

INSPECTION REPORT

BARRS COURT SCHOOL

Hereford

LEA area: Herefordshire

Unique reference number: 117051

Headteacher: Mr R Aird

Lead inspector: Dr Eric Peagam

Dates of inspection: 10–12 May 2004

Inspection number: 259048

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community Special
Age range of pupils:	11–19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	56
School address:	Barrs Court Road Hereford Herefordshire
Postcode:	HR1 1EQ
Telephone number:	01432 265035
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr D Steele
Date of previous inspection:	October 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Barrs Court School is a day school for up to 40 boys and girls aged 11–19 who all have a Statement of Special Educational Needs arising from severe learning difficulties (SLD). Some have additional needs arising from profound and multiple difficulties (PMLD). As a result, pupils exhibit very low levels of attainment when they enter the school. Pupils come from a variety of backgrounds, but with a majority experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, and come from homes where English is the main language spoken. They are almost all white British, with very few other backgrounds represented. There are currently 43 pupils aged 11-16 and 13 students in the post-16 provision.

Since the headteacher took up his appointment in January 2003, there have been significant changes in the organisation, management and curriculum in the school and the effects of these changes are still working through. The school has achieved 'Investors in People' status and is now a recognised centre for undertaking a range of appropriate externally-accredited courses. In providing courses leading to the Duke of Edinburgh Award, the school also provides facilities for other pupils in the area with special educational needs. It also makes community provision for adult education by offering food technology facilities for students with special needs attending a local college.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Barrs Court School is a good and improving school with many very good features. The very effective leadership of the new headteacher is having a significant impact on improving the quality of education and in clearly defining the role of the school. There are a number of barriers to raising pupils' achievement, particularly related to accommodation, which are being addressed through substantial remodelling of the building and which are significantly mitigated, although not entirely overcome, by the high quality of teaching. This ensures good learning and, as a result, pupils and students achieve well. The school is providing good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The quality of leadership by the headteacher is providing inspiration for the staff.
- The very effective senior management team translates vision into secure planning and implementation.
- Teachers' assessment and planning, including the very effective use of support staff, underpin pupils' learning very well.
- Arrangements to include all pupils ensure that pupils of all abilities have equal access to the curriculum.
- Relationships, based on mutual respect, are excellent.
- The school promotes pupils' personal development and independence skills very well.
- Support and guidance, including advice on courses and careers, is very effective.
- Planning for the use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum is insufficient to support learning and develop pupils' skills.
- In spite of improvements, accommodation is unsatisfactory and constitutes a barrier to learning.

The extent of the school's improvement is good. Pupils are now making better progress because the curriculum and its assessment have been significantly improved so that work is carefully planned to meet their individual needs. The progress made in dealing with the key issues from the previous inspection has been good overall, although much of the progress has been recent. In addition to curriculum and assessment, particularly strong improvement has taken place in school improvement planning and in the way leadership and management promote the professional development of staff.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Overall, achievement is good. It is particularly good in the development of communication skills, including literacy, and in practical subjects, where pupils develop good experimental and investigative skills. Pupils achieve very well in a wide range of physical education activities and make very good progress towards the targets in their Individual Education Plans (IEPs). They make less, although still satisfactory, progress in the development of information and communication technology skills. Although pupils with the greatest difficulties make good progress in using technology to control the environment, most pupils make insufficient progress in using these skills and techniques to support work in other subjects. Students in the post-16 provision make good overall progress, especially in work to prepare them for the next stage of their lives, but they too make only satisfactory progress in ICT.

Arrangements to support pupils' personal growth, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good. Pupils attend well, behave very well and show very good attitudes to their work, the school, the staff and each other. Relationships are excellent and contribute very well to the ethos and success of the school. The system of peer advocacy works very effectively and contributes very well to the development of all pupils and students involved.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching and learning are good overall, with many examples where lessons are very good and some where they are outstanding. Teaching is lively, vibrant and firmly rooted in the very good classroom relationships that underpin learning. Matching of work to individual needs is very well supported by the very good work of fully committed support staff and visiting specialists. The school provides a good curriculum, which is still being improved and which is well structured to the needs of the pupils and students at the school. Arrangements for inclusion within the school of those with the most severe needs is a particular strength, as are the arrangements to link higher-attaining pupils with mainstream school and college courses. The school is well staffed and suitably resourced, but accommodation remains unsatisfactory and a barrier to progress in spite of substantial remodelling of the building. This is exacerbated by the fact that the school roll significantly exceeds the number for which the accommodation has been approved. Support and guidance are very good; pupils are very well cared for. They are provided with very good advice and are clear about what they need to do to improve. Very good partnership with parents and highly effective community links and links with mainstream and special schools contribute very well to pupils' learning.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good overall. The headteacher provides excellent, inspirational leadership and has a very clear vision for the school, which results in well-defined priorities for improvement. There is a very effective senior management team and staff with other responsibilities are very successful in carrying these out. Financial planning and management are very strong. Governors meet all their statutory obligations and are increasingly taking responsibility for the work of the school.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very pleased with the quality of education and their children's all-round progress. They attribute this to the dedication and skill of the staff and the strong provision for pupils' welfare and guidance. Pupils and students like the school very much; they appreciate being asked for their opinions, particularly through the School Council, and are very happy that the school takes them seriously in action planning.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Improve standards in information and communication technology to match those achieved in all other subjects.
- Ensure that all pupils and students have sufficient opportunity to use information and communication technology consistently to support work in other subjects.
- Address the deficiencies in accommodation and ensure that these reach at least the standards recommended for these pupils, provide adequate space for flexible organisation of class groups and make appropriate provision for the additional equipment required to support pupils with profound and multiple difficulties.
- Ensure that the number of pupils does not exceed that for which the building is approved.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

The severity of pupils' special educational needs means that it is inappropriate to compare the standards achieved with those expected of pupils of the same age. However, in relation to pupils' prior attainment and in terms of the targets in their Individual Education Plans (IEPs), standards of achievement are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Although the school's data on pupils' long-term progress is limited, records for the last five terms demonstrate good achievement.
- A very effective programme to develop literacy and communication skills results in good achievement.
- Achievement is at least good in most subjects and very good in several.
- Progress towards IEP targets is very good.
- Standards achieved in information and communication technology (ICT) are no better than satisfactory as a result of limited access to suitable hardware and software and the lack of clear progression in curriculum planning.
- Pupils do not achieve sufficiently well in the cross-curricular use of ICT.

