

**INSPECTION REPORT**

**ALT BRIDGE SECONDARY SUPPORT CENTRE**

Huyton, Merseyside

LEA area: Knowsley

Unique reference number: 104498

Headteacher: Mr Ian Chisnall

Lead inspector: Alan Lemon

Dates of inspection: 12 – 15 January 2004

Inspection number: 259042

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	154
School address:	Wellcroft Road Huyton Liverpool Merseyside
Postcode:	L36 7TA
Telephone number:	0151 477 8310
Fax number:	0151 477 8313
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs S Gannon
Date of previous inspection:	14 September 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Alt Bridge Secondary Support Centre is a larger than average mixed day special school for 170 pupils in Years 7 to 11. The total number on roll is declining and at present there are 154 pupils mostly with moderate learning difficulties but, increasingly, pupils are being admitted in Year 7 with much more complex special educational needs including autism, physical, sensory and medical conditions. As a result, attainment on entry is low and becoming lower; whereas further up the school attainment, while still below average, is noticeably higher. There are twice as many boys as girls, which is typical for this type of school. Nearly all the pupils are of White – British heritage, two are of mixed heritage and all pupils speak English. Most similar schools have a higher proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. Many pupils are from areas of high social deprivation. Those eligible for free school meals amount to 74 per cent. The number entering or leaving the school other than at the usual time is low.

The school received a School Achievement Award in 2002 and was granted the Healthy Schools Award in 2003. While a good number of pupils have been re-integrated to mainstream schools the current level of collaborative work with local mainstream schools is limited. At present the school is not undertaking outreach work. The school has experienced prolonged problems in recruiting suitably experienced teachers for mathematics and the resistant materials component of design and technology despite its continued efforts to make appointments. Very recently a qualified teacher of design and technology was appointed.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
20165	Alan Lemon	Lead inspector	Art and design Design and technology Physical education
19343	Marion Howel	Lay inspector	
10781	Robert B Thompson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Personal, social and health education Citizenship Modern foreign language Music
21785	Veronica Kerr	Team inspector	Mathematics Science Special educational needs
27409	Susan Hunt	Team inspector	English Geography History Religious education

The inspection contractor was:

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The Alt Bridge Secondary Support Centre is a good school.** It has many very good and some outstanding features. Most pupils achieve well because teaching and learning are good. The school is well led and managed. It makes good efforts to include all pupils in many opportunities within school and beyond to learn and mature. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Pupils achieve very well in science and physical education; their achievement is occasionally very good in several other subjects.
- The few highest attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 underachieve because their courses are insufficiently challenging.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good; relationships with staff and each other are excellent.
- The overall level of attendance is unsatisfactory.
- A good proportion of teaching and learning is very good or better.
- A good curriculum is greatly enriched by many additional activities; in particular, opportunities for sports and the programme for independent travel are excellent.
- Provision for mathematics, art and design and for using resistant materials in design and technology is unsatisfactory.

The school has improved satisfactorily since its previous inspection in 1998. Progress on the key issues from that inspection has been sound overall but insufficient improvement in mathematics and aspects of design and technology have resulted from the school's difficulties in recruiting teachers. Provision in art and design has deteriorated because known weaknesses were not remedied and the subject is now unsatisfactory. Where staffing has not been a problem, there have often been marked improvements in provision, for example, the very good improvement in physical education has increased the standards pupils achieve. Good improvement in science has raised the quality of teaching and learning. The increase in resources for information and communication technology as well as teachers' expertise has shifted pupils' achievement from unsatisfactory to good. Two good programmes have been developed to help pupils with specific problems in literacy and physical development. Attendance has not improved sufficiently and pupils' absence is at the same level as before.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

**Overall, achievement is good.** In Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11 pupils achieve well in English. Progress in communication skills is good, in reading it is very good and in writing it is satisfactory. In all years, pupils achieve very well in science by discovering much through experiments. Overall, achievement in mathematics is satisfactory throughout the school. All pupils achieve very well in physical education and in Year 10 pupils' achievement is excellent in managing their mini-enterprise project. Achievement is unsatisfactory in art throughout the school and in the use of resistant materials in design and technology. The few highest attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 are not challenged sufficiently by some of their courses and underachieve.

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

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

**Pupils' personal qualities are very good.** The great majority thoroughly value and enjoy school and they behave very well towards staff and each other. However, their overall level of attendance is unsatisfactory. **Pupils' moral and social development is very good.** **Spiritual development is good** and pupils have a **good awareness and appreciation of their own culture** and of other cultures and are well prepared to live in a multi-cultural society.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**Educational provision is good. Teaching and learning are good.** There is a substantial amount of very good and, at times, excellent teaching throughout the school and very few lessons where teaching and learning are unsatisfactory. Teaching is good in most subjects and the very positive relationship between staff and pupils means pupils enjoy the challenge of learning. Subject expertise is particularly strong in science and physical education. Very good teaching in these subjects leads to thoroughly planned and demanding activities through which pupils systematically build very good knowledge, skills and understanding. The few lessons seen in French, geography, history and music were very good. Activities were lively and well resourced, which got pupils very well involved in learning. Art lessons and those in the use of resistant materials in design and technology are not planned well enough resulting in a lack of challenge and pupils learning too little.

The whole curriculum gives all pupils a good range of learning opportunities and these are very well enriched by wide variety of well-planned work outside of lessons. There are very good facilities in school and at its disposal to support learning. The provision for sport is excellent. The programme in Years 10 and 11 is a very good preparation for employment and further education. Staff support, give advice to and guide pupils very well. The wide range of pupils' needs is met effectively. While pupils are mostly well cared for, child protection procedures are not rigorous enough and reports to parents are inconsistent in giving information on their children's progress.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are good.** Governors are fully involved and keep well-informed about the success of the school. Their governance is good and they comply with all statutory requirements. The headteacher provides a clear direction, sets high expectations and is steering the school well towards new areas of work. The strengths and weaknesses of the school are very well known and used well to identify priorities for development. Although management is good, the steps taken to remedy some weaknesses or build on strengths are inadequate.

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

Parents have very supportive views of the school, giving great praise for the positive transformation in their children's confidence and for the progress they make. The large majority of pupils expressed equally favourable views although a few pupils and parents were concerned about bullying. According to pupils, bullying happens very occasionally and is dealt with effectively. There was no evidence found to show bullying is a major issue for the school or pupils.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Improve provision in mathematics and raise standards art and design and in the use of resistant materials in design and technology.
- Raise the achievement of the few highest attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Improve procedures for child protection throughout the school.
- Improve attendance.
- Improve the quality of reports to parents.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

#### Standards achieved in subjects and courses

The achievement of pupils in Years 7 to 11 is good, overall. It was very good in a substantial proportion of the lessons observed. Most pupils in Year 11 achieve the highest grade in Entry Level Certificate courses although the highest attaining pupils could achieve more by the end of Year 11.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well in science and physical education where provision, particularly teaching, is very good.
- Some groups of pupils achieved very well in the few lessons observed in each of French, geography, history and music.
- Achievement in art as well as in some aspects of design and technology is unsatisfactory.
- The small number of the highest attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 underachieve because of the lack of opportunities to pursue more challenging accredited courses.

#### Commentary

Results in the Entry Level Certificate courses in 2003

	No. entered	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
English	21			19
Mathematics	26			22
Science	30	13	10	1
French	23		21	
Physical Education	10		1	9

Pupils also gained Unit Awards in recognition for completing set assignments in several subjects.

1. The school's targets for achievement in 2003 present a mixed picture of success in the various subjects and courses in which Year 11 pupils were involved. Often the percentage of pupils reaching the target fell below the mark and this is a reflection of the erratic attendance of some pupils rather than significant factors in the strength of provision of the subjects involved. The same explanation pertains to the difference between the numbers entered for Entry Level Certificates and the number gaining a result as shown in the table above. However, targets were met or exceeded in 2003 in the results of courses in English, French, geography, history, rural science and physical education. The standards being achieved in each of these subjects supports the judgement that the targets set are as precise as is reasonable and challenging for most pupils.
2. A direct comparison with similar schools should be treated with caution as their individual contexts vary. However, the data available on schools for pupils with moderate learning difficulties shows that over 26 per cent achieve one GCSE at A\* – G while a very small percentage gain five A\* - G passes. This standard of achievement has not been reflected in the school's results for several years although its assessments and tests of pupils' attainment shows there have been small numbers of higher attaining pupils capable of achieving more. The fact that they are not relates to a failure over time to provide an appropriate level of challenge for these pupils. The school has realised this and has begun developing partnerships with mainstream schools prepared to include these pupils in their GCSE courses.
3. Overall, there is no measurable difference between the achievement of boys and girls. The very small numbers of ethnic minority pupils or those in the care of the local authority benefit as greatly as all others from the school's good provision and very positive atmosphere. As a



result, they achieve as well as others. The most significant group are those in Years 7 and 8 who now enter school with markedly greater learning difficulties and a wider range of additional needs than pupils in the past. Staff have a good knowledge of these pupils and adapt their teaching, learning resources and support effectively to meet their needs. Senior managers have responded positively to the changing needs of pupils by providing a range of training for staff, which has equipped them well in providing for more complex needs. In all these respects the school has achieved a good level of inclusion.

