

INSPECTION REPORT

READING ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

Reading

LEA area: Reading

Unique reference number: 110189

Principal: Mrs E Lansdown-Bridge

Lead inspector: Mike Kell

Dates of inspection: 22nd – 24th March 2004

Inspection number: 258979

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special (emotional and behavioural difficulties)
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	50
School address:	40 Christchurch Road Reading Berkshire
Postcode:	RG2 7AY
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Peter Jones
Date of previous inspection:	18 th – 19 th March 2002

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Reading Alternative School is a day school with a total designated roll of 45 pupils, which is slightly bigger than average for a school of this type and age range. The school is able to admit both boys and girls but there have not been any girls in the school for over two years. There are currently 50 pupils on roll, with approximately equal numbers in Key Stage 3 (Years 7 to 9) and Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11). All pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Needs that identifies social, emotional and behavioural difficulties as the main barriers to learning. Therefore, pupils' levels of attainment on entry to the school are below national expectations. The school has a wide socio-economic mix as it takes pupils from a large geographical area. Approximately half the pupils live outside the boundary of the Reading local education authority; they come from local authorities such as Bracknell Forest, Wokingham, West Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

The overwhelming majority of pupils have a white British background. No pupils are learning English as an additional language. No pupils attend classes at mainstream schools in order to extend their learning opportunities and to encourage their personal development, although a number attend classes at one of three local colleges of further education. The school does not provide a base for any regular outreach service to local mainstream schools to support teachers in their work with pupils who have significant special needs.

The school received a School Achievement Award in 2003 and is involved in national and local initiatives such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award and the 'Healthy Schools' initiative.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
13101	Mike Kell	<i>Lead inspector</i>	Science; Personal, social and health education and citizenship; Music; Physical education; English as an additional language.
19557	Liz Halls	<i>Lay inspector</i>	
21899	Gillian Lawson	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics; Art and design; Geography; History; Religious education.
22178	Kate Robertson	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; French; Information and communication technology; Design and technology; Special educational needs.

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Although Reading Alternative School currently provides a **satisfactory** quality of education, it has serious weaknesses in a number of areas of its work. These include leadership and management, governance and the curriculum. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Pupils' attendance and behaviour are unsatisfactory. The school provides unsatisfactory value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses: are:

- The headteacher has very high expectations of pupil achievement and personal development, and acts as a very good role model around the school.
- Governance is poor. Governors are not helping to shape the direction of the school, and are not involved in strategic planning and ensuring that the school operates within its budget.
- Planning which reflects the school's priorities is underdeveloped, and financial decisions are made with insufficient regard to this planning and addressing the school's financial deficit.
- Pupils' achievements are unsatisfactory.
- Pupils' behaviour and the effectiveness of pupil management strategies are unsatisfactory.
- The school prepares pupils well for leaving school by offering a range of accredited courses and college and work experience placements.
- The school has no regular and robust self-evaluation procedures in place and the monitoring of performance is not yet an established part of the school's routines.
- The school has good links with parents and with the community.
- There is good provision for pupils' care, welfare and health and safety.
- The taught week is far below national recommendations and therefore the school is not meeting statutory requirements in terms of aspects of curriculum provision for pupils of all age groups.

The school was last inspected in 2002, when it was taken out of special measures. The progress it was making at that time has not been maintained and improvement since then is unsatisfactory. There have been good improvements in some aspects, such as the range of accreditation available, but areas of concern remain. Two of the key issues have not been addressed effectively; the behaviour management strategy is still not being applied consistently and a number of pupils regularly truant. In addition, the overall quality of teaching has deteriorated and elements of the curriculum remain underdeveloped. It is not possible to judge improvement in the different subjects.

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, in relation to their prior levels of attainment, pupils' **achievements are unsatisfactory**.

They achieve well in mathematics and satisfactorily in English, design and technology, history and religious education. Progress is unsatisfactory in science, information and communication technology (ICT), personal, social and health education (PSHE) and music. There was insufficient evidence to judge achievement in geography, physical education, French and art and design. Between Years 7 and 9, pupils' achievements overall, across the subject areas generally, are unsatisfactory. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve satisfactorily. Pupils with limited literacy skills do

not make sufficient progress. Although pupils achieve well in some lessons, their progress over time is restricted by their attendance, behaviour, the short taught week, and features of teaching and learning. Pupils' achievements are enhanced well through links with local colleges but the lack of links with mainstream schools prevents pupils from following courses that are not available in school.

Attendance levels are unsatisfactory but this is due to a small number of persistent non-attenders. Punctuality is satisfactory. Pupils' attitudes to school are satisfactory but their behaviour is unsatisfactory. Provision for pupils' **spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.**

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The major barriers to learning are pupils' behaviour and some teachers' inability to manage it, particularly in Years 7 to 9. Pupils' disruptive behaviour frequently interrupts their learning and that of others. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. Some is good and very good, but teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are unsatisfactory as teaching methods are not always effective and expectations of behaviour are not sufficiently high. Lesson planning is unsatisfactory as teachers do not identify clearly precisely what it is intended that pupils will learn. The lack of sharpness in planning, combined with the disruptions caused by pupils, results in time not being used efficiently. Teachers try to develop pupils' personal qualities by providing activities that require them to work independently or collaboratively in pairs or small groups, and to participate in whole class discussions, but they find this difficult to achieve successfully. Teachers' assessment of their pupils' work is satisfactory, but its inconsistency reflects the lack of effective whole school procedures and monitoring.

The curriculum is unsatisfactory overall. There are inadequacies in its management and it fails to comply with statutory requirements. The length of the taught week is too short. The curriculum is not sufficiently well balanced and pupils with limited literacy skills do not have equal access to what is on offer. The PSHE programme is not sufficiently well organised and implemented. Opportunities for pupils to be involved in activities outside the school day are satisfactory. Aspects of the accommodation and some resources are unsatisfactory and restrict what can be taught.

The provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety is good. Satisfactory support, advice and guidance are offered to pupils as they progress through the school. The school is beginning to seek the opinions of pupils and takes good account of their views.

The school has good links with parents, the local community and local colleges. Links with other schools are more limited, with no opportunities for pupils to be included for lessons. The school does not provide any formal, routine outreach support to teachers and pupils in mainstream schools.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Governance is poor. The governing body is not sufficiently involved in the work of the school and is failing to ensure that all statutory requirements are met. The **leadership** of the headteacher and other key staff is **satisfactory**. **Management** systems and procedures are **unsatisfactory**.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are generally supportive of the school. Some pupils are very positive about the help the school has given them although their views of the school overall are satisfactory.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that governors are significantly more involved with the school.
- Increase teaching time in line with national recommendations.
- Develop robust self-evaluation systems that will enable strategic planning to be properly costed and focused on priorities, including reducing the current financial deficit.
- Improve the breadth, balance, monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum.
- Introduce a behaviour management strategy that is valued, implemented consistently and monitored routinely by senior managers to evaluate its effectiveness.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Overall, in relation to their prior levels of attainment and abilities, pupils' achievements are unsatisfactory even though they achieve better than this in some subjects. The achievement of pupils with additional needs, particularly those with poor literacy skills, is also unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Pupils frequently achieve well or satisfactorily in individual lessons, but a short taught week limits pupils' progress over time.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour frequently have a negative impact on achievement.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have good opportunities to follow accredited courses.
- There are good links with colleges, but insufficient ones with other schools, to extend individual pupils' learning and personal needs.
- Achievements in some subjects are restricted by inadequacies in teaching, learning resources and accommodation.