Commentary

1. There is insufficient information available to make a reliable year-on-year comparison of pupils' attainments and progress, or to discern the trend in these over time. However, evidence from the last five terms shows that progress is good and, in terms of targets in pupils' IEPs, it is very good. This is true both for pupils up to Year 11 and for those in the post-16 provision.
2. The school has put considerable effort and resources into improving pupils' communication skills and this has resulted in pupils making very good progress by the time they reach school-leaving age. For those pupils with limited speech, progress in the use of augmentative communication aids is very good. In Years 7 to 9, pupils achieve well as a result of well-focused lessons in which the recommendations of the National Literacy Strategy are used well. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 make very good progress which is well supported by opportunities for practical speaking and listening activities, including high quality role-play. Students in the post-16 provision continue to develop their literacy skills well and make particularly good progress in speaking and listening, through taking part in discussions and oral planning.
3. Standards achieved in physical education across a wide range of activities are consistently at least good, especially where work supports personal as well as physical development. Pupils achieve particularly well in dance lessons, where they show good awareness of rhythm, and they effectively apply the knowledge they acquire through gymnastics to establish sequences of travelling modes and balances. Very good achievement is particularly supported through the use of subject specialists, both from within the school and outside it. Pupils with PMLD make very good progress through participating at an appropriate level, mirroring or experiencing the activities of the class. Students at post-16 make good progress to achieve well in a wide range of physical activities, including working alongside adults when developing volleyball skills at the local leisure centre.

4. In design and technology, achievement is also very good, including during activities with food. Pupils achieve very high standards in lessons, demonstrating high levels of creativity and expressing great excitement about their achievements. Pupils and students in the post-16 provision make good progress in mathematics, science, humanities, French, religious education, art, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship. In addition, students at post-16 achieve well in *ASDAN* courses designed to improve their life skills and prepare them for the next stage of their lives.
5. Although provision for pupils with the greatest disability enables them to make very good progress in using ICT to control their environment and develop decision-making skills, for other pupils, there is insufficient use of ICT in other subjects either to support learning in those subjects or to develop and practise ICT skills. As a result, achievement in ICT is currently no better than satisfactory. Some students at post-16 show good skills and confidence in using a range of applications, but, in common with the rest of the school, the lack of sustained opportunities, especially for the use of ICT in presentation, means their achievement is also no better than satisfactory overall.
6. Pupils make very good progress towards carefully structured targets in their IEPs as a result of highly individualised planning for, and monitoring of, their progress. Targets are carefully and clearly set, in conjunction with parents and, where appropriate, pupils. Work is carefully planned to move pupils on, and very good assessment, particularly in literacy, numeracy and personal development, ensures that targets are frequently reviewed and updated. The pupils with PMLD make good and, in some areas, very good progress towards the targets set, as a result of being very well supported in experiencing the same lessons as other pupils, with activities carefully planned to enable them to benefit. Higher-ability pupils also achieve well as a result of challenging and highly-motivating opportunities to extend their learning through open-ended planning.
7. Despite much very good teaching, the scope for pupils to achieve very well is hindered by the accommodation available. While the school does the best it can, classrooms are often too small for the large number of pupils in some groups. As several pupils use wheelchairs, standing frames and other equipment, the already tight space in classrooms and other teaching spaces is exacerbated; this results in learning time being lost, or learning taking place at a slower pace than would otherwise be the case.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The personal development of pupils, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is very good throughout the school, enabling maximum time to be spent on learning. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are also very good. Pupils attend well and punctuality is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The personal development of pupils is a strength of the school; this builds a supportive, orderly atmosphere and aids learning.
- Excellent relationships contribute to very positive attitudes and very good behaviour.

Commentary

8. The school's values are successfully incorporated into all aspects of school life. Adults in the school know the pupils very well; they have very effective means of raising the self-esteem of pupils who are lacking in confidence and enable all pupils to better understand themselves. This has a significant impact on all pupils' attitudes to learning. Pupils of all abilities are very interested in their lessons and the extra activities offered by the school and behave very well at all times. They show respect for all the adults they associate with and try their best to comply with the wishes of these adults. Pupils show pleasure in the achievements of other pupils in their class and they frequently spontaneously applaud these achievements.

9. Pupils take responsibility for each other, whether by helping willingly with learning, or in taking care of less mobile pupils as they move around the school. Peer advocacy is well established in the school and frequently is a spontaneous gesture from the pupils. This ensures that all pupils are able to contribute to decisions relating both specifically relating to themselves and also to wider school issues. Being able to be an advocate for a fellow pupil has become a significant means of raising self-esteem with some pupils and has re-engaged some pupils in their own learning.
10. Pupils work well together when paired for some activities and are always polite, to each other and adults, including visitors. When there are opportunities to show initiative, pupils respond very well. A clear example of this is the enthusiasm and interest pupils throughout the school are bringing to the development of the School Council. In discussions with members of the council, pupils demonstrated an eagerness to be involved, and named a number of topics they would like to consider in future meetings. Pupils are very involved in determining which charities the school will support and have been responsible for arranging and running social events themselves.
11. Social development of pupils is a high priority throughout the school. It is founded on pupils becoming independent people, self-disciplined and able to make choices in their lives. The pupils achieve this very well.
12. Provision for moral education is very good and pupils have a very clear understanding of what is right and what is wrong. There is explicit teaching about considering rights and responsibilities in different situations pupils might encounter and they are also given opportunities to consider historical moral issues. The behaviour code has been developed by the School Council. It is very well known by pupils, who also understand and respect the sanctions which are applied for unacceptable behaviour. These sanctions were also determined by the School Council.
13. Spiritual development of pupils is very good. Pupils are given many opportunities to reflect on different situations. At the beginning of lunch each day they have a special time to think quietly about an issue. Assemblies also provide a focus for pupils to consider how they would like to treat other people and, therefore, how to behave themselves. Spiritual development is also encouraged through religious education lessons, when a number of different faiths and cultures are studied to enable pupils to learn from different faiths as well as learning about them. Spiritual development is woven through all aspects of personal development as self-knowledge is the key to pupils' development in the school.
14. The cultural development of pupils in the school is also very good. Music and art have a high profile across the school and contribute significantly to cultural development. Pupils respect and understand the idea that everyone is different. Although almost all pupils in the school share the same cultural background, any different cultures represented are celebrated, often through music. The school brings visitors from different cultures into the school on a regular basis to broaden the experiences of pupils and visits out of school give some awareness of the cultural diversity in the area.
15. The school is a very supportive, cohesive, happy community and this, combined with interesting things for pupils to do, results in pupils wanting to attend. Underlying this enthusiasm are the excellent personal relationships that pupils form with the staff. Teachers and support staff take great care to understand the needs of their pupils and encourage and support them to understand themselves and their feelings. There are occasions when the behaviour of some pupils could be very disruptive to their classmates. The school staff deal with these situations skilfully so as to minimise the disruption, but the pupils also make a major contribution as they continue to concentrate on their work to the best of their ability. Because staff learn quickly how to manage any behaviour that threatens to disrupt learning, a

noticeable bond develops between the adults and the pupils in their charge. This results in all pupils developing very good attitudes to their learning. Pupils trying hard and concentrating well on their work is the norm across the school.