4. In Year 7 to 11, pupils achieve well in English. They reach good standards in relation to their abilities in speaking and listening, talking clearly and confidently about work and life in school. They achieve very well in reading because good leadership and management in English has succeeded in developing effective ways of encouraging pupils' interest and increasing their reading skills. When they have the opportunity to read aloud in public, pupils enthusiastically put themselves forward and read with confidence and enjoyment. Although achievement in writing is satisfactory, progress is not as fast as in the other aspects of English. While the opportunities for pupils to enter into discussions or to read are good in English and other subjects, this is not so for writing, especially in the use of word processing to encourage writing at length. Very occasionally, writing tasks are in the form of filling in the blanks on worksheets or writing short single sentences. Information and communication technology is used well sometimes to support learning and achievement, for example, the use of the Internet by pupils to search for information in history lessons. However, some obvious computer applications are missed which would raise standards, such as using WordArt to design lettering instead of pencil sketches in design and technology.
5. Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory. While recent examination results show that Year 11 in the previous year achieved well, current achievement is not as good. This is largely because of difficulty in recruiting an experienced teacher and the necessity of using several teachers instead, some of whom lack expertise. When teaching is effective pupils achieve well, for example in Year 9 when they consolidated their knowledge of different units of measurement. When teaching was unsatisfactory, work was not matched successfully to the greater demands made by Year 7 pupils and they did not progress sufficiently in understanding the place value in tens and hundreds. The absence of a mathematician to jointly lead the subject has also had the effect of limited co-ordination taking place on the steps to promote pupils' competence in numeracy in other subjects.
6. Pupils reach higher standards than expected in science as a result of very good and imaginative teaching. Pupils learn very effectively because of the large amount of interesting experimental work involved. Information and communication technology is used well in developing science resources and in pupils' science work. Achievement in physical education is very good as a result of the expertise of several teachers. Their skills and experience are very effectively deployed through a structured and detailed teaching programme. Pupils therefore achieve very well in gymnastics, sports and swimming. Years 10 and 11 pupils made excellent progress on the trampoline because they were given high quality instruction aided with video recordings of their performances. Many pupils develop to be exceedingly enthusiastic in sports and the many opportunities in and outside school for them to participate in coaching and competitions contribute greatly to their overall achievement. The very strong grasp teachers have of the learning opportunities provided by a mini-enterprise project meant Year 10 pupils achieved excellently in coping with the real challenge of starting and managing a business using normal commercial principles. Some very good achievement was seen in French, geography, history and music largely as a consequence of teaching programmes well matched to the interests and aptitudes of pupils who are taught with well-planned and imaginative approaches. In history, the subject is brought to life through the exploration of artefacts and in music pupils can practise on a good range of instruments.
7. Achievement in information and communication technology is good because teaching is expert and is also based on a very good knowledge of pupils' learning difficulties. Lessons are planned with sufficient detail to ensure that each pupil's needs are met effectively. Most pupils

achieve well in religious education as a result of the interesting and varied teaching they receive. Good resources such as religious artefacts are used effectively to stimulate pupils' interest.

8. While pupils achieve well in the food technology aspect of design and technology, achievement is unsatisfactory in their use of resistant materials such as wood, plastics and metal. The school has had prolonged difficulties recruiting a qualified teacher and while this has begun to be resolved; provision for this area of the subject is not developed sufficiently to ensure pupils make the progress expected. Overall, pupils underachieve in art and design because their work does not contain enough challenges. This is the result of a teaching programme lacking in sufficient detail on what pupils should learn at each stage. The work they make in clay is of a satisfactory standard in terms of the skills pupils have achieved in preparing and modelling the clay.

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

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Overall, they have very good personal qualities; pupils' moral and social development is very good; their spiritual and cultural development is good. Attendance is unsatisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils are very well managed in a consistent way and this enables them to develop very good attitudes to school.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to develop confidence, the ability to reflect and a sense of responsibility.
- The erratic attendance of some pupils limits their achievement.
- Pupils are given many opportunities to learn what is right and what is wrong.

### **Commentary**

9. Pupils enjoy school. Its strong sense of community cultivates their feeling of being part of worthwhile endeavours and pupils express this very clearly in their relationship with school. They value learning and, in lessons, they listen attentively and apply serious thought and effort to their work. Pupils get thoroughly involved in the extra-curricular activities on offer, which is evident in their participation in the many lunch time clubs available such as the choir and the reading club. They are enthusiastic about school trips, for example, the residential experiences to Brathay Hall in the Lake District and the biennial visit to Germany. Staff are very caring and committed to pupils and there are excellent relationships between pupils and staff in which all pupils feel supported, valued and well cared for. There is a great feeling of trust between pupils and staff. Year 9 and 11 pupils discussed the way they are very well supported in school. A School Council has been formed recently and is helping pupils make a positive contribution to life in school. Consequently, in lessons, pupils are keen to improve and they work hard to meet their targets.
10. Pupils' very good response to school leads to greater maturity. Relationships are excellent; the everyday interactions between staff and pupils as well as between pupils themselves are extremely positive, reinforcing the high regard with which all are held. For the very few pupils who display difficult behaviours and find concentration difficult staff work well together to consistently reinforce good behaviour. Isolated incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and efficiently. No pupils were excluded from attending school either temporarily or permanently in the last full school year.
11. Pupils develop a very good understanding of right and wrong because staff are very good role models, showing respect and concern for the individual needs of all pupils. In addition, pupils are taught effectively about wider moral issues during lessons in many subjects. In personal, social and health education, for example, Year 7 pupils were encouraged to talk about

friendships and the reasons to avoid making friends with the wrong sorts of people who could lead them into trouble. There is a list of 'right and wrongs' in every classroom. Spirituality is promoted well through subjects such as religious education and music. However, there is less emphasis in assemblies although there is regular prayer. The curriculum promotes a good understanding of pupils' own culture and that of other cultures. Visitors to the school represent a variety of different ethnic groups and include authors, musicians and actors. A good emphasis on developing pupils' awareness and appreciation of a multi-cultural society is achieved through the attention to developing resources in several subjects that reflect the diversity of cultures in Britain and across the world.

## Attendance

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	10.4%	School data	5.6%
National data	8.2%	National data	2.1%

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

12. Attendance is unsatisfactory. The attendance records show the number of unauthorised absences is above average and the overall attendance rate is below that of similar schools nationally. However, there is a greater similarity with the rates of attendance in schools locally. A number of pupils are admitted who have had a previous history of poor attendance and, while the school takes reasonable steps to encourage these pupils to attend, currently it is having only a minimal impact on attendance overall. The picture was similar at the time of the previous inspection and since then, while there has been a small percentage increase in attendance, the improvement, overall, is unsatisfactory. Punctuality is generally satisfactory.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is good. Pupils are taught well, overall, but very effectively in a substantial number of their lessons. They have a good breadth of learning opportunities which are greatly enriched by activities beyond lessons. The provision in Years 10 and 11 is very good. All pupils are given very good support and guidance.

### Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching is good, which leads to all pupils learning effectively and achieving well. They learn even more effectively and occasionally to an excellent extent in a substantial proportion of lessons. Only a very small number of lessons had unsatisfactory teaching and learning. Assessment is satisfactory.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good in science and physical education.
- While few lessons were seen in geography, history, French and music, the quality of teaching and learning observed in all these subjects was very good.
- Learning is promoted effectively by excellent relationships between staff and pupils. Out of this comes a very high level of care and support in meeting each pupil's needs.
- The teaching of mathematics and art lacks expertise resulting in very little or no good teaching and learning as well as unsatisfactory assessment of pupils' progress.

