiotherapist. Because of the constraints of time and distance, parents do not come into school regularly, but this does not stop them working closely with the school to back up what is taught at school, at home. Importantly, for example, supporting the behaviour management plans or physiotherapy programmes and this consistency contributes to pupils' excellent personal development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are excellent whilst the governance is very good. The leadership and management of the acting headteacher and other members of the senior management team is inspirational.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The policies and procedures for performance management, the induction of new staff and the continuing professional development of staff are excellent.
- Teamwork is a major strength of the school and this helps it to run exceptionally well and all members of staff play their part in developing an excellent ethos.
- The governing body carries out its role as a critical friend very well.

Commentary

23 The three Investors In People Awards gained by the school during the past eight years reflects the excellent management of the school and in particular their innovative management of the workforce. The senior managers have developed excellent performance management systems and staff's targets are very clearly linked to pupils' progress. The monitoring of staff's progress towards their targets is very well managed ensuring that there is a continual drive towards improvements and raising standards. The school has made significant progress in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning since the last inspection and the quality of teaching is now very good. This process has helped to direct the school's exceptional continuing professional development programme and the quality of this is reflected in the fact that the school gained a National Training Award in 2003. The teaching assistants are fully involved in the professional development and seven of them have progressed to the role of higher level teaching assistants. This career structure demonstrates the value placed on the contribution of the teaching assistants and helps to promote the excellent school ethos. The induction of new staff is managed exceptionally well and is supported by a handbook of the highest standards. The school has the confidence and skills to employ new staff and still ensure that pupils receive excellent provision. Many of the teachers have roles beyond the school, for example, in support of their Beacon work but the senior managers

maintain a very effective balance between maintaining the quality of their own provision and development work for other schools. The school has a deservedly high reputation and does make a major impact on both special schools and mainstream schools in the Local Education Authority. The headteacher has been seconded to the Local Education Authority to help lead the strategic planning for the future role of special schools and this again reflects the high profile of the school.

24 This is a school where the members of staff clearly have the will and capacity for continual improvement in the quality and standards of the provision. The acting headteacher makes a significant contribution to the effectiveness of the school by her excellent leadership and management, and is provided with exceptional support throughout the school. There is a clear sense of purpose throughout the school and this is clearly shared by the staff, governors, parents and pupils. Aids to learning are used to their very fullest extent and any barriers are removed with great determination and to excellent effect. The headteacher consults widely and takes the views of all stakeholders, including the pupils, fully into account. The impact of these strategies is the creation of an excellent ethos, where pupils achieve very well and make excellent progress in their personal development.

25 The governing body provides very valuable support to the school and they also challenge and question the senior managers very well. They communicate very constructively with the staff and are very focussed on fully meeting the special educational needs of all of the pupils and students. The governing body has a very good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the school. They have the knowledge and expertise to make extremely pertinent recommendations about the content and organisation of the school improvement plan. This ensures that there is shared ownership of the ambitious school improvement plan. The very good plan includes all of the areas outlined in the last inspection and has a major impact on shaping the continual improvement of the school. The governing body ensures that all statutory requirements are met. They ensure that Best Value principles are key to the school's very good financial systems.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	£1,539,546	Balance from previous year	£24,412
Total expenditure	£1,479,797	Balance carried forward to the next	£84,161
Expenditure per pupil	£13,996		

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3, 4 AND POST-16

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

26 Only one **French** lesson was seen during the inspection and it was not possible to make a firm overall judgement on the quality of provision and standards in the subject. However, teacher's planning and records were analysed together with samples of pupils' work. The curriculum is well organised, giving all pupils opportunities to speak the language and experience the sounds and smells of French culture by using well chosen resources. The three-year rolling programme of topics are relevant to the pupils' ages and abilities and each module is very well planned with a range of suggested activities and resources for each group of pupils. Analysis of pupils' work indicates that the school is successful in making learning fun and interesting. Higher attaining pupils have learned vocabulary associated with everyday topics such as greetings, food, clothing, parts of the body and days of the week. Others have explored a range of sensory artefacts such as perfume and listening to typical French music. They use pictures and symbols to demonstrate understanding and can point to particular items in pictures. The pupils with the more complex learning difficulties recognise French music as the start of the lesson and explore the tastes and smells of different French foods.