16. The strong sense of unity within the school ensures that students at post-16 continue to benefit from this provision and, as a result, display attitudes and personal development commensurate with that in the school in general. Moreover, the very good opportunities for taking responsibility, and the adult-to-adult nature of relationships in this area of the school, ensure that they develop and display a high level of maturity and independence.

Exclusions

There have been no exclusions.

Attendance

Attendance is good; absence mainly relates to medical needs and appointments. Pupils arrive punctually and lessons begin on time throughout the day.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	9.3%	School data	0.1%
National data	7.9%	National data	1.0%

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a good quality of education and in some aspects provision is very good. Pupils are consistently well taught and, in consequence, learning is good. The curriculum is good and well supported by staffing and resource provision, although the accommodation remains unsatisfactory. Pupils are very well cared for and the school links very well with parents and the community to extend pupils' learning opportunities.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are both good overall and are very effectively supported by assessment, which is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers plan very well for all pupils in the class and ensure they have the resources and artefacts to illustrate teaching points.
- Teaching very successfully promotes pupils' personal development as a result of fostering very good relationships within the class.
- There is a very strong contribution from outside specialist teachers to augment the skills of the staff.
- Teaching is significantly enhanced by the high level of skill and the very effective deployment of support staff to provide teaching that is very well matched to individual needs and abilities.
- Assessment criteria for individual pupils are established in planning and the outcomes are very well used for future target-setting.
- Teachers do not consistently plan for the development and use of ICT skills through work in other subjects.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 49 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3 (6 %)	17 (35%)	26 (53 %)	3 (6 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)

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

17. During the inspection, teaching was almost always at least good, often very good and outstanding at times. It was never unsatisfactory. All teachers were seen delivering high quality lessons and, in a great many cases, high-quality teaching was seen from support staff working independently. Teaching has improved since the previous inspection; while it remains good overall, the proportion of very good and excellent teaching has doubled.
18. There are a great many strengths in teaching, which continues to improve as a result of harmonised school-wide approaches to planning and the very effective use of assessment information to ensure that work and expectations are very carefully matched to individual pupils. This has the effect of ensuring a uniformly high quality of teaching for pupils and students, so that there are no significant differences in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment for different age groups.
19. Teachers and support staff have very detailed knowledge of the pupils in their care, and use this knowledge very well in ensuring that activities are planned in such a way as to include all pupils. All lessons are effectively planned to ensure that higher-ability pupils are given work that stretches them and, in addition, are offered encouragement to extend their learning both more widely and in greater depth through open-ended tasks.
20. Planning for pupils with PMLD ensures that they can participate fully in activities, mirroring the work of other pupils, while working towards parallel targets derived from the 'early thinking skills' assessment schedule. For example, in an excellent dance lesson, one pupil was able to contribute the sound accompaniment to the dance developed by her group, as a result of the planned use of 'soundbeam' equipment. The ability of all pupils to enjoy the full range of activities in a meaningful way is significantly assisted by the highly skilled work of support staff, both within the classroom and when withdrawing pupils for individual support. They work very effectively, taking high levels of responsibility for planning and carrying out specific programmes and assessing the outcomes. When supporting lessons run by class teachers or visitors, they join in activities with enthusiasm, providing very good role models for pupils and encouraging their participation in turn.
21. Teaching for students in the post-16 provision is also good overall, with teachers developing a distinctive style to reflect the increased maturity of the students. They provide good encouragement for students to take more responsibility for their own learning as well as engaging with them on a very adult-to-adult level. The coherent nature of the school ensures that teaching skills and subject expertise are made equally available to pupils and students, who benefit from the consistent approach from all teachers. As a result, learning in the post-16 provision is also good.
22. Teachers make very good use of the resources available and augment these by developing their own support materials, as in French, where the teacher has built up a wide range of topic materials, appropriate to the pupils' level of understanding. In a science lesson on plant growth, the teacher had planned well in advance so that he was able to demonstrate stages of growth in plants germinated over a period. However, there is insufficient consistent planning for the routine use of ICT in lessons in other subjects. For pupils with PMLD, there is good and increasing use of ICT for basic communication needs and to enable them to control elements

in their environment. Good use is made in some classes of CD-ROMs and the Internet for research, but opportunities to use computer technology for communication and presentation are missed as a result of a lack of confidence by staff and the fact that the routine use of computers is not established.

23. The school is very effective in enabling support staff to identify and deploy additional skills that are used to enrich the curriculum. It provides opportunities for staff to take on additional responsibilities that extend pupils' opportunities and ensure consistent focused approaches to learning in these additional areas. As a result, staff develop and display a high level of expertise across the curriculum, being very effective in supporting, for example, communication, early thinking skills, ICT, work-related learning and independent travel. In physical education, pupils achieve well in the structured use of the trampoline as a result of the skilled coaching they receive from a member of the support staff.
24. In addition to the very effective use of its own staff, the school enhances the quality of teaching well through providing access for pupils and students to a wide range of outside specialist teaching, whether on-site, as with music and physical education, or at other venues such as mainstream schools, the local further education college or the local education authority (LEA) teachers' centre. Physical education is well supported by the effective partnership between school staff and input from, for example, the disability sports co-ordinator. Similarly, pupils' excellent progress in dance is sustained by the very effective way in which the specialist skills of the visiting teacher are used to stimulate and underpin the work of school staff in the lessons. Staff make very effective use of a range of settings outside the school to provide practical contexts for good teaching. Older pupils, in particular, learn well as a result of the opportunities provided by structured work-related teaching, for example in a commercial kitchen or on a local farm.
25. One of the most important reasons why pupils learn well is the high quality of relationships within the classroom. All staff display highly positive attitudes to the pupils and to one another and this creates a climate in which self-confidence and self-esteem flourishes. Relationships within the classroom are characterised by very high levels of mutual respect, in which all pupils, including those with the greatest difficulty, feel valued. High expectations of, and from, pupils are consistently met and confidence increases as a result of the genuine dialogue that is fostered. This is particularly true in the post-16 provision, where adult-to-adult exchanges are consistently seen.
26. Assessment, which was previously an area of weakness in the school, is now a strength. Staff make very effective use of targets in pupils' IEPs for identifying assessment criteria to be met in subjects across the curriculum and ensure that these are addressed in planning. Pupils have very good opportunities for self and mutual assessment, both against measured targets in attainment and in the judgement of the quality of their performance. In the best lessons, very good use is made of the plenary session at the end of the lesson to review what has been learned and to enable pupils to assess the progress they have made as well as explore what they need to do next. A good range of assessment techniques is used, including the very effective use of photography and video to provide a record of activity and to subsequently assess the quality of a pupil's response. Increasingly, externally-accredited courses are used to provide an assessment framework against which pupils and students are able to judge their own performance as well as to enable them to progress towards recognised qualifications.