## Commentary

13. While teaching and learning were also good at the time of the previous inspection, the current overall picture is one of good improvement. The proportion of very good or better teaching has nearly doubled in that time. In the context of the school's prolonged problems in recruiting suitable teachers for some subjects this is a notable achievement and one contributing to the School Achievement Award received in 2002. The school has a secure grasp of the strengths and weaknesses present in teaching and this knowledge is being used effectively to bring about improvement.

### **Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 60 lessons**

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactor y	Poor	Very Poor
4 (7%)	20 (33 %)	20 (33 %)	13 (22 %)	3 (5 %)	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.*

14. The school is well resourced with qualified teachers of science and physical education. These teachers use their strong subject knowledge with consummate skill to adapt lessons very well to the wide range of needs and interests of pupils. As a result pupils learn science through interestingly varied teaching which excites their interest and application. High expectations are not sacrificed by this; pupils are given considerable challenges in their learning but they are given the confidence to deal with these and, as a consequence, go on to achieve very well. They have learnt not only the skills of scientific experiment but also an understanding of chemical reactions. Similarly, in physical education teachers combine very effectively subject expertise and their knowledge of pupils' capabilities to what can be achieved. The highest expectations result from this and pupils learn very well through thoroughly planned physical activities in the gymnasium, on the sports field and in the swimming pool, that systematically build self-confidence, knowledge and skills. Pupils in Year 10 start out on the trampoline with little previous experience and, within a year, develop confidence, learn to control their movement and safely perform a number of skilful gymnastic moves and turns.
15. The outstanding features of the very good teaching in French, geography, history and music were:
- Lesson planning was clear, detailed and gave definite learning objectives to pursue.
  - The subjects are taught expertly and with imagination so that in French, for example, pupils conversed confidently and thoroughly enjoyed lesson activities.
  - Very good use was made of resources, often made by teachers themselves, to bring learning to life.
  - In history, handling objects from the past made learning immediate, real and exciting.
  - The range of instruments pupils play makes instrumental music tuition very enjoyable.
16. In all lessons the relationship between staff and pupils is of very high quality and makes an excellent contribution to pupils gaining self-confidence and increasing their esteem. Teachers and their assistants work together to support their classes. Praise and positive comments are plentiful and targeted where learning and progress are evident. This is a crucial feature in the minds of parents who have praised the school for its achievement in this respect. They describe in detail the unexpected gains in their children's bearing and happiness. Relationships work in an outstanding fashion in the Year 10 mini-enterprise project allowing teachers and assistants to adopt a similar role to that of pupils as managers and workers in the business. This very effectively ensures pupils take much responsibility and are at the forefront of decision making and action. This results in excellent learning about the realities of business and its management as well as contributing to pupils' education in citizenship.

17. The care and support given by staff are also about meeting closely the individual needs of pupils, which is generally done very well. English teaching is expert and good, which ensures pupils learn well to communicate and read. However, they are not taught to write as effectively. Although pupils' literacy skills are promoted well through other subjects, the emphasis in these is more on communication skills and reading than on writing. In information and communication technology care is taken to have enlarged print on the screen supported by synthesised speech for visually impaired pupils. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 present complex learning difficulties very different to the older pupils and make new demands upon the school's approaches to teaching. This is accommodated expertly and the training undertaken by teachers to prepare has been most beneficial. Teachers and their assistants have adapted lessons effectively for these pupils by slowing the pace of discussion and questioning, taking particular care with the choice of words and reinforcing vocabulary using repetition and writing new words on the board. Year 7 pupils have considerable difficulty concentrating but the very effective approaches of staff to behaviour management succeed in sustaining high expectations.
18. The difficulty experienced in appointing a mathematician to jointly lead the subject has weakened the teaching and learning of mathematics. Too many teachers are presently teaching the subject and some lack the expertise to do so. The lack of leadership has meant also that weaknesses in provision reported in the previous inspection have not been properly resolved and this is another negative impact on teaching. Equally, there has not been the leadership to see that pupils' competence in numeracy is being promoted sufficiently through teaching in other subjects. Some mathematics lessons are well-planned and the work is challenging and interesting for pupils. In other lessons the expectations are too low and pupils are given work that is too easy. Despite the fact that relationships between staff and pupils are always strong, pupils are left uninspired in some lessons and learn an insufficient amount. The weaknesses in the provision for art identified in the previous inspection have not been tackled effectively and this contributes to teaching and learning now being no better than satisfactory. The lack of expertise in art also plays a part. It leads to the planning of lessons being unclear on what pupils should learn and results in some unchallenging activities.
19. Since the last inspection, when the school's procedures for measuring attainment and monitoring progress were criticised, there has been good improvement. Following a great deal of training and focused attention, assessment is now good within most subjects. Using criteria appropriate to the nature of the subject, pupils' progress is carefully tracked and used to set targets. In English, the humanities, science, physical education and parts of technology there are effective systems in place. Tracking pupils' progress remains a weakness in mathematics and in art and design. In most subjects, however, the results of assessment are used to set targets and motivate pupils by helping them to understand how to improve. There are also now baseline tests taken in mathematics and English when new pupils join the school and a test in science is to be introduced shortly. This gives an objective picture of the attainment levels of newly admitted pupils, against which future progress will be measured. The head of lower school has built very good links with the schools from which new pupils are sent. These links provide the basis of assessing these pupils' needs and preparing for their arrival. The success of this is seen in how well the school manages the demands new pupils now make.

## **The curriculum**

The curriculum is good. It provides a wide range of relevant activities, which meet the interests, aptitude and particular needs of all pupils and enables them to achieve well. There are very good opportunities for enrichment through support for learning outside the school day. The very good accommodation, along with good staffing and resources, allows the curriculum to be taught effectively.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The breadth of learning opportunities is good and meets effectively the wide range of pupils' special educational needs.
- The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is very good. It prepares pupils very well for life after school.
- Pupils' personal development is promoted well through a wide range of opportunities during and outside the school day.
- Learning resources are good, particularly information and communication technology and music.

### **Commentary**

20. The curriculum has good breadth, balance and relevance. It has improved satisfactorily since the last inspection. All the conditions are well-established for all pupils to be well included in the learning opportunities provided. The planning of what pupils are taught is very good in physical education and science; it is good in English, information and communication technology, history, geography and French. The very good quality of accommodation and high quality of learning resources have been maintained; consequently, pupils achieve well. This provision contributes significantly to most pupils, by the end of Year 11, succeeding in their accredited courses such as Unit Awards and Entry Level Certificates. However, provision does not extend to offering the few highest attaining pupils more appropriately challenging courses. The school has already taken the steps recently to offer GCSE courses to these pupils and the well-developed curriculum for pupils in Years 10 and 11 prepares them very effectively for the demands of life after school. The difficulties in recruiting qualified teachers for mathematics and design and technology have resulted in limited improvement in both subjects. Provision in mathematics and in the use of resistant materials in design and technology remains unsatisfactory. Similarly, while provision in art and design was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, the shortcomings pointed out in the curriculum have not been dealt with. The subject has deteriorated as a result and provision is now unsatisfactory.
21. There is good provision for all pupils' special educational needs, especially for the range of more complex needs which pupils in Years 7 and 8 present. All the relevant technical aids are provided for pupils with sensory impairment and teachers modify their lessons well so that these children can access the curriculum, for example, by enlarging print and text and providing speech on computers for visually handicapped pupils. A good programme of support has been developed for pupils with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia). They receive focused support in lessons and are also withdrawn for specialised teaching. A sophisticated combination of traditional teaching and the use of information and communication technology enables dyslexic pupils to make significant gains, particularly in reading. Most teachers, some qualified in the teaching of dyslexic children, are now trained and experienced in meeting their needs in the ordinary classroom and do much to minimise the effect on learning. A complementary programme entitled 'Exercise and Learning' has been devised and implemented by the subject leader for physical education. The programme benefits pupils who find difficulty with movement, physical co-ordination and balance. Two teaching assistants have been trained and they work with small groups of pupils each day on exercises planned by the teacher.
22. The school has strong links with the local authority's 14 – 19 Collegiate, a broad programme of vocational education and college links that prepares pupils for making decisions about further education, training and employment. The very good provision at a local college enhances the vocational courses offered to pupils. This provision successfully improves pupils' personal development as well as increasing their vocational skills. Pupils mix freely with those from mainstream secondary schools and with adults pursuing courses. Almost all pupils take the opportunity to travel independently to and from the college, which considerably enhances their personal and social development. Careers education and guidance, work experience, college links and the experience of running their own business through a mini-enterprise project promote pupils' personal, moral and social skills very well.
23. Pupils' personal development is promoted well through formal lessons which include sex and relationships education, attention to alcohol and drug misuse and citizenship. Aspects of personal, social and health education are reinforced through the day, at meal times, playtimes,

on visits into the community, through links with other subjects such as careers, and a range of activities that include lunch time clubs for information and communication technology, music, living history, geography, netball, choir, reading, coffee bar and football. In addition pupils go on residential trips, in this country and some abroad in connection with a biennial trip to Germany. It also takes part in events at a local church and organises its own school productions.