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very well organised curriculum is planned to meet the needs of all of the pupils and students.
- Teaching and learning is good with some excellent features leading to good, and sometimes very good, achievement.
- Procedures for assessment are excellent.
- The emphasis on developing pupils' communication skills is very successful.
- Literacy is very effectively used in other subjects.

Commentary

27 In line with the schools' overall policy about curriculum organisation, English has been developed in the same way to meet the needs of all ages and abilities of the pupils. There is an emphasis on developing communication skills so that pupils can be as independent as possible and have some control over their lives. The curriculum is planned in great detail and the format and content of the National Literacy Strategy has been very well adapted to meet the needs of all the pupils. In the further education department, students are encouraged to read newspapers and other forms of literature that are age appropriate and support their growing maturity. The school has identified a higher attaining group of students and modified the curriculum accordingly to give them access to an accredited course. Although there are opportunities, in lessons, to develop writing and reading skills, they are given lesser emphasis than communication skills. However, the available data showed a weakness in writing. The school were proactive and, consequently, writing opportunities were given a greater emphasis and this has had a positive impact on pupil's achievement. Across the school, the range of literature included in the curriculum is very good and contains works by Shakespeare, Roald Dahl, J K Rowling and H G Wells. The staff are very skilled at selecting specific resources so that even pupils with more complex learning difficulties can be included and fully involved in the story. Opportunities to participate in role-play and discussion are very beneficial in promoting their confidence and self-esteem to such an extent that two pupils were successful in an audition and are taking part in a "Shakespeare 4 Kids" event in Italy. This demonstrates quite outstanding achievement. Some Year 12 pupils have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to take part in a radio broadcast and have made very good progress in developing their interviewing skills.

28 Much of the teaching for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is very good which leads to very good achievement. This is mainly because of the well-selected teaching methods, interesting resources and activities that motivate pupils and at the right level of understanding. For instance, pupils in Year 7 showed good understanding of verse and, with support, each successfully composed their own, based on the initials of their names. Another example of sensory resources supporting good achievement occurred using “ Commotion in the ocean” when music, shells, water and toy fish emphasised the theme. Other pupils develop their reading and writing skills when identifying the odd one out and record their answers using neat well- formed script while the less able pupils use the Tech Talker to demonstrate understanding. In an excellent lesson in the sensory room, pupils’ communication skills are developed by the use of carefully chosen and familiar resources. The staff are very sensitive to pupils’ particular reactions and observe individual responses to names, signs, objects of reference and sensory stimuli. Teaching for pupils in Years 10 and 11 is consistently good. In a particularly interesting lesson about “A Midsummer’s Night Dream” pupils threw themselves into role-play and thoroughly enjoyed the experience showing very good promotion of speaking and listening skills. Others learn about the “Diary of Anne Frank”. Teachers expect and encourage the oldest students to be as independent as they can, so some use their word processing skills in a lesson about “Goodnight Mr Tom” and questions are more probing to elicit their level of understanding. All members of staff have excellent relationships with the pupils and know them extremely well which means they can pick up every nuance and small step in progress. They equally tune in when pupils are not well and so change the focus for individual pupils.

29 Teachers and teaching assistants know their pupil’s distinctive learning characteristics very well. The school has developed thorough and continuous assessment systems which are used to set targets in pupils’ individual education plans. While learning objectives for groups are identified on lesson plans, pupils’ individual targets are not always specified so that progress can be difficult to assess. However, teachers are aware of pupils’ levels of achievement and can plan lessons that build on this and move learning forward.