The curriculum

The curriculum is good with some very good features. Enrichment through the provision of extra-curricular activities is good but accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory overall.

Major strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is very well managed.
- All pupils are fully included in all the learning activities the school has to offer.
- Some aspects of provision are too new to have been fully evaluated as yet.
- The accommodation remains unsatisfactory, in spite of recent improvements.

Commentary

27. The school provides pupils and students with a broad range of learning opportunities which cater well for their interests and very well for their special educational needs. There is a strong curricular policy, on which all staff have been consulted and which has been shared with the pupils. The school fully justifies a time bias towards physical activities. Statutory requirements are fully met. Continuity and progression in the education of pupils is particularly well planned and secure. Provision is very well managed, routinely monitored and constantly evaluated so that there is continual improvement in provision. The school has responded very well to the national strategy for the education of pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9. Teaching and learning at this stage are fully informed by this practice. The school actively seeks to adopt best practice and takes informed advice from centres of excellence. The number and range of externally-validated qualifications open to pupils and students are a strength.
28. The school offers the full National Curriculum to pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9, with an emphasis on self-advocacy and personal decision-making so that pupils can learn to exercise some measure of autonomy and responsibility for what they choose to do.
29. The National Curriculum provision becomes more flexible for pupils in Years 10 and 11 as they embark on their examination work. The curriculum provides very good and coherent vocational pathways for pupils and students from Year 9 as it fully supports a very wide range of highly individual needs, matches aspirations, and builds on attitudes and preferences. Off-site learning is a particular strength. There are good opportunities for fully-supported community work and experience of work both in and outside school. There is good provision for pupils and students, particularly those with higher ability, to extend their horizons further. Some pupils visit a mainstream school to study GCSE art, for example, and learn science at a college where a laboratory and a teacher have been made available to them. Very good links with a sports college allow pupils to enjoy a suitable range of leisure activities. Other links include visits to the Japonica Project, which focuses on animal welfare and the husbandry of small animals. This forms a vocational pathway through which pupils consolidate and extend their range of basic literacy and numeracy and gain insights into possible future occupations.
30. The curriculum for students at post-16 is centred on the *ASDAN* programme for life-skills and independence and provides them with a very good preparation for the next stage of their education, either in further education or training. There are further very good opportunities for additional workplace and community experiences. Students are given good opportunities for real or simulated work experience, and activities, for example in numeracy lessons, prepare them well for managing money and other elements that will provide maximum independence.
31. The National Curriculum is underpinned by a very good specialist curriculum which supports pupils with a range of profound and complex learning difficulties, and aims, by sensory means, to give these pupils essential thinking and communication skills. Provision is so far at a very early stage, but individual planning is of impressive quality and already extends pupils' skills of mobility, personal interaction, emotional development and independent living.

32. The school provides good support for learning outside the school day by the provision of clubs for drama, dance and art. There are two Duke of Edinburgh Award courses. All pupils have the chance of at least one residential experience during their time at the school.
33. There is a good match of teachers to the curriculum. All are suitably trained and experienced. Support staff are well deployed, trained and managed. The school has provided extra specialist training for two support assistants who have now successfully taken on major responsibilities in the teaching of communication and the sensory curriculum.
34. Accommodation is unsatisfactory and, despite an ambitious building programme, unlikely to meet the standards set out in the relevant government document. Although there are a number of specialist rooms, the classrooms are too small, despite recent and ongoing enlargement, and the corridors too narrow. Any improvement in the size of rooms has been vitiated by the growth in numbers on roll; the school currently has 40 per cent more pupils than the recognised accommodation number and numbers continue to grow. The small size of rooms frequently limits the pace and scope of lessons and does not properly accommodate teachers, support staff, pupils and mobility aids. The narrow corridors mean that time is frequently lost between lessons as equipment and non-ambulant pupils are moved between rooms. Uneven floors do not treat wheelchair-users kindly. The hydrotherapy pool has unwisely been allowed to deteriorate over recent years and is now structurally unsafe and used as a store. Although the school uses a swimming pool elsewhere, it is unable to respond rapidly to the pressing physical needs of some pupils. Fund-raising has been started for a new on-site pool.
35. Resources are satisfactory. The school has all necessary mobility and communication aids. There is no shortage of computers. The school is aware that the library requires further books to fully support the National Curriculum and pupils' leisure reading and has identified an appropriate reading scheme to support this.
36. The curriculum has improved well since the last inspection. All schemes of work are now in place, and all statutory requirements met. Pupils, whatever their level of ability, are now fully included in the mixed ability classes. Inclusion of all pupils in all the activities the school has to offer is now a major strength.

Care, guidance and support

Provision for the care of pupils, their support and guidance and ensuring their involvement is very good in each area.

Main strength and weaknesses

- Trusting relationships within the school are excellent.
- Pupils are very well cared for in a safe environment.
- The school has very good arrangements for consulting pupils and taking account of their views.
- Induction procedures for new pupils are very good.
- Care plans need to be extended to cover the respite care which some pupils attend regularly.

Commentary

37. The school cares for pupils and students very well. It provides a very good level of support and guidance for them at all stages of their school career. Procedures for the care of pupils are very good and in line with locally agreed child protection arrangements. There is very good liaison, through the LEA child protection officer, with the local hospital and social services. Child protection training is up to date. The school participates in the annual review of all looked after children, who are well known to the staff. All have agreed care plans.