Commentary

1. Overall, pupils achieve well in mathematics and satisfactorily in English, design and technology, history and religious education. Progress is unsatisfactory in science, ICT, PSHE and music. There was insufficient evidence to judge achievement in geography, physical education, French and art and design. It is not possible to judge the degree of improvement in each subject area since the previous inspection as judgements relating to achievement were not made during that inspection.

2. Between Years 7 and 9, pupils' achievements overall are unsatisfactory. They make at least satisfactory progress when their performance is measured simply by national tests at the end of Year 9, when the school's results compare favourably with similar schools nationally. However, while these results are to be commended, this information has to be viewed within a bigger context. The tests only measure performance in English, mathematics and science and the small numbers of pupils involved mean that the performance of a few individuals can distort the figures.

3. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve satisfactorily in the impressive range of accredited courses that are available. Pupils can study for a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in English, mathematics, science, art and physical education; Certificate of Educational Achievement Entry Level qualifications are available in ICT and humanities. Some of the GCSE subjects are also available at Entry Level for those pupils who may not achieve the GCSE equivalent. Pupils are not able to follow an accredited course in design and technology but they have the opportunity to take accredited tests in aspects of food technology such as Hygiene, Health and Safety. Most of the GCSE and Entry Level courses have only been introduced recently and therefore results are not yet available, although a number of Year 10 pupils have been successful in some modules in GCSE science. Last year's results demonstrate how pupils' attendance and attitudes have a significant impact on the courses they complete and the results they attain; from a cohort of nine, only two gained grades in all three Entry Level subjects that were available (English, mathematics and science) and three pupils were not awarded grades in any subjects. Only two pupils sat a GCSE examination, in mathematics.

4. The progress of pupils with poor literacy levels is unsatisfactory. This is because, although individual education plans (IEPs) are based, appropriately, on individual Statements of Special Educational Needs, targets are too broad and evaluations are not sufficiently thorough. For instance,

although targets are discussed at annual reviews of Statements of Special Educational Needs, there is no interim recording of progress towards targets or why certain strategies failed to work. There are not always sufficient additional strategies in place to guide pupils' learning and the support provided in lessons is not focused sufficiently on addressing specific difficulties. A lack of short-term targets and structured programmes to meet pupils' curriculum targets limits the achievements and progress made by this group of pupils.

5. In addition to pupils' attendance, attitudes and behaviour, and some teachers' inability to manage this, there are other barriers that limit learning and achievement. Aspects of curriculum provision are restrictive factors; the taught week is too short and timetables are unbalanced. Some features of teaching also limit progress. Plans do not identify sufficiently clearly the learning objectives in lessons, and therefore restrict the effectiveness of assessment procedures in evaluating progress. Some teachers are insecure in knowledge of the subjects they are teaching and time is not used efficiently because too much is expended on trying to maintain discipline and refocusing pupils' attention.

6. Pupils' achievements are enhanced well through links with local colleges. These links are important in extending and enriching individual pupils' learning and social needs. However, there are no links with mainstream schools that would enable pupils to follow courses that are not available in school. Pupils' achievements are supported well by the school's use of local facilities and visitors into the school.

7. The promotion of pupils' personal development is an important dimension of the school's work. Pupils make satisfactory progress in achieving their personal targets and this can be seen in practical ways. In classrooms they follow well established routines in subjects such as mathematics and art and craft, and they take the initiative and help with putting away equipment in food technology. Teachers also provide activities that help to encourage both independent study and collaborative work with classmates. In both cases, pupils can be very mature and involved but they can also be dismissive and uninterested.

8. The school has not yet developed an effective whole school approach to developing and reinforcing pupils' literacy skills through other subjects of the curriculum. Some individual teachers do this through activities such as discussions, opportunities for pupils to read aloud or extract information from books, and by expectations of written work. However, these opportunities are not provided in managed and planned ways through enough other subjects of the curriculum to help their development satisfactorily. There is insufficient planned development of numeracy across the curriculum. These skills are promoted in some lessons in some subjects but planning generally does not identify how these skills will be developed. The lack of whole school monitoring of the use of ICT means that the school is not ensuring the best use of resources by teachers, and nor is it identifying the best way to support teachers in the use of new technology in other subjects of the curriculum. Consequently, there are few examples of the use of computers for cross-curricular work. Overall, the planned and progressive use of ICT is not yet embedded within different subjects of the curriculum.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes to school are satisfactory but their behaviour and attendance are unsatisfactory. Punctuality is satisfactory. Provision for all aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The overall unsatisfactory attendance figures are due to small number of persistent truants. The school makes every effort to improve these attendance figures.
- Although pupils behave sensibly and maturely at times, their behaviour and attitudes in a number of lessons seriously disrupt learning.
- Good opportunities are provided for pupils to be aware of life in multicultural British society.

Commentary

9. Attendance rates are worse than those of similar schools, even though there have been some notable improvements in attendance with a few particularly disaffected pupils. Some pupils now achieve 100 per cent attendance over significant periods of time but others do not attend school at all. The school monitors individual attendance figures very closely and works hard, along with the education welfare service, to encourage these pupils to attend. However, approximately half of the pupils live outside the boundaries of the Reading local education authority and therefore the school has to liaise with education welfare officers from other areas. These links are not always effective.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	9.8	School data	18.6
National data	11.9	National data	7.7

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

10. Although pupils' attitudes towards learning are satisfactory overall, they range from very good to poor. These different responses reflect the quality of teaching and are much more positive when pupils are presented with a variety of interesting activities. In the best lessons, pupils quickly get involved in their work, follow instructions, persevere with the challenges set, enjoy their learning and interact with staff in a mature and socially acceptable manner. Staff encourage them well so they are prepared to contribute their ideas. Sometimes, pupils can be polite to adults and welcoming to visitors while at other times they are surly and extremely negative.

11. Overall, the behaviour of the pupils is unsatisfactory. Behaviour in assemblies and at lunch and break times is good, but this is linked very closely to the headteacher's presence at these times. She manages pupils' behaviour exceptionally well. In lessons, behaviour is unsatisfactory overall and often poor. While some teachers restore order quickly and without fuss, others find this extremely difficult. This is because different staff have different expectations of pupil conduct and the school's behaviour management strategy, based on the award of points for effort and behaviour in each lesson, is ineffective. Pupils are expected to self-assess their points score at the end of each lesson and this is then negotiated with the teacher. There are serious flaws in this system. Teachers frequently forget to consider points at the end of the lesson, points are awarded inconsistently and so pupils frequently receive more points than their behaviour suggests they should, and when pupils disagree with teachers' scores they frequently become very abusive. Pupils place very little value on the points system and this is evident in the fact that they never remind teachers who forget about it. There is also a weakness in the monitoring of behaviour. The school is not fully monitoring its own performance indicators for behaviour to track whether its behaviour management strategy is working.

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	44	12	8
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	5	0	0

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

12. Pupils' spiritual development is enhanced by the sense of community developed through whole school assemblies. However, these lack any spiritual dimension and there are few opportunities for pupils to reflect on moral or social messages or aspects of their own lives.

13. Provision for moral development is satisfactory. Assemblies consider moral themes well and staff act as good role models, showing tolerance and patience when dealing with pupils with unacceptable behaviour. Instances of bullying, disrespect for the feelings of others and other aggressive behaviour do occur but any such behaviour is dealt with promptly and effectively by the head teacher. However, this is not consistent amongst all staff. Pupils are insufficiently clear what it is about their behaviour that is causing discomfort to others.

14. Many pupils enter the school with poor social skills, limited understanding of the world around them, little respect for authority and a low tolerance of others' views and feelings. Relationships between pupils are frequently very fragile although the school provides satisfactory opportunities for pupils to interact with each other in, for example, tutor group discussions and social activities outside lessons. Older pupils start to show some improvement in social skills as they enjoy work experience placements and benefit from courses at local colleges.