30 Teachers find the best method of communicating with individual pupils and ensure that it is used consistently throughout the school day. This means that all pupils are included in whatever is going on. The school’s commitment to this is very evident in the detailed teaching strategies used with each group of pupils; for example, those with more complex learning needs are supported with sensory clues, objects of reference, pictures, symbols and technological aids such as Big Macs. Staff understand the many different ways pupils respond, be it by a small movement of the head or hand, reaching out to touch or push away, the way they anticipate their turn and their level of alertness, vocalisation or gesture. Sensitivity to the needs of each pupil means that both personal and learning needs are met. Familiar routines which are predictable and which promote a measure of independence using pictures, symbols and objects, as well as the spoken word, are usually successful with pupils with severe learning difficulties. Signing is used very effectively in all classes alongside the other methods of communication. All the systems used by staff have the intention of encouraging pupils to respond and make choices about their particular environment.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

31 All staff very effectively promote pupils’ communication, language and literacy skills in other subjects. Very good use is made of signing, symbols and visual timetables alongside the spoken word so that every pupil is able to understand what is expected of them. Very good use is made of objects of reference, for those with more complex learning difficulties, so that they know the purpose of each lesson. In the further education department, teachers are skilled at promoting reading skills. Students have their own shopping lists while out in the supermarket and others discuss newspaper headlines in a current affairs lesson.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is inspired and the subject is exceptionally well managed.
- The very effective use of assessment informs planning and assessment very well.
- The content and organisation of the curriculum, delivered through very good teaching, ensures that all pupils achieve very well.
- Staff work exceptionally well as a team.
- The teaching of mathematics is very well planned in other subjects.

Commentary

32 The four subject leaders have an excellent vision for both the development of the subject and of meeting the wide range of individual learning needs of the pupils and students. The co-ordinators have worked very hard at successfully producing a curriculum that relates to the three main groups of special educational needs that pupils and students have and ensures very appropriate individual provision.

33 Very detailed assessment is based upon a very good range of measures including National Curriculum level descriptors. These have been adapted to provide the assessment of the smaller incremental steps in learning, of the school's subject curriculum. The assessment information is very effectively used by the co-ordinators to track pupils' and students' progress of their individual targets and, as a result, the pupils achieve very well.

34 A main focus of the curriculum is in ensuring that learning objects for the subject are taught in a style that is relevant to both the age and abilities of the pupils. This is achieved through very appropriate teaching styles and methods and is having a very positive impact on pupils' and students' achievements. For example, in a lesson for Year 13 students, ICT is used very effectively to support their conversion of time from digital to analogue. Year 8 pupils use a floor map to make very good gains in their recognition of numbers extending to the identification of bigger and smaller numbers. In the teaching of pupils with severe communication and relationship difficulties, the use of individualised teaching programmes is very effective in enabling pupils to concentrate on the given task of matching shapes.

35 Very effective support for pupils and students of all ability levels, in lessons, is provided through staff working very effectively together. This teamwork is acknowledged and encouraged very well by the school in giving several teaching assistants opportunities to lead lessons and to advise teachers on planning ICT into their mathematics lessons. This has helped to ensure the very good use of ICT to support the subject's teaching and learning. For example, data handling programs are used effectively as are programs that consolidate the learning of basic skills.

Mathematics across the curriculum

36 The use of mathematics within other subjects is promoted very effectively by ensuring that the mathematical skills of pupils and students are built into the planning. This provides very appropriate opportunities for the application of mathematical skills and has helped to raise pupils' achievement in this area. Some observed examples of the very effective use of mathematics in other subjects, were weighing and measuring ingredients in food technology. Also, students make very good progress in the accurate use of money when managing the 'Healthy Eating Tuck Shop'.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All pupils have access to an excellent curriculum that has been developed by the school and is exceptionally well managed to meet the special educational needs of all of the pupils.

- The teaching of scientific enquiries and investigations are inspirational.
- Pupils with the more complex needs have excellent opportunities to experience science activities.

Commentary

37 The science curriculum is firmly based on the National Curriculum and provides all pupils with access to an exceptional curriculum. The leadership and management of the curriculum are excellent and also there is exceptional vision and drive for continual improvement in the subject. The leaders provide tremendous role models for other staff in relation to their commitment and drive for high standards. The science co-ordinator also makes a valuable contribution to standards in other schools in her role with the Local Education Authority.