24. The school provides all pupils with a very good range of additional activities, especially opportunities for sports. The school possesses very good indoor and outdoor facilities for games and offers boys and girls the chance to play a variety of sports. It also has extensive links with professional football clubs offering coaching. In playing football, many pupils develop great enthusiasm and some considerable skills, which lead them to playing in local and regional competitions. Lunch time clubs are very well attended, particularly instrumental music. The school choir is very successful and performs in many venues across the borough, the climax of which is taking part in the Manchester Arena choir of over 8,000 children.
25. The match of teachers and support staff to the curriculum is good; however, there is a problem recruiting a qualified teacher of mathematics and until recently prolonged difficulty in appointing an experienced teacher of design and technology. Resources are good overall and very good in music, information and communication technology, physical education and humanities. Accommodation is very good. There are specialist rooms for information and communication technology, food technology, design and technology and physical education. In addition to large classrooms there are three large areas set aside as leisure rooms for lower, middle and upper school pupils. The upper school leisure room has a very attractive coffee bar. There is an adequately equipped medical room with en-suite shower and toilet facilities. However, the art room is very cramped. There are attractive extensive well cared for school grounds.

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

Overall, arrangements for the care, welfare, health and safety of all pupils are satisfactory. The large majority of pupils are given very good guidance and support. The school has satisfactory arrangements for seeking and taking action on pupils' views.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The teachers have a very good understanding and knowledge of their pupils' needs.
- The school provides all pupils with very good opportunities to increase their independence.
- The arrangements for staff training in child protection procedures are unsatisfactory.

### **Commentary**

26. Relationships within the school are excellent. Teachers provide very good support for most pupils and have a very good knowledge of the individual pupils' personal circumstances. Form tutors play a very important part in the care of the pupils. Class books are well used as a link between home and school and the communications in them helps form teachers to be alerted quickly to any difficulties an individual pupil may be experiencing. However, the inconsistency with which pupils' progress is assessed and monitored across the subjects they study means they get less advice and guidance on academic matters than on their personal development. One result of this is that higher attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 are not directed towards more challenging courses. Pupils benefit from the very caring attitudes of teachers and from the good work the school is doing to promote their independence. A very good programme is in place to help pupils gain sufficient confidence to travel to and from school on their own. They are supported very well during this time and clearly benefit from their greater independence. The upper school pupils also benefit from the opportunity to study for one day each week at a nearby college. They mix with both pupils from mainstream schools and adults, and this helps to raise their self-esteem and to further their personal development.

27. The school has a policy in relation to child protection procedures and all staff are aware of the policy. While the school has child protection procedures these are not given a sufficiently high profile. There is no means in place to ensure adequately that all staff have received appropriate basic training or that their training is updated when necessary. The school provides a safe and secure environment with good attention to risk assessments.
28. The pupils have recently had the opportunity to participate in the School Council. This is the school's first attempt to give pupils a way of expressing their views in a formal manner. The system is very new and it is too soon to say how effective it is. Pupils take an active part in the School Council and play an appropriate part in the life of the school. Small class sizes and the excellent relationships within the school do contribute significantly towards the school being aware of pupils' concerns or views.

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

Overall the links with parents are satisfactory. The links with the community and other local schools and colleges are good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents are very pleased with the support provided for them and with the contact they have with the school. However, the annual reports on pupils' progress provided for parents are unsatisfactory.
- The school has well developed links with two mainstream secondary schools, and a nearby college.
- The school's good links with the community significantly enhance the curriculum and opportunities for pupils' personal development.

### **Commentary**

29. There was a limited response to the parental questionnaire, but the parents who did respond showed good support for the school and the work it is doing. They feel that their children are happy whilst they are in school and appreciate the help they receive from their teachers. There is a lack of consistency in the way different subject reports are produced. Both the styles and contents differ from subject to subject and the information for parents is not always written in an easily readable form.
30. The school has close and productive links with a local college. The college provides opportunities for all Year 10 and Year 11 pupils to attend on a weekly basis to gain experience and qualifications over a wide range of skills. The school has very recently instigated provision for its highest attaining pupils to pursue GCSE courses in partnerships with local mainstream secondary schools. There are good links with two local secondary schools and new ones are being established. This is a reflection of the growing confidence in mainstream schools of the effective work being carried out in the Alt Bridge Secondary Support Centre. The developing links also assist in the re-integration of pupils into mainstream schooling. Pupils gain much from their experiences of the wider community. The school makes good use of local museums and galleries and encourages pupils to participate in a wide range of other visits to enrich the curriculum as well as ensuring interesting visitors come to school.



## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The governance of the school is good and it complies with statutory requirements. The headteacher gives the school a clear direction and is effective in leading and managing its changing role. He sets high expectations and is well supported by an effective team of senior staff who ensure the school is managed well.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Governors play an active part in regularly evaluating educational provision, which makes their role effective in giving advice and guiding the school.
- The headteacher is steering the school effectively towards a different future and is taking staff along with him in creating positive change.
- Management throughout the school is effective in organising a purposeful and good atmosphere for pupils and into which they are all very well included.
- Monitoring is very effective in revealing strengths and weaknesses but does not always inform appropriate actions to remove weaknesses or build on strengths.
- The school ably identifies its priorities for development and pursues these effectively by good financial planning. However, success is not measured in terms of the benefits to pupils.

### Commentary

31. Governors are well-informed and closely involved, playing a positive role in supporting staff and pupils. They invest much in keeping abreast of the work of the school and maintaining close contact with staff. Governors, on an annual basis, participate in auditing the curriculum through a scrutiny of teachers' paperwork and discussions with subject leaders. This gives governors a first-hand check on whether the school's educational provision meets statutory requirements and also enables them to keep directly in touch with emerging issues. When it comes to approving the school improvement plan, they are well-placed, through their consultations, to comment on priorities and provide the challenge towards achieving best value for money. Governors added their weight to the provision of a comprehensive programme of training and equipped staff effectively to meet the needs of new pupils presenting more complex needs.
32. The headteacher is strongly committed to a clear set of educational aims, which are pursued effectively achieving good provision for pupils. Aims are well understood by other senior staff who contribute positively to good leadership. In many areas of the school's work high expectations are well-established and these result in some very strong teaching and learning. The headteacher has driven continual improvement well and, despite uncertainty about the future role of the school, many developments have continued steadily in a positive vein. Good partnerships have been developed with other schools and the potential for comparing performance with a similar school is being developed to further strengthen the school's use of best value principles. Very importantly, the headteacher has led well in keeping the staff in a positive frame of mind and assured about change. As a result, a very good atmosphere pervades the school sustaining the effective performance of staff and this is of great benefit to pupils who continue to achieve well. The headteacher has written a vision for the future work of the school and some recent initiatives dovetail well with the clear direction it sets, for example, the good programme of professional development for staff and the increase in the school's expertise for dealing with pupils' more complex communication, literacy and movement problems.
33. A good management structure enables the school to work efficiently. Staff with management roles perform these well, having a clear understanding of what is required. The deputy headteacher contributes well to management especially in supporting recent developments for school self-review and monitoring the performance of pupils. While these are in the development stage, senior staff and governors are kept accurately informed of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, this advantage is not always being exploited fully to

remedy known weaknesses - for example, in art - or build on known strengths such as the motor skills programme developed in physical education. Development planning processes are comprehensive in identifying principal priorities and organising effective steps to deal with them. The process reflects the school's clear grasp of the main areas for development and fully involves staff and governors in decisions. The financial commitments for improvements are carefully costed and budgeted and financial procedures are well adhered to, which ensures best value is considered in the competitiveness of contracts and purchases. However, the criteria for evaluating the extent to which priorities have been achieved are not tied securely to good measures of success; for example, actions in the current development plan for raising standards in reading and writing are not tied to measuring increases in pupils' performance in these areas.