38. The school addresses the issues of safe and healthy living as part of the PSHE curriculum. The school nurse help pupils to understand some of the issues about keeping themselves safe, and the school is currently piloting some material prepared by the Red Cross designed to help them in this. A clinical psychologist and child psychiatrist visit the school regularly to deal with such issues as improving pupils' mood and self-image. The school fosters and supports all aspects of negotiation to improve pupils' safety and to pre-empt difficulties, and sets aside areas where a child suffering, for example, from stress may quietly recuperate.
39. The school takes great care to ensure that pupils and adults work in a healthy and safe environment. Health and safety audits take place every six months, with feedback on action points. All new staff have a basic induction on health and safety. All electrical appliances are tested yearly, and all sharp instruments safely stored. The school has clear guidelines on physical restraint, and staff training is updated annually. Medical waste bins are cleared by specialists twice a week.
40. Relationships in the school as a whole are such that every pupil has an excellent and trusting relationship with at least one adult. Some learning support assistants spend a good part of their time with one pupil, where trusting, constructive and very pleasant relationships were seen flourishing during the inspection.
41. School assessment procedures are very good, with the result that support, advice and guidance are particularly well focused. Pupils' targets are relevant and meaningful to them, based firmly on the curriculum and on evidence. All pupils' targets are linked with strategies likely or known to be effective, which are designed to enable staff to help pupils and students. Human resources are made available to support pupils in reaching a specific, particularly important target wherever possible. Strategies to support behavioural targets are particularly detailed, involving several, well-supported stages, so that progress towards them is consistently very good. The school is aware that care plans now need to be extended to cover the respite care which some pupils attend weekly.
42. Induction arrangements for pupils are very good. There are frequent opportunities for new pupils to visit the school informally. The Year 7 teacher liaises effectively with primary schools and visits new pupils in their classes. The transfer of records is reliable.
43. The school's arrangements for transitional reviews are satisfactory and look set to improve rapidly as the school adopts a new and more effective model, and social services become more fully involved in the process. The school makes very good use of an external agency which provides impartial guidance on further study and career opportunities.
44. The school has set up a very effective School Council, which pupils value because they are confident that their views are listened to and taken account of. In addition, the system of 'peer advocacy' works very well to ensure that pupils have a high level of involvement in, and responsibility for, the work of the school.
45. There has been a good level of improvement since the last inspection. The recording of fire alarm tests, criticised in the last report, has been introduced. Clutter has been cleared from the corridors. In order to improve the health of pupils and the safety of the environment, a secure boundary fence has been installed, and all doors to the building are now electronically controlled. The policy and protocol for the storage and administering of medicines has been improved and is safe. The school has secured the willing co-operation of the builders in keeping pupils and students safe in an environment which is currently a construction site, and procedures for this are very good.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The information provided for parents is very good.
- The school supports many opportunities for parents to become involved in their children's learning.
- Home/school diaries are well used to promote a full knowledge of pupils and ensure a consistent approach to their development.
- The school has very good links with the local community, which work to mutual benefit.
- Links with other schools enhance opportunities for pupils.

Commentary

46. Parents receive a wide range of high quality information and are kept very well informed about day-to-day events at school. Because the school serves a very wide geographic area and is a secondary school, there is very little opportunity for parents to have casual, informal contact with the school. To address this, the school will always attempt to meet a parent's request to come into the school for any reason affecting their child's progress or well-being. Staff always respond to parents' requests to talk to them and, if necessary, members of the school staff visit parents in their home to provide information and support. The formal channels of communication are very good. Annual reports for parents about their children's progress are very good, describing honestly what their child can do across all the subjects they are studying. Parents are fully involved in annual reviews of Statements of Special Educational Needs, and their views are used to inform the strategies employed with their children. On a daily basis there is a dialogue between home and school via the pupils' diaries. This enables both school and home to respond to daily events that they themselves have not been part of. This is obviously beneficial to the personal development of pupils.
47. There are two parents' evenings each year, in addition to the annual review meeting. The open evenings give the school the opportunity to consult with parents over developments in the school, such as the new policy for special educational needs. Outside agencies which are associated with the school also attend these evenings and provide valuable additional information and support to parents.
48. After-school clubs are open to families of pupils, who come along and join in the sign-along and trampolining clubs, for example. This is a very innovative way of drawing the whole family into supporting the progress and enjoyment of children or siblings. Extended families are also welcomed at formal training sessions in a range of augmented communication initiatives.
49. The school has very good links with a number of mainstream schools and colleges in the area and a number of these schools ask Barrs Court School to provide advice and expertise to benefit individual pupils in the mainstream school. The high quality of the inclusion programmes some of these schools and colleges operate with Barrs Court is a tangible benefit to all pupils involved.
50. The school has very good links with the local community. The local business community is very supportive of the school. It has made significant contributions to the school using its management expertise by becoming members of the governing body and by offering worthwhile work experiences for pupils. The school facilities are regularly used by the local community.

51. Students at post-16 also benefit very well from the partnerships the school has developed. In addition to those enjoyed by all pupils, links with organisations to support adults with learning difficulties enable students to develop useful contacts for when they leave school. These links are particularly fostered, for example, by joint activities with one such organisation at a local leisure centre.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are both very good. Leadership by the headteacher is excellent. Governance is satisfactory with some good aspects. A significant barrier to further improvement is the accommodation of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The qualities of leadership and management displayed by the headteacher are excellent.
- The headteacher has created a very effective senior management team.
- Day-to-day finances and administration are very good.
- Governors meet regularly and have a good understanding of the school's level of effectiveness. They are beginning to find out for themselves how things are doing but still rely on the headteacher for much of their information.

Commentary

52. The headteacher is totally committed to moving the school forward to achieve higher standards and inspire staff. He has established a very able senior management team that shares his determination that all pupils will make as much progress as they can both academically and in broader areas of their personal achievement. The headteacher delegates responsibilities very effectively to the re-organised senior management team. Staff appreciate this, take their responsibilities seriously, and, as a result, are working extremely hard to implement positive aspects to raise standards. A good example of the way in which the school has improved dramatically is its achievement of the Investors in People award within six months of the headteacher's appointment, indicating the way in which staff have been empowered. This is very good improvement since the previous inspection.
53. Good improvements have been made in the school's planning, resulting in tightly focused and structured plans for keeping track of progress in all areas of the school's work. The resulting information is used well to inform school and staff development. Staff development has a high priority in the school and has resulted in all staff producing professional development portfolios. This is good practice.
54. Staff performance management is securely in place and individual targets have been identified which effectively support improvements in teaching through lesson observations and constructive feedback. Teachers and support staff form very effective teams across the school and this has a beneficial effect on the progress pupils and students make. Teaching and support staff have good opportunities to take part in a wide range of appropriate training opportunities. The responsibilities of staff are well known to them and they accept them enthusiastically. Staff induction is well structured and much appreciated by new staff, and ensures that they get to know about the school and pupils as quickly as possible.
55. The governing body takes its responsibilities seriously and ensures all statutory requirements are fully met. There is now a full governing body and recent recruits bring additional expertise to the membership, from both a medical and a business community standpoint. Governors are committed to the school and have considerable empathy with the pupils and their special educational needs. They are very supportive of the school and have very good relationships with the headteacher and the staff.

56. Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, but this is largely derived from the information provided by the headteacher and there is a limited tradition of monitoring and evaluating on their own account. The chair of the governing body is a regular visitor to the school, and others are beginning to follow his example to see how the school works. However, the governors need to develop this further in order to carry out their role more effectively
57. The most significant aids to raising achievement during the last 18 months have been the significantly improved leadership and management, including the setting up of a new effective senior management team, the improvement in the curriculum and the assessment of pupils of all abilities, and the improved quality of teaching and learning across the school, enhanced by the setting up of more secure individual targets for pupils. A barrier to school improvement is the accommodation, which is unsatisfactory in spite of the school spending considerable sums of money to improve it. This is further compounded by the fact that the school has around forty per cent more than the approved number of pupils.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	886,294
Total expenditure	967,073
Expenditure per pupil	17,269

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	229,978
Balance carried forward to the next	149,199

58. Financial management was weak at the time of the previous inspection, with the school carrying forward a very large balance for which there was no clearly identified purpose. As a result, pupils were not benefiting from up to 25 per cent of the funds allocated to the school to meet their needs. This situation has continued until recently, when, under the leadership of the new headteacher, the balance has been significantly reduced. The figures for last year include a significant contingency item related to building works and the balance carried forward similarly includes £89,000 for current building works. When these figures are taken into account, along with the actual costs of building work, the figure carried forward falls to below £60,000 (or 6.8 per cent of the budget) and the real expenditure per pupil is £14,912, which is in line with the average for a school of this type.
59. There are clear links between the school's priorities and its financial planning. The headteacher and governing body give appropriately careful consideration to the outcome of their spending decisions. School administration staff keep all accounts well and provide good quality support and information for the headteacher and governing body. The latest auditor's report confirms the high quality of practice and made only minor recommendations for improvement, which have been fully implemented.
60. The school has developed good systems for consulting with parents, pupils and the community to ensure that it meets their aspirations. The shared commitment of staff ensures that pupils' needs are met. The school is working to develop reliable ways of comparing its effectiveness with that of similar schools, but has so far been hampered by the absence of data. Governors take good care to ensure that they achieve good value when spending money, comparing price with quality, and the school is constantly reviewing its role, provision and effectiveness to ensure that the principles of 'Best Value' are met. High morale and an excellent ethos in the school have been key factors in this improvement and in raising pupils' achievements. Taking into account the good levels of achievement, the school gives good value for money.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Literacy and communication

Provision in literacy and communication is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Management is very good.
- The curriculum caters very well for a wide range of communication needs.
- The quality of expertise within the school is very high.
- Some book resources require further development.
- The use of ICT could be developed further.

Commentary

61. Pupils make a consistently good and often very good achievement in literacy and communication during their time at the school. This is because assessment is thorough, pupils' targets plainly show the next steps in learning and lesson planning for each pupil is of a very high standard. This planning is fully informed by the high quality of specialist knowledge, including that of a highly effective learning assistant specially trained in methods of communication.
62. By the end of Year 9, pupils have made a good level of achievement in well-focussed lessons in which the recommendations of the National Literacy Strategy have been well used. All can tell their news, some by means of augmented methods of communication. All are helped to write this news. High-achievers write simple words and phrases, others make good achievement by writing recognisable letter shapes between two lines. Pupils enjoy stories by the end of Year 9, and have some understanding of the big books, sometimes through objects they can touch or by recorded sounds. Response of lower-achievers ranges from intermittent eye-pointing to making choices to demonstrate their understanding. In drama, they identify school-based fears which they are helped to articulate and to act out.
63. Pupils have made a very good level of achievement by the end of Year 11, particularly in their capacity to interact appropriately with others. This is partly the result of good opportunities for role-playing, in which well-supervised small group work leads to confident presentation. In a lesson in Years 10 and 11, pupils were successfully learning how to make a socially acceptable complaint that was likely to be listened to and acted upon. Almost all pupils can read, with help, for pleasure and information and all enjoy looking at books. High-achievers write simple continuous prose with some attention to full stops but inaccurate use of capital letters. Lower-achievers copy and over-write words and phrases.
64. Teaching is consistently well planned, and well focused. Resources are appropriate and well suited to the needs of pupils and students. Support staff are well deployed. Appropriate, constructive relationships are key strengths in the teaching and learning. Pupils are interested in the lessons, and show themselves capable of extended periods of concentration.
65. Excellent teaching and learning were seen in a reading lesson for the younger pupils on "The shark and the shipwreck". The simple rhyming tale was a great success and held pupils' attention. A simple blackboard game concentrated their minds on key words. Sound effects

were used to help the understanding of the less able, and there was a good selection of model sea creatures and objects of “buried treasure” to further aid understanding and improve learning and concentration. The lesson was rigorous in its systematic teaching of parts of speech. Writing was supported by individually-prepared worksheets, so that all could take part in this learning activity, including the lowest achievers, who were helped to focus on the models of sea creatures and make choices regarding them.

66. Management of literacy and communication throughout the curriculum is very good. The co-ordinator’s knowledge of early communication has fed into and fully informed all planning. Communication is supported by well-organised use of symbols and other aids such as picture exchange cards. There is very well-informed teaching of phonics. A wide and suitable range of alternative aids, the use of which is carefully monitored, further supports communication. Pupils with PMLD are enabled to communicate by a range of switches. Sign language is currently being taught to staff and pupils as a whole-school priority. There are valuable inputs from the LEA literacy advisor. The school is aware that the use of information and communication technology could be developed more extensively, although computers are used to generate the symbols which help some pupils to read.
67. There has been a good level of improvement since the last inspection. Curriculum provision for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 has been a priority and is now very good. Augmented communication is now well used. Planning, criticised in the last report, is now securely based on reliable assessment procedures and is very good. The library area now contains a satisfactory number of books, and there are plans to develop it further to more fully support pupils’ leisure reading.

Literacy across the curriculum

68. The teaching of literacy across the curriculum is good in all classes. All staff know pupils’ literacy and communication targets, so that appropriate support and challenge are well planned.

FRENCH

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is enthusiastic, lively and well supported by other members of staff.
- The curriculum is well matched to the needs of the pupils.
- Acquisition of vocabulary is well supported by active learning experiences.
- Good use of high quality, specifically-prepared resources keeps pupils interested and motivated.

Commentary

69. Although there were limited opportunities to observe French lessons during the inspection, from the evidence of those seen and from discussions with staff and pupils, it is clear that standards of achievement are good. Pupils are making good progress in French because they enjoy the lessons and are very well motivated by the activities that occur in lessons. They are steadily acquiring a basic vocabulary that relates to everyday life and events and, in the process, are gaining confidence in speaking the language. In one group, pupils identify and name items of clothing which Yvette (a doll produced by the teacher) will wear on holiday and decide which items of apparel they would like her to wear. In another class, pupils are creating their own two-dimensional house in which they furnish, week by week, each of the rooms in turn. They select the items of furniture and specify the numbers of each in representing their own homes. Pupils develop an awareness of cultural aspects of France, through formal

greeting sessions and in singing well-known French songs such as 'Alouette' and 'Frère Jacques'.