38 The quality of teaching and learning is excellent across the ability and age range in the school and this is directly linked to the focus on practical and investigative work.

Example of outstanding practice

In a Year 10 lesson for more able pupils studying forces, exceptionally high expectations, very precise planning and the imaginative use of resources inspired pupils to investigate the effect of resistance on the movement of an object.

Entering the room, the air of industry and purpose hits you immediately. The introduction is sparkling and alive and every pupil builds on their previous learning by the teacher using an extensive range of visual and practical prompts to consolidate their learning. The scene is set for a stimulating investigation and there is a great sense of excitement and anticipation as the teacher explains the lesson objectives. The pupils have been involved in the construction of small trucks and different sized sails and these form the basis of the investigation. Excellent quality and stimulating prompt cards have been produced to guide pupils through the investigation on a step-by-step basis. Every pupil, using the prompt cards as a guide, has the responsibility for finding and managing some of the equipment, for example measuring equipment. They observe, measure and record the distance travelled by a vehicle taking off from a ramp. The vehicle is fitted with a small sail first and then a larger sail. Pupils predict the effect of the resistance caused by the different size of the sail on the distance travelled and then confidently say whether what happened was as expected. The pupils do not want the lesson to end and talk enthusiastically about their next investigation in science.

39 In lessons, the teaching and learning is guided by excellent subject knowledge, the exceptional use of assessment to inform planning and a consistent focus on learning through investigation. This “hands on” approach establishes a science ethos in the lessons and this is reinforced by the consistent use of scientific terms and, also, exceptional levels of challenge. The more able pupils confidently use the prompt cards to carry out the sequential steps of an investigation with little or no support. Pupils are very effectively encouraged to make their own contribution to planning and evaluating an investigation. They make excellent gains in their understanding of a fair test. Some pupils can state whether what is happening is as expected and express their own ideas about adapting the investigation.

40 The sensory science base provides an exceptional wealth of opportunities for the pupils to experience and engage in stimulating experiences. The organisation of the sensory facility into satellite rooms provides a magical blend of visual, tactile and auditory prompts. The members of staff are exceptional in their sensitive yet challenging teaching of the pupils and, as a result, they respond exceptionally well. Incisive and detailed assessment guides teaching and demonstrates the gains that the pupils make in their learning over-time. Pupils in Years 7 to 9, use the excellent range of resources to perform activities by trial and error and remember learned responses for an increasing amount of time. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 indicate a preference when tasting different foods and increase the time that they focus on specific objects. Staff know the pupils very well and this provides an essential platform of trust that is based on excellent relationships. No time is lost as essential feeding and hygiene routines are managed very well.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is excellent and management of the subject is inspirational.
- A very appropriate curriculum, delivered through very good teaching, ensures that all pupils and students achieve very well.
- Members of staff work exceptionally well together as very effective teams.
- The use of ICT across the curriculum is excellent.
- The quality and range of resources for subject teaching are very good.

Commentary

41 The three subject co-ordinators have worked very hard to realise their vision of a curriculum that meets the range of special educational needs that pupils and students have. This has been accomplished very successfully. Ongoing assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of the curriculum ensures its continuing appropriateness in meeting the individual learning needs of all pupils and students. Issues such as planning and assessment of the curriculum, have been very well thought through and presented through a series of training events. The training is also delivered to new staff as part of their excellent induction process.

42 A major contributing factor to the success of the curriculum, in meeting the learning needs of all pupils and students, is the range of teaching styles and methods employed. These have the type and severity of pupils' special educational needs as a focus. For example, pupils and students with more complex needs, by using switches to control computer programs and electrical devices have access, and some independence, to learning. The use of such peripheral devices is an integral and very successful feature of teaching these pupils and students. Pupils who are more independent learners are challenged well and, as they progress through the school, they increasingly use computers purposefully. They become more competent in their word processing skills and in the use of the Internet to search for information. For example, pupils in a Year 10 lesson produced individual party invitations combining text with clip art images. In a Year 13 lesson, students confidently demonstrated their skills in using the Internet to find examples of dance music.