15. Overall, the provision for cultural development is satisfactory. The study of world faiths in religious education helps them to consider others' practices and beliefs while art, music and English help to develop aesthetic awareness and an appreciation of others' literary endeavours.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but are unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Assessment procedures are satisfactory but require further refinement and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- There are wide variations in the quality of teaching and learning across the school.
- Large staff turnover and recruitment difficulties mean that not all teachers have sufficiently high expectations of behaviour and understanding of the school's behaviour management strategy. Pupils' behaviour frequently disrupts learning.
- Praise and encouragement are used well.
- Lesson planning is not always sufficiently precise and so activities are sometimes limited in variety and do not always match pupils' needs.
- Special needs assistants support pupils' learning and personal development well.
- Teaching does not take into account the needs of pupils with low levels of literacy.
- Some teachers are subject specialists but others have insecure knowledge of the subjects they teach.

Commentary

16. Overall, teaching is satisfactory although some teaching and learning is of very high quality. At these times, teachers who are very confident in their subject knowledge manage and enthuse pupils extremely well. They plan high quality activities that are skilfully prepared so that individual pupils can be challenged and achieve success. Very efficient time management allows them to provide these activities. Classrooms are very well organised. Very high quality relationships and encouragement are characteristic features of these lessons. At these times, high quality teamwork between teachers and effective special needs assistants plays a very important role in promoting pupils' learning. They contribute greatly in helping to maintain pupils' attention and in managing their behaviour. These lessons are rich and rewarding learning experiences for all pupils.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 32 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
0 (0%)	3 (9%)	6 (19%)	19 (60%)	4 (12%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

17. An impressive feature of the most effective teaching is the way all pupils are included because teachers manage their behaviour very effectively. Pupils are aware of teachers' expectations. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour efficiently and with minimum fuss and provide pupils with well established routines for them to follow. As a result, lessons are orderly. Pupils settle quickly, listen carefully to what they are asked to do and respond positively; if they do begin to lose interest, teachers employ skilful strategies to refocus and engage them. These are busy sessions during which pupils are very productive, working very hard and successfully, with interest and enthusiasm.

18. However, not all teaching and learning is this effective, particularly in Years 7 to 9. There are two major barriers to learning that affect many lessons. On many occasions, teachers' inability to set clear expectations of behaviour, and their failure to manage disruptive behaviour when it occurs, have serious implications for learning. All too frequently, time is lost through teachers attempting to control disruptive behaviour, often unsuccessfully without outside assistance. As a result, on many occasions there is no time for final plenary sessions that allow teachers to review and assess pupils' learning. The second barrier to effective learning relates to teachers' lack of expertise in the subjects they are teaching. In the worst instances, pupils are provided with inaccurate information, while at other times teachers' insecurity is evident in the way they respond to questions and extend discussions.

19. Lesson planning is unsatisfactory overall. The best plans use information about pupils' prior learning to plan activities that are appropriate to their age, interests and abilities. The plans identify what pupils are expected to learn and show the activities that have been chosen to develop subject-specific skills, knowledge and understanding. At these times, the learning needs of all pupils are met as tasks challenge the most able pupils and extend their understanding. On other occasions teachers' planning is much less effective; lessons do not have a clear focus on what it is anticipated pupils will learn and the progressive activities that will develop this learning. In addition, planning does not identify activities and teaching strategies that take into account the needs of pupils who have low levels of literacy. Consequently, pupils cannot attempt the activities independently or the work set is not sufficiently interesting to them. They therefore often become disruptive and unco-operative.

20. In addition to providing opportunities for pupils to make academic progress, teachers try to develop pupils' personal qualities too. They provide activities that require pupils to work independently, such as preparing materials for a science investigation they are to carry out and making sandwiches in food technology. Many carry out these tasks very successfully, but others find it very difficult to work unsupported. Pupils also find it difficult to work collaboratively, like the Year 9 group who were asked to participate in paired discussion about how people can be discriminated against. They are also given opportunities to participate in larger group work, such as

whole class discussions in history about the General Strike and consideration of limericks in English. The success or failure of these sessions depends greatly on how effectively teachers orchestrate the discussions through their insistence on pupils speaking properly and listening to others.

21. Teachers' assessment of their pupils' work is satisfactory, but its inconsistency reflects the lack of whole school procedures and monitoring. Assessment in some subject areas is more developed than in others; it is good in mathematics and art and design. However, teachers' marking is inconsistent. Some assess pupils' work regularly and use the information they obtain to plan lessons that meet the needs of individual pupils while maintaining coverage of curriculum programmes and the syllabuses of externally accredited courses, such as the GCSE. They feed back to pupils about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Others' marking is not sufficiently informative to help pupils to get better.

The Curriculum

The school provides an unsatisfactory range of curricular opportunities, although opportunities for additional activities outside the school day are satisfactory. Accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory and do not meet the needs of a secondary school curriculum. Provision for pupils' PSHE is unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Taught time is too short for all year groups. There is insufficient time to teach National Curriculum programmes of study in some subjects.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have the opportunity to pursue a broad range of accredited courses.
- Pupils aged 14 to 16 years are prepared well for leaving school.
- Inadequate monitoring and evaluation means that pupils do not follow a sufficiently well planned and progressive curriculum.
- Ineffective strategies for working with pupils with immature literacy skills result in these pupils not having equal access and opportunity.

Commentary

22. Although most subjects of the National Curriculum are taught, the school is not meeting all statutory requirements. French is not taught in Year 9, and there is not full coverage of the National Curriculum in ICT and design and technology (resistant materials) in Years 7 to 11. Difficulties in appointing appropriately qualified specialist staff have been a major obstacle to providing these elements of the curriculum. In addition, most pupils do not have a dedicated PSHE lesson and there are no effective alternative arrangements to compensate for this. This seriously restricts the development of a meaningful programme in citizenship. Therefore, although drugs awareness and sex and relationships education are addressed, the overall provision for PSHE is unsatisfactory.

23. Shortcomings in the structure of the curriculum mean that overall the school offers an unsatisfactory breadth and balance of learning opportunities. It is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9. In some year groups, some subjects, such as PSHE, are missing from the timetable, and there are imbalances between year groups. For example, pupils in Year 9 have significantly less science than those in Years 7 and 8.

24. The curriculum is satisfactory for pupils in Years 10 and 11 because it offers accreditation in most subjects and good college links, with opportunities to pursue a work related curriculum. Pupils respond positively and gain, both socially and academically, from their work experience placements

and attendance at Reading and Newbury colleges. However, the curriculum provided on site for this age group is unbalanced and lacks breadth. For example, Year 10 has a careers lesson but no other PSHE lessons; Year 11 use the slot allocated for health education to complete the theory element of their GCSE physical education course.

25. Three factors account for these deficiencies in the curriculum. The length of the taught week has been extended but it remains well below the recommended time of 25 hours. There is therefore insufficient time available to cover the programmes of study for each subject area. Secondly, the relatively short time that is available is not used effectively. The tutorial sessions at the end of the day are unplanned and so make little contribution to pupils' personal development. Friday afternoon consists of options. These are generally of a sporting nature, although other activities have been offered such as music technology and community arts involvement. While these activities may promote aspects of personal development and offer some external accreditation, for example for Emergency Aid and Team Building Skills, the options are not planned with regard to the overall curriculum provided. In addition, some pupils may be withdrawn from these activities for reasons of behaviour management, which reduces significantly their curriculum entitlement. The third factor relates to school management. Ineffective monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum has failed to identify these shortcomings.