## Financial information

### *Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003*

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	1,256,187
Total expenditure	1,246,123
Expenditure per pupil	7330

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	4327
Balance carried forward to the next	14391

34. The heads of lower, middle and upper school manage the school's pastoral provision effectively. Their work contributes significantly to the school's very good commitment to ensuring every pupil is fully included in what the school offers and that their needs are met. As a result, all pupils are very well supported. The head of lower school has developed very good links with the schools from which new pupils are admitted. As a result, these pupils and their parents receive a very good induction and the detailed information gathered on each new pupil helps greatly to prepare their admission. This initiative has made the school and teachers effective in managing the different problems new pupils are now presenting. The management of subjects is good, overall, while several subjects, where provision is very strong and pupils achieve very well, benefit from an especially clear overview and thoroughly well planned curriculum. Mathematics and art are managed unsatisfactorily. In the case of mathematics, the school, despite much effort, has been unable to recruit a teacher to jointly lead the subject and the leadership of art is ineffective.

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

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

### ENGLISH AND FRENCH

#### English

Provision in English is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Reading is very good throughout the school.
- While achievement in writing is satisfactory, pupils have too few opportunities for extended writing and word processing. The writing pupils are given to do is often unchallenging.
- The Key Stage 3 Strategy is having a positive effect on developing pupils' literacy.
- Speaking and listening are good.
- The assessment of pupils' attainment in Year 7 and again in Year 9 has a positive effect on their progress, particularly in reading.

#### Commentary

35. All pupils achieve well in speaking and listening. They gain the confidence to talk about their work and discuss a range of issues. Year 8 pupils described parts of the story '*Stig of the Dump*' going into great detail about the reaction of Barney's grandmother to him going into the quarry. Year 10 pupils discussed characters from '*Our Day Out*' with humour and empathy. In some lessons pupils, although listening well, are not given enough opportunities to discuss their work. In and around the school pupils speak politely and confidently join in conversation.
36. The achievement of all pupils in reading is very good, which is a good improvement since the last inspection. Year 7 pupils' reading is assessed when they first arrive and is tested again in Years 8 and 9. This test data shows very good progress in reading. The school has boosted reading by introducing a good reading scheme as well as a reward system, which acts as an effective incentive for pupils. As a result, all pupils have become confident, enthusiastic readers and enjoy all types of books. The lunch time Book Club for Years 7, 8 and 9 pupils buzzes with purposeful activity. Every year there is a book week when visiting authors such Allan Gibbons come into school to run workshops which the pupils thoroughly enjoy.
37. Achievement in writing is satisfactory, overall. It is not as good as in speaking and listening or reading because all pupils are not encouraged or motivated to write as much as they are to speak and read. Information and communication technology is underused to interest and support pupils in doing longer pieces of writing. Sometimes, in other subjects, pupils are only required to fill in the blanks or write short single sentence answers to complete unchallenging worksheets and this gives less opportunity for self-expression and creative writing.
38. The implementation of the literacy strand of the Key Stage 3 Strategy is beginning to have a good impact on all pupils' enjoyment of literature and on their achievement. The use of Big Books and more opportunities for pupils to study different types of books and authors is particularly effective as are the discussions pupils have about the books they are reading.
39. In 2003, nearly all Year 11 pupils gained the highest level pass in the Entry Level Certificate in English. Of the few who failed to achieve a result it was because of their absence from school.
40. Pupils throughout the school achieve well because teaching and learning are good. When teaching was very good, its particular strength was the brisk pace and variation in activities as

well as the very good relationships between pupils and staff. Praise was used frequently to motivate pupils and this encouraged them to try harder with their work and concentrate more. Support staff were well placed within lessons to help and encourage pupils when necessary. All staff know pupils' abilities well because they use assessment effectively when pupils first arrive to determine what they need to be taught and to check their progress in lessons throughout their time in school.

41. Leadership and management are good. There are two curriculum leaders over the whole department who have developed good planning for what is taught. They meet regularly and work well together. The improvement, overall, in English since the last inspection is satisfactory. The subject contributes well to pupils' social, spiritual, moral and cultural development.

### **Literacy across the curriculum**

42. Staff give satisfactory attention to literacy in their teaching of other subjects across the curriculum; for example, in French, as a result of pupils working hard on their conversation and pronunciation they improved their speaking and listening skills. Pupils are encouraged to read, for example in information and communication technology, they read text on screen describing paintings by Picasso and Matisse. Year 11 pupils read eagerly in religious education about the life of Nelson Mandela and in art Year 9 pupils were keen to read aloud in class the explanation for applying glazes to pottery. However, opportunities for pupils to write as part of their work in lessons are much fewer.

### **French**

43. Three lessons were seen during the week, in Years 7, 9, and 11. All these lessons were of a very high quality. Planning was exemplary and learning resources were very good, many of them made in-house by the teacher to match the needs and ability of individual pupils. Good use was made of information and communication technology in preparing worksheets to match individual need and an overhead projector presentation was used effectively to motivate pupils. Relationships in class were excellent and consequently the pupils responded very well. The teacher's subject knowledge was excellent and she used the target language predominately throughout lessons, supplemented by her very good use of mime, body language and humour. Pupils tried hard to improve their accents and pronunciations. They learned new words and phrases and were not afraid to use these phrases when replying to the teacher and having short conversations in class. This work enhanced pupils' speaking and listening skills dramatically. French makes a positive contribution to pupils' personal, social, moral and cultural development. Pupils achieve very well, take pride in their work and show obvious enjoyment in their lessons.

### **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **unsatisfactory**.

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

- In some teaching there is a lack of expertise, which makes learning unsatisfactory.
- The leadership and management of mathematics are unsatisfactory.
- Relationships between all teachers and pupils are very good and classes are well managed.
- Pupils show positive attitudes towards the subject, are conscientious and work hard in lessons.
- Assessment of pupils' progress and the use of the results to set targets and monitor the effectiveness of teaching are unsatisfactory.
- Recent improvements to the curriculum are providing a sound basis for future improvement.

#### **Commentary**

44. The increase in pupils' attainment in mathematics as measured in tests taken between Years 7 and 9 shows significant gains and represents good achievement. In Year 11 pupils take the Entry Level Certificate. In 2003, all of those entered obtained the highest grade. These results were a good achievement for the majority of those pupils. Earlier test results indicate that a few higher attaining pupils should have achieved more than the Entry Level Certificate was designed for. The standards currently achieved are not as good as those reflected in the 2003 results. Most pupils are now achieving satisfactorily. This is, in large part, due to the difficulties in appointing a suitably qualified and experienced teacher of mathematics.
45. Unforeseen staff absence has had an adverse effect on the learning of most pupils. Mathematics is taught by a combination of temporary teachers and full time teachers covering the gaps. Some of these teachers are inexperienced in mathematics. The majority of classes have had frequent changes of teacher, many being taught by a succession of temporary staff. This lack of continuity limits progress. These problems have also compromised the setting arrangements, so that some classes are now larger and include pupils with a wide range of attainment. However, the lessons observed were orderly and pupils worked hard. Some pupils were doing work that was too easy and were therefore not making enough progress. Many lessons also lacked stimulating activities and tended to be based on routine exercises. The monitoring of pupils' progress is made very difficult when teaching is being shared by two or three people.
46. Teaching is satisfactory, overall. All teachers showed a high level of commitment and treated pupils with sensitivity and respect. Pupils responded to these obvious efforts by behaving well and working hard at tasks, although they were sometimes uninspiring. The best lessons included well-prepared and stimulating activities. For example, Year 9 pupils, who had previously displayed inadequate knowledge of measurement, thoroughly enjoyed a lesson based on well-designed laminated cards used as a game. By the end, all could confidently distinguish between "millimetre" and "centimetre" and were clear about the relative sizes of all the main units used to measure distance, time and weight. Appropriate variation in the level of work given to pupils of different attainment enabled all in a Year 7 class to make good progress in mastering place value.
47. Prolonged unsatisfactory leadership and management have left the department ill equipped to deal with the present predicament. The joint subject leader, with support from the local authority's mathematics adviser, is working to rectify the situation. A published course for Years 7 to 9 has been purchased and is forming the basis of teaching that reflects the numeracy strand of the Key Stage 3 Strategy. However, its introduction is proceeding very slowly. Inactivity since the last inspection has resulted in unsatisfactory improvement in the monitoring of pupils' progress. Marking of pupils' day-to-day work is patchy and often unsatisfactory. While there is a baseline test in mathematics in Year 7, which is then repeated annually as well as on-going tests on topic work, the means to draw all the test information together to track progress is unsatisfactory.