43 Very effective support for pupils and students of all ability levels, but particularly those with more complex needs, is provided in the relationships and experience that teachers and teaching assistants bring together. This is particularly noticeable in ICT where several of the non-teaching staff have been given opportunities to lead lessons in the subject. In these lessons they showed confidence in their teaching and a very good awareness of pupils' and students' special educational needs.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

44 The subject co-ordinators have placed great emphasis on ensuring that ICT is used in all subjects, to support teaching and learning. This has been successfully achieved, mainly through recognising opportunities for the use of ICT within other subjects' planning. In this, teachers receive very good support and guidance by several of the teaching assistants who have been given specific responsibilities. Additionally, the availability and use of a well-resourced computer suite and several computers in each teaching area, further enables the use of ICT within subject teaching and learning. For example, in science it was used to investigate wind resistance, in history where the Internet was used to research the life of Romans and in English pupils used word processing to produce text about 'Good Night Mr Tom'.

HUMANITIES

45 Only two geography lessons and one history lesson were seen during the inspection and it was not possible to make a firm overall judgement on the quality of provision and standards in the subjects. Evidence was gathered from discussion with the subject leader and scrutiny of

photographs, examples of pupils' work, curriculum documents and planning. Humanities are taught to pupils in Years 7 to 9. Pupils follow a half-termly cycle of history and geography that offers them a very good variety of rich experiences with an emphasis on experiential learning through practical activities. For example, in **history**, the pupils learned about what life was like in the 19th century through their visit to Quarry Bank Mill where they had a 'Victorian' lesson. Pupils with more complex needs have relevant sensory experiences as part of their experiential curriculum. An example of this is when pupils studying the 'Railway Children' and the 'Secret Garden' were dressed up as 19th Century children in sensory English. In **geography**, pupils learn about the world around them. For example, as part of their work on the weather and climate, pupils have undertaken a weather walk and recorded what the weather was like and if they felt hot or cold and wet or dry.

Religious Education

The provision in religious education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- An extensive range of very effective teaching strategies is used.
- The curriculum is very well organised and the inclusive strategies used, along with some very carefully selected resources, means that all pupils benefit and can be part of lessons.
- The effective links with personal, social, health education and citizenship.

Commentary

46 The quality of teaching is consistently good and occasionally very good which results in good learning. Teachers know pupils very well and use the guidance in the curriculum modules effectively to include all pupils in lessons. They create a calm learning atmosphere by playing music, lighting a candle and by focusing on an object such as a vase of flowers or a Buddha. The way they manage the pupils and use the resources, including teaching assistants, all adds to the reflective ethos at the start of lessons. All adults use the recommended teaching strategies with different groups and pupils respond positively. Teachers use objects of reference, texture and sound to successfully stimulate interest and the most able pupils can identify a wide range of natural and waste artefacts. Excellent teamwork and relationships promote pupils' interest, enabling them to achieve very well.

47 Pupils across the school are taught about the major world faiths in ways that are consistent with their age and abilities. The scheme has been published and relates very clearly to the pupils' ages and abilities whilst meeting the requirements in the Local Education Authority's Agreed Syllabus. Because the curriculum is so well organised, in line with the school's inclusive philosophy, all pupils are given opportunities to participate at their own level of understanding. Every module is planned in detail with suggestions for teaching strategies and resources for each group of pupils. An example of this is the sensitive way resources are used in a module about "The natural world". This took place in the sensory garden in the warm sunshine and the pupils, with the more complex learning difficulties, were able to enjoy smelling and touching a variety of plants. In another lesson, the same module was handled differently but equally appropriately with more able pupils. In this lesson there were instances of quiet reflection when considering the value to the environment of natural plants, in contrast to litter.

48 Parts of the curriculum complement the personal, social, health education and citizenship curriculum very well. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are involved in a topic about making moral choices, developing relationships and discussing issues about life and death. This helps pupils to understand about living in society and their role in it. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is particularly well promoted through religious education.