26. Not all pupils have equal access to the curriculum. Experienced special needs assistants work with individual pupils, but overall planning for the delivery of the curriculum for pupils who have significant difficulties with literacy is unsatisfactory. Staff have not had sufficient training and support to provide adequately for the needs of these pupils. Apart from the college links for pupils in Years 10 and 11, there are no opportunities for pupils to be offered a tailored curriculum by attending local schools to follow specific courses that may not be on offer in the school.

27. The school has developed some innovative approaches to enriching its curriculum. For example, it holds a themed multi-cultural week each year devoted to cross-curricular activities. Visitors to the school share a range of different cultures and customs and they lead a programme of drama, music, art and design, craft and food technology. Some recent highlights of these activities have been African music, Japanese papermaking and *'Ready, Steady Cook!'* when food from different continents was cooked and tasted.

28. The satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities available for pupils helps to enhance and broaden the curriculum. On one afternoon a week, the school runs a variety of after-school activities including sports, chess and gardening. The school takes full advantage of the locality to enable pupils to participate in sporting fixtures and other activities such as field trips and visiting local environmental areas.

29. The accommodation as a whole is unsatisfactory for meeting the needs of the curriculum. Although teachers make effective and creative use of the accommodation, space is at a premium. Many classrooms are cramped, corridors and stairs are narrow and some specialist rooms, such as the science laboratory, are barely adequate in size. There is no area large enough for physical education, dance or drama and this has a detrimental effect on pupils' achievement. Neither is there a suitable room for working with resistant materials in design and technology. However, the art room is large, with very good displays of work, and the small library is stimulating and attractive although it is also used as a classroom.

30. Pupils' achievements are also limited by the quality of learning resources. These are unsatisfactory in science, physical education, music, and ICT. In addition, there are inadequate materials to stimulate pupils with poor literacy skills.

Care, guidance and support

There are good arrangements to ensure pupils' care, welfare, health and safety. The support, advice and guidance made available to pupils are satisfactory. Pupils' views are sought and acted upon; their involvement in school decision making is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Pupils have very trusting relationships with adults.
- There are good arrangements for the induction of new pupils.
- Staff always treat pupils with respect and value their opinions.
- There is good quality guidance on further study or career opportunities.
- Pupils' IEPs are not effective in guiding their progress and achievements.

Commentary

31. The arrangements for maintaining a safe school are good. Staff are suitably trained and have a good understanding of health and safety procedures, including risk assessments. Pupils feel safe and secure in the school. They offer this information willingly and parents confirm it. Good records are kept of any identified, potential hazards to ensure they are dealt with quickly, and health and safety issues are discussed at staff meetings to ensure that all staff understand their role. During lessons such as food technology, science and physical education teachers make sure that pupils follow safe practice. First aid arrangements are good, with staff having had emergency training. Child protection procedures are well embedded in the school and are in line with locally agreed arrangements.

32. Staff have pupils' well-being in mind at all times and they always endeavour to provide appropriate levels of supervision to ensure a positive learning environment. The school is a caring community; every pupil is treated with respect and this reflects the aim of meeting the needs of the individual. However, on occasion staff use terms of endearment that are most inappropriate for pupils of this age. Pupils feel valued, and are able to express their views, not only to individual staff but also in a large group setting, such as an assembly. Staff discuss issues openly with pupils and act upon them as appropriate. The school council and school forum work well to involve pupils in school developments. Pupil welfare is further enhanced by the provision of counselling opportunities through activities such as art therapy. This enables them to communicate their fears, feelings and emotions in a safe and supportive environment.

33. Systems for monitoring and assessing pupils' academic and personal achievement and progress are satisfactory. The school operates a system of tutors and key workers to offer support and guidance. Staff are aware of pupils' individual needs and they know their targets as contained in IEPs. However, these plans have limitations. In particular, the targets are too broad and evaluations are not sufficiently thorough. Therefore, pupil records do not demonstrate clearly the progress, or otherwise, that pupils may have made against their personal, behavioural and academic objectives. Pupils' targets are sometimes discussed in lessons and with key workers, and while some pupils openly acknowledge their individual objectives, others are not focused on them at all. On occasion, pupils also recognise one another's needs. There are good examples of mutual support and encouragement.

34. The headteacher takes responsibility for the good induction procedures that are available for all pupils. These include a thorough familiarisation programme during which parents and carers must visit the school with their child before a pupil can be admitted. Procedures enable the school to form a good initial profile of the core needs of each entrant.

35. From the age of 14 years to when they leave school pupils receive good quality careers guidance. The Connexions personal adviser offers an effective service to pupils and this supports the good links with local colleges and employers. Consequently, pupils are well informed about the range of choices available to them when they leave school.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has good links with parents and the local community. There are satisfactory links with other schools and colleges, although the school does not provide any outreach support to mainstream schools.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Parents hold the school in high regard.
- Parents are provided with good information about the work of the school and their children's progress.
- There are strong, mutually beneficial, links between the school and its local community.
- The school has been successful in providing pupils with opportunities to attend local colleges but unsuccessful in establishing links for pupils to integrate into mainstream schools.

Commentary

36. In their response to the pre-inspection questionnaire and at the parents' meeting, parents showed that they are generally pleased with what the school provides and feel their children make good progress. They believe that staff encourage pupils to overcome their difficulties and expect their children to work hard. Some parents expressed concern about behaviour in the school and this was supported by inspectors' findings. Parents make a satisfactory contribution to the school's work, and to the achievement of their children, by supporting staff in their work. They respond positively to the school's suggestions to contact outside agencies, such as the health services. Parents and carers are invited to various social events to celebrate the work of the school, as well as to more formal occasions. They meet with staff at pupil progress evenings and Annual Reviews of pupils' Statements of Special Educational Needs are well attended.

37. The school sends home newsletters each term. These are easy to read, informative about general matters, and celebrate the work of pupils and staff. The headteacher telephones pupils' homes when necessary, and is very willing to talk to parents who ring the school; they are welcomed at any time to visit. However, the school does not provide a home-school communication book and this is a missed opportunity for staff to be informed of what pupils have done during the weekend and for the school to comment on the pupils' week. Pupils' annual progress reports are good, with details of each subject that outline what they know and can do, and comments on attitudes to work and behaviour.

38. Staff and pupils work hard to maintain good relationships with the local community. For example, the school works closely with the borough council and won a 'Reading in Bloom' award in 2003. Pupils help in the local community. For instance, they help at a pre-school group that meet in the school, and several older pupils have carried out community service by visiting a local primary special school to help in the classroom.

39. The school makes every effort to work constructively with mainstream schools but relationships have been difficult to establish. Consequently, there are no links to support individual pupils' curriculum needs or to provide integration opportunities to help promote the possible successful return of pupils to mainstream education. There are much better links with colleges in Reading and Newbury. These give pupils opportunities to follow vocational 'taster' courses and provide valuable social experiences.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Governance is poor. The governing body is failing to ensure that all statutory requirements are met. The leadership of the headteacher and senior staff is satisfactory overall but management is unsatisfactory. There are significant weaknesses in both leadership and management.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The headteacher has very high expectations of pupil achievement and personal development.
- The school is not meeting statutory requirements in terms of aspects of curriculum provision for pupils of all age groups.
- Governors are not helping to shape the vision and direction of the school and are failing to be involved in strategic planning and ensuring that the school operates within its budget.
- Strategic planning, which properly reflects the school's priorities and ambitions, is underdeveloped.
- The school has no regular and robust self-evaluation procedures in place and the monitoring of performance is not yet an established part of the school's routines.
- Financial decisions are made with insufficient regard to school planning and addressing the school's significant financial deficit.