70. Teaching in French is consistently good, and characterised by great enthusiasm that supports pupils' learning well. Although not a specialist, the teacher has sufficient command of the language for the level at which pupils are working and this knowledge is deployed well. Lessons are lively and well-constructed to provide a range of different learning experiences that hold pupils' attention well. Each series of lessons is supported by purpose-designed resources that provide a good balance of action games, role-play and oral activities. Stimulus materials, including good quality photographs and worksheets, also add to the quality of lessons. Learning in these lessons is effectively encouraged and underpinned by the enthusiasm with which support staff join in and provide good role models.
71. The curriculum meets National Curriculum requirements at an appropriate level, which is a significant improvement on the position at the previous inspection. Although there is more emphasis on speaking and listening than on reading and writing, this is appropriate, given the special educational needs of the pupils. Pupils record their learning effectively through drawing and assembling pictorial records and this supports the informal assessment that takes place in lessons well. All teaching in the subject is undertaken by a single, part-time teacher who takes responsibility for managing the subject and this is done well.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good** and pupils achieve well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision has improved well since the last inspection.
- Leadership and management of mathematics are very good.
- Overall, teaching and learning are never less than good and sometimes very good.
- National strategies are used well as a guide to good teaching.
- Support assistants are used effectively to enhance pupils' progress.

Commentary

72. There have been good improvements since the last inspection. The curriculum offered and the way in which pupils' work is assessed have greatly improved. Pupils now acquire knowledge, skills and understanding across a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum. This is as a result of very good leadership and management of the subject. The subject leader liaises well with staff through a series of formal and informal meetings. The National Numeracy Strategy has been implemented effectively. The three-part lesson works well, particularly the plenary summing up at the end of the lesson. The subject leader collects and collates relevant data relating to pupils' achievement, which he uses well to inform future planning. Because of this data the quality of reports to parents has improved significantly.
73. Overall teaching and learning are consistently good. In the very good lessons, learning objectives are shared with the pupils so that they know what to expect. The starts of lessons are fun with quick-fire sums to work out mentally. Pupils are encouraged to listen, attend and participate fully. Support assistants are used very well, often in a one-to-one situation with pupils who have more profound learning difficulties. In this way, all pupils are fully included in the lessons and make as much progress as their higher-attaining peers. Lessons are planned to be practical and realistic. A barrier to further improvement in mathematics is the size of the classrooms; this prohibits free movement of pupils around the room as there is just not enough space for pupils, staff and the huge equipment, such as chairs, frames and supports, that many pupils bring with them.

Mathematics across the curriculum

74. The school provides good opportunities to promote pupils' numeracy skills through other subjects of the curriculum. Good examples were seen in design and technology and food technology, where pupils used their numeracy skills to weigh, measure and time. When setting ovens they used their knowledge of temperature. In physical education, pupils counted how many steps and jumps they made, and in music they counted to the beat of the music. In their personal and social lessons, pupils plan shopping expeditions and actually go to the supermarket to improve their practical money skills. In art and design pupils recognise and use a variety of shape and size and in science pupils use their numeracy skills to measure. Staff encourage pupils well to use mathematical language in different contexts.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils develop good knowledge and understanding across all aspects of the subject.
- Teaching is good and well matched to pupils' understanding; it promotes curiosity and excitement.
- Science is well co-ordinated and there is a good scheme of work to support progression in pupils' learning.
- There are no specialist science facilities so that investigative work often takes place in already inadequate classrooms.

Commentary

75. It was only possible to observe two lessons in science during the inspection, but from these, discussion with staff and pupils, and observation of pupils applying scientific knowledge in other lessons, it was evident that pupils make good progress and achieve well. They learn well because they are presented with vibrant and exciting learning experiences, as when they learn about the conditions needed for germination of seeds and subsequent plant growth, which enables them to understand the horticultural process when they participate in the 'Japonica Project' at a local farm. They are enabled to relate what they learn to real-life situations, as they do when they apply their knowledge of anatomy when considering the reasons for, and the effects of, exercise on the human body.
76. Pupils apply and extend their knowledge of the properties of materials to culinary activities, as when they prepare the dish 'toad in the hole' and observe that some ingredients can be separated again, while others cannot. The excitement they find in investigations was evident in a lesson on magnetism when, having formed and tested hypotheses about magnetic attraction, they applied their knowledge to designing a game in which a concealed magnet is used to move a metal object about.
77. This commitment to investigative approaches ensures that higher-ability pupils have good opportunities for extending their learning and, as a result, they make good progress at an appropriate level. Similarly, the very effective support given to pupils with PMLD in practical lessons ensures that they are able to achieve well in terms of the sensory and communication targets set for them.
78. Teaching in science is good overall and very good at times. Teachers prepare their lessons in depth ensuring that they have enough resources and materials to enable them to make, and pupils to examine, all the teaching points that are identified in their thorough planning. Lessons are lively and conducted at good pace, with a very good balance between investigation and recording, and explanation and questioning. Investigation work is very well supported by the

high level of involvement of support staff, who work with individuals or small groups and are very successful in ensuring that pupils' individual level of understanding reflects their ability and previous knowledge. As a result, pupils show great excitement about their developing knowledge, and their successful investigations stimulate them to greater curiosity and questioning. Pupils are provided with appropriate formats for recording and storing information, although there is limited use of ICT for this purpose.

79. The school has developed a good scheme of work that provides a progressive structure that, in turn, ensures that pupils build successfully on their previous learning without unnecessary repetition of previous work. Assessment structures are well established and consistently used to identify the learning that has taken place and the quality of understanding. This information is then applied very well to planning subsequent experiences for individual pupils that move their learning on. Resources are generally sufficient and well used, but there is no dedicated accommodation for science. As a result, investigative work is largely carried out in classrooms which are too small to allow the free movement and different groupings that would enable standards to be raised still higher. Improvement has been satisfactory since the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The provision for pupils with PMLD to experience control of their environment is excellent.
- There are sufficient computers to enable pupils to have regular access and teaching.
- The use of communication aids for pupils who have limited language is good and improving.
- Teaching is not systematic and based on a scheme of work that enables teachers to plan securely.
- ICT is not routinely used to support work in other subjects.
- The existing ICT suite is unsatisfactory and does not provide an adequate learning environment.