TECHNOLOGY

49 Only one **design and technology** lesson was seen during the inspection and it was not possible to make a firm overall judgement on the quality of provision and standards in the subject. However, in the lesson observed for Year 8 pupils, the teaching was good. Learning objectives were clearly given and the lesson on producing a collage of a face was well prepared and pupils evidently enjoyed their learning. An analysis of pupils' work and a study of work on display shows that they understand design requirements and the procedures involved, although some do not go on to evaluate their projects. There are also elements of design and technology in other subjects, such as art and design, when pupils produce three-dimensional objects such as African masks and Aboriginal artefacts.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and Design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Subject expertise is good and consequently pupils make good gains in their learning.
- Staff work well together as very effective teams.

Commentary

50 Teachers have good knowledge of their pupils' and students' abilities and this is reflected in the good differentiation of learning tasks through group work. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils give rise to a relaxed atmosphere in lessons that effectively promotes learning. Teachers are confident in their teaching of subject skills and pupils and students are rewarded, when answering questions, with a full and accurate response. Introductions to lessons are clear and signing is used effectively, for example, when using information about Aboriginal Culture as a prompt for pupils' work. The presentation of learning tasks is always appropriate to the age and ability of pupils and students and helps them to achieve well. For example, in a lesson for Year 11 pupils, they decorated a plate with different fabrics. The pupils with more complex needs were effectively introduced to the different fabrics by touch and sight, with one pupils being able to eye point to select a fabric.

51 Teachers and teaching assistants support each other very well in lessons and this provides opportunities for effective individual teaching to pupils and students. These very good working relationships have been exceptionally well encouraged by the management team. Some of the teaching assistants effectively lead the teaching of some art and design lessons.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils and students have very good opportunities to perform and compose.
- The excellent singing and signing clubs develop pupils' and students' confidence and love of music extremely well.
- Excellent links with the community enable the pupils and students to work with professional musicians.
- Music is used very effectively to deliver the sensory curriculum to pupils with more complex needs.

Commentary

52 All pupils and students have access to a very good music curriculum that has been developed by the school and is fine tuned to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. The emphasis is on composing, performing, listening to and appraising music. Because the curriculum is very relevant and pupils are very effectively supported, they achieve very well and are confident to perform in public. At a further education assembly, to celebrate a student's birthday, the singing and signing choir gave an excellent rendition of 'Are you ready for love'. Both the choir and the students in the audience thoroughly enjoyed the performance that was a really joyous occasion. Students are given very good support to enable them to compose their own music using ICT. For example, in an ICT lesson for higher attaining Year 13 students, they confidently used a programme to select rhythm and beats to make their own mix of dance and exercise music.

53 Pupils and students have many opportunities to make music with pupils from other schools, including mainstream schools, and with professional musicians. These include sessions at Bridgewater Hall with the Halle for Youth project. The school was awarded a certificate of merit at the National School Choirs Festival. This gave pupils the marvellous experience of singing at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London and significantly boosted their confidence to achieve very well.

54 Members of staff are very skilled in using music to stimulate pupils and students with more complex difficulties. An example of this was in a very good lesson for Year 12 students where there was a very rich range of musical and sensory experiences linked to the Maori creation story. The students responded very well. One student made huge efforts to reach out and move wind chimes and another student smiled and tried to sit up when he heard the Maori music.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils and students are encouraged and challenged to do their best.
- Leadership and management of the subject are inspirational.
- The outstanding opportunities the pupils and students have to be fully included in sports related activities and these make an excellent contribution to their personal development.