Commentary

40. The headteacher had only been in post for a short time prior to the last inspection, when the school was judged to require special measures. She has led the school forward in many ways since then. She has a very significant presence around the school and in that respect she is a motivational and inspirational leader who is an extremely good role model for staff and pupils. Her control and management of pupils are exceptional. However, there are significant weaknesses in governance, leadership and management of the school.

41. The small governing body is under strength but, nonetheless, it has not had sufficient input into shaping the direction of the school. Governors rely heavily on the headteacher for information and are not regular visitors to the school. They therefore have a very limited understanding of the extent and degree of some of the school's weaknesses. Governors are not acting as an effective critical friend to the school and are not influencing its development. Even though governors' minutes show that the headteacher has drawn governors' attention to the fact that they are not meeting their obligations, as there are no sub-committees for important areas like finance and the curriculum, the situation has not improved. This lack of direct involvement in the school's work is reflected particularly in strategic planning and monitoring of budgeting and spending. A local authority financial audit carried out in February 2003 was critical of the governing body in a number of areas and concluded that "it is not fulfilling its duties within the national and local framework". Governors' failure to monitor the curriculum through an appropriate committee structure has resulted in the school failing to meet National Curriculum requirements in Years 7 to 9 and some aspects of subject areas are absent in Years 10 and 11.

42. While senior managers share the headteacher's high aspirations for the school, the necessary developments are not yet reflected in a prioritised and costed improvement plan. The most important areas for development are not properly ascertained and governors' input is superficial rather than an informed contribution based on a detailed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. In particular, governors do not have sufficient discussion and involvement in budgeting and spending decisions. Discussions of finance are sparse, to the extent that financial details are not even discussed at a number of governors' meetings. Their input into budgeting is unsatisfactory, with budgets being agreed through discussion between the chair of governors and the headteacher. Consequently, there is no planning or recognition of how the school's substantial deficit is to be repaid.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	562,203.00
Total expenditure	643,730.00
Expenditure per pupil	14,305.00

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	0.00
Balance carried forward to the next year	-81,527.00

43. There is a clear commitment to running an equitable establishment in which all individuals matter. However, while this philosophy drives forward the headteacher's thinking and underpins the school's work it is not being translated into practice. For instance, behaviour management strategies and the points system for rewarding work and effort in lessons are not applied consistently, and tutorial time is not used effectively. Confrontational and disruptive behaviour is commonplace and therefore the headteacher spends far too much of her valuable time dealing with these situations. Frequently, this occurs when staff who are having difficulties send for assistance, but it also happens because the headteacher is constantly on the alert for disturbances and intervenes immediately. As a result, she is not able to devote time to providing high levels of routine monitoring.

44. The school is managed unsatisfactorily. Current systems for gathering information about the school and its performance are not yet always formal and routine. There is no established culture for reviewing and evaluating the school's work. Some management systems are used, such as monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and the performance management of staff and staff training, but these systems are relatively new and lack robustness. For instance, staff's reports on training they have undertaken off site are inadequate. Teachers' classroom practice is monitored but observations are not recorded in a sufficiently developmental way and best practice is not disseminated effectively in order to raise the overall standard of teaching. There are similar limitations in other areas. The curriculum is not monitored and evaluated regularly and therefore there are imbalances. Pupils regularly leave classes voluntarily, or are removed, but the details of these absences and their durations are not routinely recorded. As a result, the school does not have detailed information that indicates triggers for disruptive behaviour and nor can it evaluate its success in preventing such incidents.

45. The middle managers who are in post, such as subject co-ordinators, are not empowered to take full control of their areas of responsibility. The principles of appraising provision are new: these include determining how the area should be developed and putting forward an improvement plan with prioritised and costed needs. Their ability to plan adequately is further limited by the fact that they do not have delegated budgets and this highlights limitations in the way in which budgets are set to meet identified priorities. As a result, some subject areas have inadequate resources.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Support for pupils with poor literacy skills is underdeveloped and does not meet their needs.
- Pupils' learning in lessons is sometimes unsatisfactory, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- Teachers have implemented the National Literacy Strategy for pupils in Years 7 to 9 and this is helping to raise achievement.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have the opportunity to gain accredited qualifications.
- Literacy across the curriculum is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

46. Although achievement and progress are satisfactory overall, learning for those pupils whose basic literacy skills are poor does not progress as well as it should and is, therefore, unsatisfactory. This is because there are no specific programmes or strategies to address their needs. For instance, during the inspection no direct teaching of phonics was observed. The school does not use alternative methods to encourage and motivate these pupils; more use of ICT and word frames in all classes would be beneficial. For instance, key words are not always prominently displayed to help pupils learn the vocabulary associated with different subjects. These pupils are not motivated by the type of written work they are expected to do and they are unable to work independently or organise their own work. Occasionally this leads to boredom, a refusal to co-operate, and a subsequent deterioration in behaviour. However, there are some examples of good practice within the school, such as in a Year 7 literacy session when pupils enjoyed drafting their own limericks. In this, there was an emphasis on simple rhyming words and ICT was used to encourage reluctant writers to draft their work.

47. The quality of teaching ranges from very good to satisfactory, and is satisfactory overall. However, there were occasions when learning was unsatisfactory. At these times, teachers tried very hard to manage pupils and maintain their interest but the behaviour of a minority affected learning. Lessons are usually well structured for pupils in Years 7 to 9, using the three part lesson format of an introduction followed by the main teaching activity and a final plenary session, in line with the recommended practice of the National Literacy Strategy. However, when teaching is less effective and pupil behaviour disrupts the lesson, there is not enough time for teachers to conduct an effective plenary session by summing up what has been learnt and considering what the next step will be. Special needs assistants know pupils well and are usually effective in helping to keep pupils focused on their work. Pupils in Years 10 and 11, particularly the more able ones, work well independently towards accreditation. For instance, a Year 11 class considered questions about leisure, extracting information from a brochure with a good level of concentration and minimal adult intervention. In the best lessons, planning clearly shows what teachers want pupils to learn. However, there are some instances where the objectives identified are not clearly stated, or are largely behavioural. As a result, effective assessment cannot be carried out because there are no clear learning objectives against which to measure progress.

48. Pupils' achievements are satisfactory overall. Some pupils are achieving well, as shown by the scores they achieve in the national test they take at the end of Year 9 and their results in Entry Level examinations. Higher achieving pupils in Years 10 and 11 also achieve well in the more

demanding GCSE course that they take. However, there are others whose achievements are unsatisfactory. A number of pupils are regular non-attenders while others are present in lessons but their progress is hampered by their unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour.

49. The co-ordinator has been in post for a year and has a clear mandate to raise standards. In order to do this she recognises the importance of monitoring teaching, although this has not yet been possible. Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

50. A significant number of pupils enter the school with immature communication skills, but the school has not yet developed an effective whole school approach to developing and reinforcing pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum. Some individual teachers do this through activities such as discussions to develop speaking and listening skills, by providing opportunities for pupils to read aloud or extract information from books, and by expectations of extended writing. However, these opportunities are not provided in managed and planned ways through enough other subjects of the curriculum to help their development satisfactorily.

French

51. It is not possible to judge the qualities of teaching and learning and pupil achievement because not enough lessons were observed during the inspection. During the Year 7 lesson that was sampled, interest levels were high as pupils were highly motivated by the experience of a French breakfast. Although there was limited use of the language, pupils showed a growing interest in learning French words and phrases and many could remember vocabulary from previous lessons, such as when counting to twenty. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' social and cultural development. During the breakfast, for instance, pupils behaved extremely well and conversation was polite and sociable.