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

48. Teachers are sensitive to pupils' weaknesses with number work and plan lessons carefully to minimise the negative effect on learning in different subjects. The lack of a whole school policy and associated training is preventing most teachers in most subjects from making a positive contribution to pupils' learning in this important aspect of the curriculum.

## SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good and imaginative teaching results in lessons that pupils enjoy and in which learning is very effective.
- Very good leadership and management, based on excellent teamwork and a very positive ethos, are ensuring that all aspects of work are well organised and efficient.
- All pupils achieve very well.
- The lack of a laboratory technician results in teachers spending too much time preparing materials for lessons. This limits the time they can invest in other aspects of the provision.
- Curricular arrangements limit the learning opportunities for the highest attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11.

### Commentary

49. The increase in pupils' attainment in science as measured in tests taken in Year 9 shows significant gains and represents very good achievement. Pupils often reach standards that exceed expectations based on their attainment when they join the school. The results from tests, confirmed by lesson observations and examination of pupils' exercise books, demonstrate a very good knowledge and understanding of the main strands of science. Pupils have a very good grasp of the structure and function of parts of the human body; they construct simple circuits and cope with the abstract concepts that underlie chemistry. Because of the unusual amount of experimental work provided, pupils have good practical skills and competently test a hypothesis. They have a very good understanding of a "fair test" and recognise the need to keep some variables the same.
50. In Years 10 and 11, all pupils are entered for the Entry Level Certificate. Recent results show that pupils are building well on their success in Year 9 and progress very well to higher standards. All pupils in the present Year 11 are working at levels that should guarantee success and most are in line to attain the highest grade. Pupils in one Year 11 class, for example, could name all the planets in the solar system and explain clearly how the movement of planets results in seasons. All pupils have access to a recognised qualification, which the great majority achieve.
51. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers are well-qualified and prepare lessons that are full of interest and based on excellent understanding of their pupils' strengths and weaknesses. The use of video, information and communication technology, practical work and very imaginative worksheets, mostly designed in the department, all contribute to successful lessons that pupils enjoy. Particular care is taken to ensure that the problems that many pupils have with literacy are not allowed to limit their learning of science. Pupils' confidence and accuracy using technical terms are impressive. The relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent. Pupils respond to their teachers' evident care with trust and affection and by consistently giving of their best. Every lesson is based on high aspirations. Their teachers' belief is stretching pupils to levels higher than they dare hope for and doing wonders for self-confidence.
52. Both teachers work closely together as a mutually supportive team. Morale is high and there is a shared vision of excellence, which is being rigorously pursued. The curriculum is designed carefully to meet the needs of all and underpinned by detailed schemes of work based on the science strand of the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Despite the lack of technical support, most lessons include relevant and well-prepared practical work that pupils thoroughly enjoy and which adds significantly to their learning. Pupils' work is always carefully marked and every lesson includes a final section that evaluates pupils' success. Regular tests provide objective

data to monitor progress. The information gathered is well organised, and used to monitor the effectiveness of teaching and set targets for pupils. Pupils are highly motivated by constant evidence of success in meeting targets, especially on the frequent occasions when they are directly involved in assessing their own achievement.

53. The lack of technical support, exacerbated by inadequate accommodation for the preparation of practical materials, places an undue burden on teachers. The time and energy spent on maintaining high standards of practical work are limiting development in other areas of provision, such as increasing the use of information and communication technology to enrich learning. The present curricular arrangements do not allow the grouping of pupils in Years 10 and 11 according to attainment. This effectively prevents the department from catering for the small number of pupils who could cope with a full GCSE course. Since the last inspection there has been good improvement from a strong position. Teaching, standards and management have all improved.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good improvements in accommodation and learning resources are supporting all pupils' good achievement.
- Teachers have good knowledge of the subject.
- The subject is well led and managed.
- The information and communication technology lunch time clubs contribute effectively to pupils' achievement.

### **Commentary**

54. The school has made a good improvement in the quality and quantity of learning resources since the last inspection; for example, all rooms now have computers. The accommodation has also improved; there are now two classrooms dedicated solely for information and communication technology. These are well timetabled and increase the opportunities for pupils to learn information and communication technology. As a result pupils are now achieving well.
55. The school has ensured all permanent teaching staff are trained, and many support assistants have completed basic training in their own time. Better trained staff impacts positively on how well pupils achieve. They are better able to support younger pupils in learning to use programs such as Draw and word processing. They support older pupils to improve the presentation of their work, teaching them to change the size and style of lettering, create highlight features or add graphics to their documents. Because of good subject knowledge, teaching is consistently good and occasionally very good. Lessons are well planned. Very good relationships in class mean teachers challenge pupils well and pupils respond positively. Pupils enjoy their lessons and take great pride in their work.
56. The subject is well led and managed by a very knowledgeable and enthusiastic co-ordinator. He provides good support for staff and meets with them informally on a regular basis. His monitoring of pupils' progress is particularly good, with analysis done by pupils' age, gender and special educational needs. Analysis is taken further in examining the progress made by pupils with or without computers at home. The co-ordinator uses the information to identify the type of support particular pupils need in school.
57. Pupils across the school, all age groups and abilities, including those with additional special need, achieve well and make good progress. Teachers know their pupils very well and pay particular attention to those with additional needs. For example, pupils with visual problems

are well catered for by increasing the size of the text on screens and additionally ensuring that there is 'speech' on the program. Pupils with specific learning problems are given extra help and support by matching specific reading programs to their individual need. This works well and is good practice. Not only do pupils improve their information and communication technology skills, but there is definite improvement in their reading ability as they read instructions from the screen.

58. Pupils actively participate in the lunch time information and communication technology clubs and find the work and games very enjoyable. Participation enhances pupils' competency, such as locating the correct programs, loading and running them, following instructions on the screen and closing down programs correctly. Pupils take advantage of these sessions to word process their work.

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

59. Information and communication technology is used effectively across the curriculum. The co-ordinator has audited the software available and catalogued this by subject as an aid to other co-ordinators and teachers to identify software which is useful and easily available to them. Interactive white boards are available in the core subjects to enhance presentation. In science, information and communication technology is planned into the lessons to stimulate pupils' imagination. Teachers make good use of the Internet when motivating pupils to research into the Victorians, to find information on Zeppelins and rainforests and to display a Roman villa.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

60. As only two lessons were seen in geography it is not possible to make an overall judgement on provision. However, in this limited number of observations pupils' achievement was good. Pupils study geography up to the end of Year 9. It is taught imaginatively and the school's locality is used extremely well to support pupils' learning. Year 7 pupils, for example, have drawn a map of the school site. Year 8 pupils understand what a continent is and name the seven continents and the countries contained within North and South America. By the end of Year 9, pupils have learnt in a very imaginative way about the rainforests found around the equator. During this lesson pupils used very good listening skills as the teacher described the structure of a rainforest which enabled them then to draw a diagram of the different features found at the bottom, middle and canopy of a typical rainforest.
61. The subject leader is extremely enthusiastic and imaginative in planning learning opportunities for pupils that are a good match for their needs. The good provision described in the previous inspection report has been maintained. The subject contributes very well to pupils' cultural, spiritual and social development.

### **History**

62. Only three lessons were seen during the inspection week and therefore a judgement on provision for history is not possible. Pupils' work and teachers' records show that achievement over time is very good. History is taught up to the end of Year 11 and includes an accredited course. In a very good lesson for Year 7 pupils, they learnt about how wealthy Romans lived in Britain at the time of the Roman Empire. Pupils handled artefacts – matching them to labels and, for example, described how a strigil was used and what was kept in a moratorium. Pupils found great enjoyment in their discoveries and such enjoyment permeated the history lessons seen in Years 9 and 11. Year 9 pupils learnt about Victorian school days through exploring and discussing artefacts. Year 10 pupils found out about Zeppelin raids during the First World War by reading first-hand accounts of an air raid over London in 1916.