Commentary

55 Staff at a local gym know the pupils very well and work very well with the school staff to provide exceptional opportunities for pupils to extend their gymnastics skills. Instructions are very clear and members of staff demonstrate the warm up exercises very well. As a result, pupils in Years 7 to 11 are warmed up very effectively prior to their main activities. Some pupils are skilfully encouraged to complete a neat forward roll whilst others are challenged to complete a handstand. The use of assessment is excellent and therefore activities are tailor made for each individual pupil as, for example, they extend their trampoline skills. Higher ability pupils are very effectively challenged to combine a sequence of moves on the trampoline and they are very keen to show off their skills. Some pupils make very good gains in their ability to balance on low and high beams. Pupils' levels of concentration and determination are a credit to them and they take great pleasure in the achievements of others. Pupils with more complex needs have very well - planned individual programmes and benefit from sessions in the hydro-pool. Pupils in wheelchairs are challenged to develop their skills and follow an award scheme and some have achieved silver level.

56 There has been excellent progress in the quality of the provision since the last inspection. There is an exceptionally clear vision for the development of the subject and this is translated into dramatic progress by energetic and enthusiastic leadership. The co-ordinator sets exceptionally high standards in the quality of her teaching and is therefore an excellent role model for other staff. She establishes a calm and purposeful ethos for Year 10 pupils as they are challenged to make excellent gains in their confidence during a rebound therapy session. This is an incredibly positive experience for pupils and staff where expectations are continually raised and pupils thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to take a full and active part in the activities. The exceptional quality of the provision has been deservedly recognised as the school has gained a Sports Mark Gold Award in 2000 and again in 2003. Also, the co-ordinator has the opportunity to spread her valuable expertise as part of the Sports Co-ordinator initiative with the Local Education Authority.

57 Every opportunity is taken to use the school's facilities, local clubs, high schools and outdoor facilities for pupils and students to access an exceptional range of rich and stimulating activities. This is made possible by the exceptional teamwork and commitment of staff that very effectively provides pupils and students with the support and confidence to take full advantage of these opportunities. The very good programme of lunchtime activities, such as the yoga sessions, helps pupils to learn the importance of exercise. Pupils and students are equally keen when

orienteering in a local park or taking part in activities on Sale Water Park. Parents are very appreciative of the opportunities provided for their children and recall events, such as their child's involvement in the opening of the Commonwealth Games, with great pride. Pupils and students take part in residential opportunities that are accessible to all of them and these provide excellent opportunities for them to experience the outdoors and also promote their excellent personal development.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils have excellent opportunities to develop their personal and social skills because the very carefully planned curriculum is delivered through all subjects and activities.
- The health education programme is extremely effective in helping pupils to understand the importance of healthy lifestyles.

Commentary

58 The curriculum has been drawn up following a very thorough audit of how pupils' and students' personal, social and citizenship skills can be developed in different subjects. Advice on what teachers should teach has been carefully developed and members of staff have been trained to ensure that they are confident in promoting pupils' skills in all subjects and activities. It is testimony to the very high quality of the curriculum that materials produced have been published and used by other schools. Consequently, because pupils and students have many varied and very well - planned opportunities to develop and practice their personal and social skills throughout the school day, they make excellent progress and achieve extremely well. All pupils and students have detailed and relevant learning targets which are reviewed regularly. These are very well matched to their needs. The staff understand pupils with more complex needs exceptionally well and are very skilled at using familiar objects to orientate the pupils. An example of this was when Year 11 pupils are involved in personal health and hygiene activities. Because they are closely involved in setting targets and evaluating how well they have done, pupils and students are clear what their learning goals are. This has a very positive impact on pupils' and students' achievements.

59 A major emphasis of the curriculum is on teaching pupils and students the importance of a healthy lifestyle. The school is working towards the 'Healthy School' award and the members of staff are extremely effective in helping pupils to understand about healthy diets. For example, Year 9 pupils can sort foods into those that are good and bad for teeth. By Year 11, some pupils can select foods to make a healthy snack. The school nurse works with staff to deliver an excellent programme to help pupils and students to understand the changes that happen to them at puberty. Work on substance abuse is very effective in preparing students to be safe in the community. For example, Year 13 students undertake a role-play that teaches them the effects of alcohol on the body and how to resist peer pressure to drink.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Well-planned activities enable pupils to achieve very well in understanding their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