52. However not all pupils have the opportunity to learn useful sets of basic words and phrases, and about aspects of French life and culture. Pupils in Year 9 do not study the subject and so the school is failing to meet its statutory obligation to teach them all the required subjects of the National Curriculum. French is not available to pupils in Years 10 and 11.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Teaching is good overall and as a result pupils achieve well.
- The National Numeracy Strategy for pupils in Years 7 to 9 has been implemented well in most lessons.
- When lessons are not taught by a mathematics specialist, teaching is more limited and pupil achievement is lower.
- Assessment is helpful to pupils, as they understand what they have to do to improve.
- The subject is well led, but monitoring of teaching is not carried out sufficiently well to enhance the skills of newer, less well qualified teachers.
- The promotion of numeracy skills in other subjects has not been developed satisfactorily.

Commentary

53. Many pupils enter the school having missed part of their schooling. Some are at early stages of mathematical development. Pupils make good progress in all areas of mathematics due to well planned lessons and skilled teaching. Their good achievements are evident when their results in

national tests at the end of Year 9 are compared with their performance at the end of Year 6. By Year 9, they have a good basic knowledge of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division and are beginning to organise their work and check their results. They use and interpret mathematical symbols accurately and are beginning to search for number patterns and relationships. Similarly, some pupils in Years 10 and 11 are successful in their Entry Level and GCSE examinations. This steady improvement results from the experience and expertise of the subject co-ordinator, a subject specialist who teaches the majority of mathematics in the school. He has succeeded in implementing the National Numeracy Strategy for pupils in Years 7 to 9 in most classes and is tracking pupil achievement and progress carefully.

54. Overall teaching in mathematics is good. The co-ordinator's very good subject knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject engage the pupils and they respond with confidence and interest. Generally, pupils behave well in these lessons because they are well managed, motivated and want to learn. Lessons usually target the work to meet pupils' individual needs, building well on prior learning. Sometimes, events that have taken place outside the classroom spill into lessons, or pupils display irritation and annoyance, but these disruptions are well managed by experienced teachers and teaching assistants. In particular, many Year 10 and 11 pupils work individually for extended periods of time with good concentration, supported effectively by teaching assistants and the teacher. They generally understand pupils' needs well so that they focus on a range of short, fast activities to motivate and involve them. Most lessons start or finish with a variety of mental arithmetic exercises or timed tests, and the focus on mental arithmetic is helping to improve pupils' general mathematical understanding.

55. Teaching and learning are more limited when lessons are taught by temporary or non-specialist teachers. The three part lesson is not so well implemented, relationships are less secure and behaviour is not so well managed with the result that time is lost in lessons.

56. Most teachers make clear assessments of what pupils can do. In class this may mean whole group and individual discussions. These are used well to challenge pupils to show their understanding of problems by describing them, explaining the strategies they have used and showing how they check their results. This was very evident in a Year 9 lesson where higher attaining pupils named and described a range of angles and used this knowledge to solve problems. These discussions, questions, comments and prompts enable pupils to understand what they need to do, in very specific terms, to improve and to know more fully what is required of them. As a result, pupils move on quickly in their understanding. This ongoing assessment is supported by written comments. Work is generally marked satisfactorily, with annotations that both praise and, occasionally, challenge.

57. Mathematics is well led and satisfactorily managed. The co-ordinator has a clear vision for the future development of the subject. He has developed good long term planning and checks lesson planning carefully, but monitoring of teaching is not carried out sufficiently well to enhance the skills of newer, less well qualified teachers. The use of ICT to support learning in mathematics is satisfactory but a shortage of useful software holds back this development.

Mathematics across the curriculum

58. There is insufficient planned development of numeracy across the curriculum. Pupils' numeracy skills are promoted in some subjects, such as when reading scales in science and measuring and weighing in food technology, but lesson plans generally do not identify how these skills will be developed. Consequently, opportunities are frequently missed.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 who attend regularly and are willing to work achieve recognised qualifications.
- Pupils are taught by subject specialists but teaching and learning are unsatisfactory overall.
- Teachers' insecure classroom management and pupils' disruptive behaviour frequently restrict learning.
- There is specialist accommodation but resources are inadequate for a GCSE course.
- The use of new technology is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

59. Even though pupils have the opportunity to follow Entry Level and GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11, their learning and achievements are unsatisfactory overall. Some pupils make satisfactory progress in their Entry Level work although none have yet completed the newly introduced GCSE course. However, the disruptive behaviour in lessons and the poor attendance of some pupils mean that overall pupils are not working to their ability. Not all pupils have sufficient time allocated for science. In particular, Year 9 pupils do not have enough lessons, receiving less teaching time than those in Years 7 and 8.

60. The subject teachers are knowledgeable and plan to develop in pupils a scientific approach to practical work. They do this by giving an appropriate focus on investigations, through emphasising and developing key vocabulary and scientific terminology and encouraging the acquisition of practical skills. Consequently, pupils understand how to make predictions and carry out experiments that acknowledge the idea of a 'fair test' by incorporating controlled variables, such as the height a ball bounces from different surfaces and the effectiveness of different materials as insulators. They read accurately scales on thermometers and digital balances, and record their results using the correct units. Results are displayed as different forms of graphs, which the most able pupils draw independently, but they do not have the benefit of doing this using ICT. New technology is not used sufficiently well. Pupils do not experience aspects of ICT, such as data logging and using control mechanisms. Learning resources have not been extended and improved to keep pace with curriculum developments. Therefore, while they are adequate for pupils in Years 7 to 9, there is an insufficient range of high quality resources for pupils following accredited courses.

61. Although teachers are subject specialists, all pupils do not learn satisfactorily. This is because their unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour frequently disrupt lessons and teachers are not able to restore order sufficiently quickly. Far too frequently pupils refuse to participate in activities. At these times they become abusive, which involves swearing and making personal comments to staff, and often they antagonise each other to the extent that there is physical confrontation. On these occasions, teachers do not have effective behaviour strategies that they can call upon to refocus pupils. Pupils may be requested to leave the room, although they may refuse to do so, and so other staff, particularly the headteacher, may have to be called for. These confrontations waste significant amounts of time. The school's system of awarding points for work and effort in lessons has little value in science lessons. Teachers do not always remember to do this at the end of lessons and when it does occur the allocation of points is inconsistent and does not properly reflect what has taken place. The pupils place little value on the system; they never remind teachers to give out points if they forget.

62. The science co-ordinator, who is enthusiastic, is a newly qualified teacher and is working hard to develop the subject. Pupils follow a balanced subject curriculum and there is a subject development plan in place. Although leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory, there are significant limitations. The co-ordinator does not have a delegated budget and so plans to improve provision may never materialise. Assessment procedures are satisfactory overall but

marking is often inadequate; pupils are given insufficient information about what they need to do to improve, and unsatisfactory work is not dealt with adequately. As a result, a lot of work remains unfinished and there is no insistence that badly presented work is improved.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory.
- Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory.
- New technology does not support learning effectively across the curriculum.
- Learning resources are limited.

Commentary

63. Overall, teaching and learning in lessons are unsatisfactory. The main factor that contributes to pupils' lack of achievement is the long term absence of the co-ordinator, a subject specialist. The subject has been taught largely by supply teachers who do not have sufficiently high expectations of behaviour; nor do they have the necessary behaviour management skills to re-engage pupils when their behaviour becomes particularly disruptive. In lessons, this unsatisfactory behaviour of a significant minority of pupils, and their poor attitudes to work, affects the learning of others. However, where a teacher's knowledge and skills are more assured, there is noticeably more progress in lessons. In one good lesson observed, a teacher worked hard to reinforce a Year 11 group's understanding of control, using a 'Logo' program. The pupils remained focused for a long period of time. They were well supported and encouraged when they became frustrated, and all pupils managed to follow instructions, enabling them to produce a series of shapes on the screen.