There are good links made with other subjects, for example, with personal, social and health education and food technology. In the latter pupils recreated a Roman feast. By the use of such exercises pupils' awareness of others and their lives is developed effectively, which is a very positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development.

63. There has been a good improvement since the previous inspection when provision in history was good. The very enthusiastic and hard working subject leader, who teaches all history lessons, has improved learning resources. She has developed learning materials to fit with history visits for pupils to Chester and Quarry Bank Mill.

## Religious Education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Lessons in the main are effective and well planned.
- Religious education lessons contribute well to pupils' spiritual, social and moral development.
- Leadership and management of the subject by the two subject leaders are good.
- There is some over-use of worksheets which detracts from the quality of learning.
- The work done by Year 7 pupils is not always sufficiently challenging.

### Commentary

64. Most pupils achieve well. They learn about the major world faiths in a manner that is consistent with their capabilities and special learning needs. However, in one Year 7 lesson, where pupils have more complex learning needs than most pupils, the teacher underestimated the pupils' prior knowledge about the story of the Nativity and, as a result, their work did not challenge them sufficiently. The two curriculum leaders base what they teach on the Local Agreed Syllabus, SACRE and QCA guidelines for teaching religious education to pupils with special educational needs. This ensures each year group learns consistently over time. Very good use is made of a broad variety of teaching methods to engage the attention and interest of pupils such as when Year 9 pupils learnt about David and Goliath with the use of a simplified Bible story, key words and a cartoon version of David's life. A broad range of artefacts and role play is used to illustrate and develop understanding in the Christian and other world faiths, for example, in this way Year 10 pupils compared the Buddhist birth ritual to Christian baptism. The use of these good teaching methods means that pupils learn effectively and recall much of what they have learnt previously. There is, however, little opportunity for pupils to develop writing skills because of an over-use of worksheets. Worksheets also sometimes do not contribute enough to learning such as when a Year 11 group, learning about the early life of Nelson Mandela, were given too much information for them to read and understand.
65. Because of the rich variety in the teaching methods used and the successful attempt that is made to engage pupils at a personal level in the teaching of world faiths, pupils' spiritual, cultural, moral and social development is enhanced.
66. There are two enthusiastic subject leaders who have been in post for a number of years. They provide good leadership which is soundly based on good knowledge and experience of the subject. Training opportunities have been taken such as a course on Judaism at Hope University which has helped them appreciate the great link between Judaism, Christianity and Islam; there has been an audit of the subject including its resources; and a plan for development has been drawn up to help the leaders move forward with religious education throughout the school. There are visits and visitors to the school on a regular basis from different faiths. In addition, the department has links with the local parish church and Roman Catholic Church and there have been recent visits to a Mosque and the Manchester Jewish

Museum. These visits all help pupils appreciate the differences and similarities amongst the major world faiths. A comprehensive assessment scheme has been developed and is used continuously culminating in an end of term examination; these clarify and reinforce well what pupils know and can do.

67. The department has maintained the high standard noted at the time of the last inspection and has made good improvement. However, the contribution to pupils' competence in literacy, writing skills in particular, is too limited. There are too few examples of information and communication technology being used. There was a good example of numeracy being used in a Year 11 lesson when pupils calculated how long Nelson Mandela was in prison for and how old he is now.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and Technology**

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

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

- Teaching and learning in food technology are good.
- The Year 10 mini-enterprise project is very well conceived and leads to excellent achievement.
- Improvement in the provision for the use of resistant materials is unsatisfactory.
- As a result, some teaching and learning in the use of resistant materials are unsatisfactory.
- Food technology is led and managed well but the leadership and management of resistant materials lag behind as a consequence of difficulties in recruiting a qualified teacher.

#### **Commentary**

68. In food technology, the planning of what is taught is well structured and contributes positively to pupils' progress over time. The good progress being made by pupils at the time of the previous inspection has been maintained. What is intended for pupils to learn at each stage is written out in clear detail and this achieves the desired balance between learning how to design products and making them. This strong curriculum is a reflection of good subject expertise and teachers' understanding of the range of learning difficulties experienced by pupils. Year 7 pupils, who have very different and more complex needs than usual for the school, are managed very effectively. Expectations for good behaviour are made clear most sensitively with the result that the pupils, who struggle to hold their concentration, stay alert. Food contamination was explained to them in clear, well-paced speech and illustrated in an entertaining way using models of insects. This captured pupils' attention and meant they achieved well in knowing how harmful germs spoil food. Older and more settled groups experience the same interesting, effective teaching and achieve well. Year 9 pupils are involved in a challenging project in which they are designing a pizza and its packaging for mass-production including labelling according to the regulations. To do this they investigated the data printed on food packaging, for example, identifying fat content, and they know if this is healthy or not.

## Example of outstanding practice

### **A Year 10 mini-enterprise project that is exceptionally well planned and managed to give pupils a very real and worthwhile work-related experience and insight into business.**

The high quality of planning behind the mini-enterprise achieves a most effective simulation of a design, production and marketing experience for the Year 10 pupils choosing this course. The advice and support of Young Enterprise in assisting the project have contributed considerably to its success. The demands of management, the conditions of the workplace and quality control are painstakingly reproduced, all of which makes a significant contribution to these pupils' citizenship education. Achievement is excellent because expectations are exceptionally high; for example, the manufacture of a greetings card for all occasions by the pupils achieves a product of a commercial standard. The company name and logo on the reverse of each card is printed professionally with the use of a computer. A wide range of small decorations from many sources has been collected, combined and assembled most imaginatively on the cards and these achieve a very good variety of visually attractive products. These are packaged in cellophane wrappers ready for sale. Appropriately, teachers stand back and offer their advice. The pupils, who are also shareholders, have charge of the business and understand its profit and loss realities. They monitor their own productivity systematically and pay themselves accordingly.

69. At the time of the previous inspection the school was experiencing problems in recruiting a teacher to teach the use of resistant materials such as wood and metal. Their predicament was only resolved very recently with a temporary appointment of a qualified teacher. However, this has not given time to remedy the shortcomings that were identified by the previous inspection related to the plans for what should be taught and the assessment of what pupils learn. These plans remain incomplete, although the statutory requirements for design and technology are now being met. Teaching in this aspect of design and technology is satisfactory, overall. However, the weaknesses in planning combined with the teacher's inexperience of providing for pupils with learning difficulties leads to unchallenging work in some lessons. Year 9 pupils, for example, starting to design a flip book, learned a sound approach for setting out their work but were given too few resources to stimulate ideas, support their drawings or help them make choices. As a result they achieved less than they might otherwise have done. Likewise in a Year 11 mini-enterprise project, the absence of suitable resources to help pupils design lettering for their company name meant the standards achieved were too low. The potential of a computer program such as WordArt for raising standards was not recognised or used.
70. The co-ordination between the two parts of design and technology is not yet sufficiently developed to provide effective leadership and management, overall. The impact of this is seen particularly in the contrast of the excellent Year 10 mini-enterprise and the similar Year 11 project, which is unsatisfactory.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Art and Design**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils underachieve as a result of unsatisfactory leadership and management in art and design.
- Only minimal planning has been done on what pupils should be taught.
- Pupils achieve most making work using clay.
- The opportunities for pupils to gain accreditation by the end of Year 11 are far too limited.