Commentary

60 The school prepares pupils and students exceptionally well to be good citizens through utilising every opportunity to make them aware of their rights and responsibilities. Younger pupils learn the importance of taking care of the school. For example, pupils in Years 7 to 9 have painted a mural to brighten up the activity area in the playground. Students in the further education department held a sophisticated mock election in which the local Member of Parliament was involved. Students prepared a manifesto and the student who was elected had to try to implement his manifesto promise to increase choices in the tuck shop. Pupils and students have been able to develop a keen awareness of the hardship suffered by others through their involvement in many fundraising activities for charity and through taking part in a scheme, operated by Amnesty International, to write to children who are prisoners of conscience. Students in the further education department showed enlightened responsibility when they organised a sponsored walk to collect money for charity.

POST-16 PROVISION

Provision in post-16 is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The preparation for students' post-school placements is excellent.
- The students thoroughly enjoy age-appropriate activities and relate exceptionally well to each other.
- Staff have the knowledge and expertise to ensure that the students make the best of their opportunities.

Commentary

61 The school has an outstanding careers programme that is tailored extremely well to the needs of individual students. Higher attaining students have excellent opportunities to prepare for their transition to college. Members of staff are highly skilled at helping the students to consider what difficulties they might encounter and in teaching strategies to deal with them. Students with more complex needs have an excellent curriculum that gives them varied sensory experiences of the world of work. A particular strength is the way that members of staff use the garden to help the students to develop horticultural skills. Some students have made huge gains through this and gone on to develop skills that will help them to obtain employment. Students have many opportunities to learn the skills that they will need to live as independently as possible. For example, extremely well-planned activities and very good support teach them economic awareness so that higher attaining students can handle money and work out which items are the best value.

Example of outstanding practice

Virtually all the students in the further education department take part in the signing/singing club at lunchtime. Students purposefully request an early lunch so that they can have more time at the club. A teaching assistant with British Sign Language skills and qualifications leads the session.

The air of anticipation in the room is intense. Hovering over the CD player, the student in charge of the accompanying music tracks can hardly contain his excitement to start. As the first bars of the track "Fields of Gold" fill the room, expressions change to intense concentration, hands move to form the first entreaty of the song, fingers "walk" the fields and then burst asunder as "gold". All are drawn to follow and match the grace, emotion and verve of the teaching assistant leading each song, and whose inspiration the club is. She arouses her choir to "Be my hero" with a punch of the air, thumps her chest to indicate the site of the heart that is "Ready for love" and imbues the signing for the wings in the Westlife song, "Flying without wings" with great pathos. The mood veers between a rock concert and a spiritual gathering. Students of all abilities and communication difficulties are desperate to lead their favourite songs. Their capacity to sign is frequently limited by their physical capability, but this does not stop the occasion being both poignant and dynamic. As each track finishes, students hug, clap and hold each other. Each and every song is signed with huge emotion, and where possible, students sing as well. The occasion acknowledges the feelings, responses and excitement of the group. It offers students a chance to pour out their emotions for each other, in a public venue, and in an age appropriate manner. They leave with their confidence soaring; uplifted and exhilarated.

62 The further education department is exceptionally well led and managed and, as a result, the curriculum fully meets the range of students' special educational needs. The balance between the students' academic, vocational and personal development is exceptionally well considered and this provides students with a rich and stimulating programme as the basis for their very good achievement. The high quality and discrete accommodation gives the students a distinct identity that very effectively helps to promote their maturity and growing independence. The members of staff use excellent assessment systems and know the students very well and, consequently, very effectively challenge them to achieve very well.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	1
How inclusive the school is	1
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2
Value for money provided by the school	1
Overall standards achieved	2
Pupils' achievement	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	1
Attendance	3
Attitudes	1
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The quality of education provided by the school	1
The quality of teaching	2
How well pupils learn	2
The quality of assessment	1
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	1
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	1
Accommodation and resources	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	1
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	1
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	1
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	1
The school's links with other schools and colleges	1
The leadership and management of the school	1
The governance of the school	2
The leadership of the headteacher	1
The leadership of other key staff	1
The effectiveness of management	1

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