64. While insufficient expertise in teaching ICT plays its part in pupils' unsatisfactory progress over time, other factors contribute too. The long term absence of the co-ordinator has meant there has been little continuity in learning in terms of building on pupils' existing skills. In addition, there is an absence of adequate and appropriate software and pupils do not get the opportunity to experience elements of the subject, like data logging in science.

65. Leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. Developments in ICT have stalled as a result of the long-term absence of the subject co-ordinator. There are no procedures for monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision for ICT and the standards that pupils achieve. There are no formal systems in place for monitoring and evaluating pupils' achievements through assessment procedures, and so teachers cannot judge the progress pupils are making. There is some evidence that pupils are learning new skills and developing confidence in computer use in the lessons observed, but even though some pupils are developing these skills, they are not doing so systematically. The lack of assessment data means that teachers are not able to plan activities that meet individual needs by rehearsing pupils' previously acquired skills and teaching new ones in a structured and progressive way

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

66. The lack of whole school monitoring of the use of ICT means that the school is not ensuring the best use of resources by teachers; nor is it identifying the best way to support teachers in the use of new technology in other subjects of the curriculum. Consequently, there are few examples of the use of computers for cross-curricular work. In part this is due to the lack of computers in some classrooms and so there are limited opportunities for their use and restricted access to the Internet for research by individual pupils. There is some evidence of computers being used to redraft work in English but few instances of, for example, the use of databases in science or presenting results in

graphical form using new technology. Overall, the planned and progressive use of ICT is not yet embedded within different subjects of the curriculum.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Pupils have the opportunity to study the subject as an element of their humanities GCSE course.
- Special needs assistants support pupils' learning well.
- Pupils' access to new technology to extend learning is limited and there are insufficient artefacts to help develop pupils' understanding.
- Good use is made of the local community to bring the subject 'alive'.

Commentary

67. Pupils of all ages make satisfactory progress in acquiring new skills, knowledge and understanding. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching is well planned and organised, and pupils are provided with activities that are appropriate to their age and interests. In Years 10 and 11, pupils are generally motivated by their examination course and are well focused. For instance, in one session pupils answered questions on the background to the General Strike. A well orchestrated discussion enabled pupils to show good understanding and knowledge of the background to the strike. Special needs assistants supported teachers well, such as by encouraging pupils to complete lengthy sections of writing and to finish their work carefully. Their behaviour was particularly good and their attitudes towards learning positive so that no time was wasted.

68. In contrast, in a Year 8 lesson on the dissolution of Parliament by Charles II, teaching and learning were much less effective. The disruptive behaviour of two pupils slowed down the lesson to the extent that all pupils' learning was unsatisfactory. Some of the disruptive behaviour is caused by pupils' literacy difficulties and the lack of activities and strategies that are appropriate to meet their needs. However, the points system that teachers use to manage pupils and reward good behaviour is ineffective with pupils at these times and many pupils use it as an excuse to argue.

69. History is managed by the humanities co-ordinator, who provides satisfactory leadership and management. She has a clear vision for the subject and has developed effective long term planning. However, her role in monitoring and evaluating teaching is underdeveloped. There are limited resources in ICT to support learning, and insufficient artefacts to develop pupils' understanding. First hand experiences, through visits and visitors, are used effectively to promote pupils' achievements in history.

Geography

70. It is not possible to judge the overall qualities of teaching, learning and pupil achievement in geography because not enough lessons were observed during the inspection. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have the opportunity to study geography through the combined humanities GCSE course that they follow. This is a good development.

71. In the geography lesson that was sampled, teaching was well planned, prepared and imaginative. Year 8 pupils were enthusiastic and well focused, and the learning that ensued was good. As part of their learning in physical geography, this session was combined with art to design

model volcanoes in various stages of development. Pupils found ways of making their volcanoes erupt so that lava poured down the sides. All pupils could recognise the various stages of volcanic activity, and could design and make a good cross-section clearly showing this. Their behaviour was particularly good and their attitudes towards learning positive, so that no time was wasted.

72. There are limited ICT resources to support learning in geography. However, the community is used effectively to extend pupils' experiences through planned visits to places of interest.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Relationships in lessons are strong.
- Generally, pupils have good attitudes towards their learning but the misbehaviour of a minority disrupts parts of some lessons.
- Pupils in Year 11 are able to gain external accreditation.
- Good use is made of visitors and visits to the local community to extend and enrich pupils' learning.

Commentary

73. Pupils follow the locally Agreed Syllabus for religious education, which has been adapted creatively to combine with studies in humanities. This gives pupils in Years 10 and 11 the opportunity to follow a GCSE examination course in humanities. Pupils' learning is supported well by visits to the school by people of different faiths from within the local community, and by visits to various places of worship.

74. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers use pupils' knowledge and personal experiences well to motivate and encourage them. They try hard to create a positive learning atmosphere and their strong relationships with pupils usually enable them to manage their behaviour well. Pupils generally have positive attitudes to the subject and they are beginning to develop respect for each other's feelings, values and beliefs by being prepared to listen to others' points of view. However, the behaviour of a significant minority of pupils occasionally disrupts lessons. Staff use a variety of strategies to manage this challenging behaviour. These strategies are generally successful, but on occasion individuals' persistent unsatisfactory behaviour results in teaching time lost, and the learning of others is adversely affected.

75. Although some pupils work hard and achieve well, their achievements overall are satisfactory because of the disruptions to learning. Some make good progress with their speaking and listening skills so that in oral sessions they are able to show their understanding of what they have learned, but many are unable to demonstrate this learning in their work because of limited writing skills. However, by the end of Year 9, many pupils know several of the stories and traditions of different religions and recognise the similarities and differences between them. For example, they know about different places of worship. Higher attaining pupils know something about the rules of religions; they recognise the religious rituals surrounding birth, marriage and death and the symbols used in the ceremonies that surround them. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 deepen their study of the key elements of the religions studied and begin to recognise the effects of religions on individual behaviour, attitudes and social practices. For instance, in the local study unit of their GCSE examination course they considered the history of religion in the Reading area, recording the way in which the town has embraced a multi-faith society. Experiences such as this make a significant contribution to pupils' understanding of living in multi-faith and multi-cultural Britain.

76. The co-ordinator leads and manages the subject satisfactorily, and assesses pupils' learning satisfactorily. Although the number of resources, including the range of artifacts, have increased, they still remain limited. For example, the lack of ICT resources means that opportunities for using new technology to support learning are lost.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The teachers' enthusiasm and subject knowledge encourage pupils to learn in craft and food technology.
- There is no provision for the teaching of resistant materials.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not have the opportunity to follow an accredited course.

Commentary

77. The school does not provide opportunities for pupils to study resistant materials and is therefore failing to meet National Curriculum requirements. This is due to the lack of appropriate accommodation and the absence of staff expertise. In the absence of such provision the school has tried to compensate by developing a good programme of craft activities to extend pupils' skills. These lessons are characterised by a good level of application. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic; they maintain a good pace in lessons and provide activities that interest and motivate the pupils. As a result, they apply themselves, frequently working independently and taking pride in what they produce. For instance, a Year 7 group was engrossed when making its own felt and Year 11 pupils were absorbed when designing and using a variety of materials to make sculptures based on the theme of *Decay*. However, even when pupils are involved in what they are doing, many still make inappropriate comments and frequently behave disruptively, disturbing the work of others.