## Commentary

71. Art and design lacks clear aims and sense of direction, which is already understood by the school. While provision in art and design has been scrutinised regularly by senior staff and governors, the weaknesses identified have not been dealt with effectively. The major shortcoming lies in the quality of planning of what pupils are taught. The written scheme of work containing the plans lacks clear statements on what pupils should learn in each topic of work. Existing guidance on learning objectives in the National Curriculum for art and design and in other publications have not been read and understood sufficiently. A similar weakness was reported by the previous inspection and, since then, far too little improvement has occurred. The art room is untidy and cluttered reducing the space and scope for creative activities. Also, because the art room is double booked for one period, each week one Year 7 group has to spend half of their lesson in the ICT suite and this wastes time and contributes to them underachieving.
72. All pupils are capable of the higher standards they reach in other subjects but underachieve in art and design as a result of not being challenged sufficiently by the work that they are given. As pupils are invariably interested and enjoy working in the art room and are proud of their results, they could be stretched much more. However, they are not given enough encouragement to be imaginative. The preparatory steps to making work are very superficial. There is too little attention paid to them gathering and exploring visual information to stimulate creativity. One Year 7 group had to rely on their very slender recall of the features of houses to design a ceramic plaque. When another Year 7 group were taken out to look at house facades first-hand, they had no materials with them to make notes or sketches. The absence of wider study means that the contribution art and design should make to pupils' cultural knowledge and understanding, especially cultures other than their own, is not promoted satisfactorily.
73. While the teaching observed was satisfactory, teaching and learning overall are unsatisfactory as a result of the weaknesses in the provision for art and design. Most observations were of ceramic lessons, the strongest aspect, as technical expertise and interest here are sound. Pupils are given simple and effective tools and techniques for preparing clay and, as a result, they roll out slabs of consistent thickness, which they shape and securely assemble into plaques and pots. Lower attaining pupils and those with problems using their hands to manipulate tools and materials get good support from the teacher and classroom assistants. One or two basic methods of modelling clay are taught although demonstrations are not well organised. Only a few pupils watch enough to understand and use what is shown. The same is true of other aspects of art and design work such as painting and drawing where subject knowledge is inadequate. Some Year 9 pupils enthusiastically read aloud the instructions for applying glazes to pots. However, the group was not questioned to see if they all had understood what had been read. There are too few examples and illustrations of good work available to inform pupils of the scope for what could be achieved. Expectations, largely focused on pupils completing practical tasks, are low and they are not given appropriate challenges, for example, through researching and experimenting as a route towards developing their own ideas.
74. The accreditation just introduced in art and design reflects the lack of challenge in lessons for many pupils. In addition, pupils in Years 10 and 11, particularly those who are the highest attaining, do not have enough time to complete a more demanding course.

## Music

75. As only one music lesson was seen no judgement on provision in the subject is possible. The choir was heard performing and instrumental teaching was observed involving brass instruments, violins and guitars.

76. The one Year 7 lesson was very well taught. Pupils showed a very good knowledge of the families of the orchestra. During the lesson they concentrated on percussion. They showed good control in hitting, striking and shaking instruments. They played well individually, in pairs and as a group, taking turns and sharing when necessary. They played loud, quiet, fast, and slow and kept good rhythm. They could identify the instruments visually and by the sound they made. Relationships in class were excellent and as a result pupils worked extremely hard and behaved very well. Very good use was made of praise and encouragement. Pupils enjoyed the teacher's very effective use of humour, which made learning fun. The teacher fully achieved her aims of pupils not only learning music, but 'learning through music'.
77. The instrumental teaching was of a very high quality and pupils made very good progress. This contributes significantly to school concerts, the choir's performances and other school presentations. As well as developing pupils' musical talents, the subject makes a very important contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school is rightly very proud of its wider achievements in music.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

Provision in physical education is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is very well planned and carried out, sets very high expectations and results in very good and sometimes excellent learning.
- All pupils make exceptional progress because of the expertise and enthusiasm with which they are taught. As a result they achieve very well and sometimes to an excellent extent.
- Physical education is very well led and managed.

### **Commentary**

78. Teaching and learning are consistently very good and sometimes excellent. The expertise in a wide range of physical activities, which is shared among several teachers, is very strong and this underpins very good provision in the subject. The written scheme of what pupils are taught creates a very balanced programme and every activity is carefully sequenced and set out in detail. As a result each lesson is very well planned in terms of use of time and what pupils will learn. This gives teaching great clarity and lessons get off to a quick and purposeful start. Teaching is enthusiastic and pupils are managed in a most effective manner. There are high expectations for good behaviour but most pupils have acquired very good attitudes and are interested in getting fully involved in activities. Year 11, for example, played football on the sports field through winter squalls with energy, enthusiasm and without complaint. Year 7 pupils, because of the greater complexity of their learning difficulties, are much less responsive to the teacher's expectations but the greater emphasis on them listening carefully and following instructions leads to their sound concentration and effort. Teaching approaches are adapted effectively to meet pupils' needs without any diminution of expectations to achieve high standards.
79. Achievement is very good, overall. In 2003 all but one of the 10 pupils entered achieved the highest level in the Entry Level Certificate examination. Year 7 pupils put much effort into warming up exercises jogging as a group around the gymnasium's perimeter and avoiding each other's space most of the time. They do very well in muscle stretching exercises to overcome their difficulties in balancing and co-ordination and go on to achieve very well in performing rolls on floor mats. During Year 10 and 11, pupils make exceptional progress on the trampoline as a result of expert tuition. Year 10 pupils quickly gain in confidence and acquire very good techniques to perform basic moves such as bringing a bounce to a safe halt. The high rate of progress is greatly assisted by the teacher making video recordings of each pupil's performance. Using the video clips, they together evaluate technique and this leads pupils into a very well informed effort to improve and on to excellent achievement. Each

pupil builds up a very good understanding from this of how to achieve success and uses their knowledge to participate in constructive discussions of each other's performances. Pupils' confidence and skills move on remarkably by Year 11 and each pupil's movement on the trampoline is very well developed. All pupils, and more noticeably girls, have progressed from the basics to performing good tucks and straight pikes and the close assessment of progress using video and evaluative discussions have supported this excellent achievement. On the football field, Year 11 boys demonstrate a very high level of sportsmanship, taking energetic tackles in good part. A few pupils play football with above average ability. All sustain a high level of effort and, as teams, occasionally control the pace of play, putting together well planned passes that lead to a score.

80. Very effective leadership and management of physical education have resulted in it improving very well since the previous inspection in relation to the quality of teaching and the standards achieved. An Entry Level Certificate course has been introduced. Physical education makes an excellent contribution towards enriching the school's curriculum, in particular, participation in sports. For example, pupils take part in football coaching initiatives provided by the major clubs in Merseyside and some pupils go on to play competitively in Knowsley and Merseyside youth teams. Boys and girls are given every opportunity to participate in the range of physical education and sports available. The co-ordinator for physical education has developed and instigated an exercise and learning programme aimed at supporting a small group of pupils who have difficulties with developing their movement and manipulation skills. Due to complications with the timetable, the exercise programmes are carried out with pupils by two trained teaching assistants when the co-ordinator is not able to monitor their success. This makes it difficult for both the co-ordinator and senior management to know the best ways in which to develop this initiative. However, a link has been made with a local college of higher education, whose Sports Science Department are interested in beginning research on the effectiveness of the programme.

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

The provision in personal, social and health education including citizenship is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There are good opportunities for learning in school and outside school.
- A range of initiatives such as the School Council, Healthy Schools Award scheme and Team Enterprise supports pupils' personal development well.
- A good quality programme of work which includes personal, social and health education, careers and citizenship permeates the school.

### **Commentary**

81. All pupils achieve well because staff promote pupils' personal development well in lessons and in other activities. Achievement is also good because staff know pupils very well and have such good relationships with them. Consistently good teaching of personal, social and health education leads to all pupils effectively learning social and self-help skills. Pupils in Years 10 and 11, attending vocational courses at a local college of further education, gain much from the opportunities for personal and social development this provides. They travel to college independently and mix freely with pupils from other schools and adults who are pursuing similar courses. Pupils in the school choir participate in performances in school and in public, which expand their personal experiences and development. School assemblies are held on a regular basis and ensure pupils consider a wide range of thought-provoking topics. A wide range of visits and visitors is provided as well as residential experiences both in this country and abroad. All pupils have at least one residential experience but in Year 11, four of six pupils asked had participated in three residential excursions over their time in school and described enthusiastically what were for them wonderful experiences and memories.

82. Every class in school elects a representative to the School Council and its work is developing well. The school has achieved the Healthy Schools Award, which has raised pupils' understanding and appreciation of a healthy lifestyle. Their knowledge of healthy diets is supplemented in science and food technology very effectively. At lunch time and breaks senior pupils share responsibility for organising activities such as controlling the flow of pupils into the dining hall and helping to ensure dining is a positive social occasion for all. The mini-enterprise project being carried out by Year 10 pupils is planned superbly in order for all the pupils participating to experience real responsibility for generating, managing and making a success of a business designing, producing and selling greetings cards. As the shareholders of the business they know and have to contend with the realities of profit and loss. As employees in the manufacture of cards they gain good work experience and learn the link between productivity and wages.
83. The leadership and management of personal, social and health education and citizenship are good. The plan for what is taught in personal, social and health education has been revised to ensure that the requirements for citizenship education are effectively included. The plan also includes careers education for all pupils from Year 9. The Connexions advisor (careers advisor) is an asset to the school and ensures all pupils have individual attention as they progress through the school and out into the wide world of work and further education.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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