78. Lessons are well planned and structured, and the classroom is well organised. Lessons usually start promptly as pupils collect their work and listen to the teacher's introductory discussion. Activities are wide ranging and pupils are given the opportunity to experience a variety of materials as they produce two and three-dimensional work. Teachers move around, assisting pupils well with technique and prompting and questioning them to develop their ideas. Ongoing assessment opportunities such as this are used well to involve pupils in their learning and to explain how their work can be improved. However, plenary sessions at the end of lessons are much less effective in this respect. Although these review sessions are planned, they are often disrupted and so opportunities to seek pupils' views about their work and to reinforce information about the techniques are lost. In addition, the awarding of points, as part of the schools' behaviour management strategy, loses impact or simply does not happen.

79. Achievement in food technology is satisfactory. Pupils enjoy this subject and so they behave sensibly, work hard and make satisfactory gains in learning. They are taught satisfactorily. The teacher's approach to managing pupils' behaviour is reasonably firm and pupils usually co-operate, listen and follow instructions. Activities are planned which allow pupils to apply their practical skills, such as weighing and measuring ingredients. Their literacy skills are promoted through activities like reading recipes and writing about their cookery, or about health and safety aspects associated with working in a kitchen. Pupils' personal development and social skills are reinforced well, such as the input of an Indian visitor when a Year 11 class made and cooked onion bajjis. The level of conversation was enthusiastic and sociable, with pupils expressing their likes and dislikes. A group of Year 10 pupils made sandwiches for a school trip and many were able to show initiative, washing salad ingredients and washing up afterwards.

80. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The deficiencies in provision are outside the control of the subject co-ordinator.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

81. It is not possible to judge the overall qualities of teaching, learning and pupil achievement because too few lessons were observed during the inspection. In the lesson that was sampled, teaching, learning and achievement were satisfactory. Year 10 pupils worked individually on examination projects, and some disruptive behaviour was well managed.

82. Pupils in all years have notebooks which they use to research projects, and to practise skills and combinations of colour, pattern and design. These are variable in quality but some pupils show a developing talent for design and are highly imaginative in their choices of materials, textures and techniques. Evidence around the room showed a good range of reference materials, including works of well known artists and stimulating ideas and materials. From projects in progress, and finished work on display around the school, it is evident that pupils use a wide range of materials and skills to produce impressive work. The attractive earthenware dragons produced by Year 8 pupils show very careful work, and the large totem poles, with eye-catching decoration and delicate insect wings, demonstrate how Year 9 pupils have used a range of techniques while working with paper, wood, wire, plaster, glue and paint. Some Year 10 and 11 pupils, as part of their GCSE examination course, have made striking sculptures, vases and pots which are beautifully glazed and finished, showing a good development of skills.

Music

Provision in music is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Pupils behave badly and have poor attitudes.
- Lessons are well planned but teaching and learning are unsatisfactory.
- There is no dedicated teaching accommodation and resources are limited.

Commentary

83. A part-time subject specialist tries very hard to provide pupils with activities that interest and motivate them as well as to develop their musical understanding and performing skills. They therefore study topics such as the music of *The Beatles* and rock and roll, stimulated by the film *Grease*. Some pupils respond positively to these activities and become very involved in their work. However, these are in the minority. Most pupils are disinterested and demonstrate this through unruly and disruptive behaviour. As a consequence, their achievements are unsatisfactory.

84. Lessons are planned with clear objectives of intended learning, with a good mixture of activities. These are supported by appropriate resources, such as compact discs and videos to help set the scene and develop appreciation of the era. Pupils generally watch and listen to these introductory sessions but their attitudes deteriorate rapidly when they are required to carry out any tasks. This is surprising, as the activities are appropriate to their age, such as playing chord sequences on a keyboard to *Let it Be* and *Those Magic Changes*. At these times, pupils demonstrate very unpleasant aspects of behaviour. They swear profusely, are extremely confrontational and seriously disrupt the learning of those who wish to participate. Others simply sit around and refuse to do anything. The situation is made worse by the shortage of equipment. Pupils have to share keyboards and many find it extremely difficult to work with others. At these

times, the teacher is unable to restore any order in the classroom so that on occasion pupils come to blows. This frequently requires sending for additional staff, generally the headteacher. The only time they appear to be prepared to work are when given simple tasks such as completing a wordsearch.

85. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. All pupils in Years 7 to 10 study the subject and there is an appropriate curriculum in place.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

86. It is not possible to make judgements on the quality of teaching, learning and achievement as only one lesson was observed during the inspection. In the lesson that was sampled, pupils were off site using the fitness room at a local leisure centre where they were taught by an instructor that the school employs specifically for these sessions. They had an extremely positive attitude towards their individual fitness programmes, co-operating with staff and using equipment sensibly and safely. Such use of high quality community facilities is a strength of the subject. However, there are significant weaknesses in provision associated with the school's accommodation and resources. These are totally inadequate for active pupils of this age. There is no appropriate indoor accommodation, and outdoors pupils have to use an adjacent public park. Consequently, if they are to be provided with suitable learning opportunities they have to travel off site. This means that time is lost and there are significant costs to the school in travel expenses, hiring charges and staffing costs. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 now have the opportunity to follow a GCSE course and this is a very good development.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, social and health education

Provision in pupils' PSHE is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Not all pupils have lessons in PSHE.
- The school meets its statutory requirement to provide drugs and sex and relationships education, but citizenship is not properly planned and taught.
- Tutorials held at the end of the day do not support the PSHE programme.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour often disrupt learning.
- Although teaching and learning are satisfactory, pupils' achievements over time are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

87. Most pupils do not have a dedicated PSHE lesson due to the short taught week and a curriculum that is unbalanced and, in some year groups, lacking breadth. Years 7 and 8 do not have any PSHE lessons. Year 10 has only careers education and Year 11 has careers and health education lessons, although the latter is taken up by teaching the theory element of their physical education GCSE course. As a result, citizenship is not taught effectively through a planned and considered programme. The headteacher anticipated that the tutorial sessions held at the end of three days each week should help to compensate for these deficiencies in provision. However, this is not the case and monitoring has failed to pick this up. Although some sessions are valuable

experiences, such as supported reading, they do not contribute to pupils' learning in PSHE. The sessions are unplanned and therefore generally end up as time for a drink and general conversation. The pupils refer to them as 'chill out time'. Both strands of provision for PSHE are inadequate.

88. Pupils are taught satisfactorily overall and sometimes well. Topics are interesting, relevant and appropriate to pupils' ages but their attitudes and behaviour can be significantly different in different lessons. A Year 11 class was seen in a careers lesson preparing for their work experience placements. This was a well planned and prepared lesson which motivated pupils and so they worked conscientiously and with interest as they considered potentially difficult situations that they might encounter. Year 9 pupils were presented with the challenge of considering racial discrimination but they resolutely refused to co-operate. The teacher employed a range of strategies to involve them and she remained calm and focused in spite of a barrage of abuse, rudeness and disinterest. However, although teaching was satisfactory, learning was not, because the disruptive behaviour prevented any progress from being made. Although on balance pupils achieve satisfactorily in individual lessons, their achievements over time are unsatisfactory because the unpredictability of their behaviour means that in some lessons no meaningful learning takes place.

89. The subject co-ordinator, who is relatively new to the school, is trying to develop the subject and has recently attended training to help to implement the citizenship curriculum. Currently, leadership and management are satisfactory because, although there are shortcomings in provision, these are due to factors outside the co-ordinator's control, such as the structure of the taught week. Consequently, there is no opportunity to produce a coherent long term planning structure that ensures pupils follow a broad and relevant subject curriculum as they move through the school.

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	5
Pupils' achievement	5
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	5
Attendance	5
Attitudes	4
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	5
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	4
The quality of education provided by the school	4
The quality of teaching	4
How well pupils learn	4
The quality of assessment	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	5
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	4
Accommodation and resources	5
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	4
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	3
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	4
The leadership and management of the school	5
The governance of the school	6
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.*