Commentary

80. It was only possible to see two lessons in ICT during the inspection, both in Years 7 to 9. From these lessons, and from observation of pupils working in classrooms as well as scrutiny of their work, it is evident that standards of achievement are satisfactory.
81. Pupils make satisfactory progress in developing an awareness of the wide range of ways in which information is stored and in which technology is used to control and direct equipment of various kinds. They know that machines that are worked by electricity need to be switched on and that they can vary effects by use of devices such as a volume control. They use a digital camera to record experiences as well as a CD-player or cassette recorder to access stored music.
82. Most pupils show confidence in using computers for basic functions and are aware of the ways in which information can be stored and retrieved on them. In particular, they are confident when interrogating a CD-ROM or using the Internet to find specific information. They use simple word-processing programs to write short accounts and work with graphics programs to select and manipulate clipart. Higher-attaining pupils are beginning to combine text and graphics to present and illustrate simple ideas and events.
83. Pupils with PMLD make very good progress in learning to control elements in their environment, particularly through the use of the very well-designed and equipped multi-sensory room. As a result of very well-planned interactions with resources carefully selected and

managed to reflect pupils' individual development needs, they achieve very well in terms of the cognitive targets derived from the early thinking skills curriculum.

84. On the basis of the limited evidence available, teaching in ICT as a discrete subject is satisfactory. In the lessons seen, the teacher had good subject knowledge and skills, and used these well to assist pupils to achieve set tasks. Good use was made of informal assessment and feedback to enable pupils to make at least satisfactory progress in these lessons.
85. Although many of the shortcomings identified at the previous inspection, when progress was judged to be unsatisfactory, have been insufficiently addressed, particularly in relation to cross-curricular use, there has been some improvement in the subject as a whole. This is particularly true in respect of the use of technology for communication and to provide access for the most disabled pupils, which has been energetically addressed and is now very good. The school has purchased, and is organising training for, an interactive whiteboard, which it is planned to use to lead whole-class teaching in the subject. As a result, improvement in the subject overall has been satisfactory, and the school is well placed to improve further in the near future.
86. The school is well resourced in terms of the amount and quality of computer hardware and software, but is aware that these are not deployed sufficiently well to support good progress. The IT suite is unsuitable, consisting of a long narrow room, in which equipment is not accessible to wheelchair-users and which does not lend itself to group instruction. Until recently, there has been a basic inconsistency between the resources in classrooms and those in the ICT suite and this has discouraged teachers from making more effective use of the facilities. Much software is not currently being used as a result of lack of training for staff in its use and, in some cases, unawareness that it exists. In addition, attempts to use a nationally recommended scheme of work and its associated assessment structure have proved unsuccessful as it does not meet the needs of the pupils. These difficulties are well known to the school and the recently-appointed co-ordinator, in conjunction with senior management, has produced an appropriate development plan to address them, including a restructuring of the curriculum and the relocation of the computers currently in the ICT suite.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

87. There is some very good use of ICT for pupils with PMLD both in terms of communication aids to enable them to participate in lessons and in the provision of technology to enable them to gain access to the curriculum. In addition to the very effective use of the multi-sensory room to support learning in a range of curriculum areas, particularly communication skills, pupils have good opportunities to develop basic understanding and make simple choices through, for example, a touch screen-based program where they identify differences between pictures. In a dance lesson, a severely disabled pupil was able to contribute to her group's performance by using simple movement to interrupt an electronic beam, which resulted in sounds being produced. In a French lesson, a pupil was able to use a simple communicator to say 'bonjour'.
88. Use of ICT across the school, however, is less well developed so that pupils do not make sufficient use of it either to support work in other subjects or to refine and develop their skills. There is some good use of CD-ROM and the Internet for research and this is reflected in teachers' planning. There is also some use of word-processing to present material but this is limited and inconsistent so that pupils do not develop confidence in its use. As a result, the standards achieved in cross-curricular work are unsatisfactory.

HUMANITIES

Provision in humanities is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Humanities is taught as two separate subjects, preserving the identity of each.
- Teaching, learning and achievement are good.
- The history curriculum is broad and interesting.
- The subjects are well managed.
- Not enough use is made of ICT.

Commentary

89. One lesson of geography and three history lessons were seen for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9.
90. Pupils are making good achievement in response to well-planned lessons containing a range of practical tasks which pupils enjoy and can do. In history, by Year 9, they have learned how a Roman soldier was dressed, and seen a range of pictures of life in Victorian times. In their study of World War II, they have sensed the urgency of taking shelter during an air raid and have built their own model shelter. In geography, pupils have planted potatoes and made the connection between potatoes and the chips they enjoy. They have some knowledge of logistics as applied to food production and distribution.
91. Teaching and learning are always good, particularly when there is imaginative use of resources. These were very well used in a history lesson on the Blitz, when an authentic recording helped them to sense the danger of an air raid. In the geography lesson a local farmer (also a school governor) brought his potato plants, with authoritative instructions on how to grow and harvest them. Pupils learned from this that potatoes, when planted, grow into plants from which we harvest an important food.
92. The curriculum area is well managed. The history curriculum is adequately supported by a limited programme of trips and visits to historical monuments, including a mediaeval house. The school is aware that assessment and recording in both subjects require further review. Resources of good quality continue to be developed, although not enough use is currently made of ICT.
93. There has been a good level of improvement. The curricula for both history and geography are now well adapted to the needs of pupils.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching, learning and achievement are good.
- The subject is well managed.

Commentary

94. Pupils make a consistently good level of achievement in response to well-planned and sensitively-delivered lessons, in which key concepts are carefully addressed. Pupils, by the time they are in Year 9, realise the need to trust and to be kind to one another, and have been introduced to the story of "The Good Samaritan". They know that a church is a "special" place, devoted to Christianity, and that objects within it have religious significance. In Years 10 and

11, pupils know what prayers are for and what an altar is. They have experienced, in this context, a period of spiritual reflection. Some know the Lord's Prayer, and realise that Jesus spoke it in Aramaic.

95. Teaching is effective because lessons are well planned. Relationships in the classroom are very good, and there are many opportunities for communication and making personal choices, with the result that pupils improve their confidence and self-esteem. There are good opportunities for role-play, modelling and drawing which pupils enjoy and which help them to learn.
96. An excellent opportunity for spiritual development was seen following a visit to the cathedral, where pupils were enabled to construct a simple altar and write their own prayer. There was an excellent opportunity for recapitulation as photographs of the interior of the cathedral were circulated. A spiritual atmosphere was created in the classroom by the careful choice of music. Pupils read their prayers reverently, and pinned them above the altar, an activity which held considerable spiritual resonance for them. Pupils lit a candle for each prayer. There was an excellent opportunity for reflection as the number of candles grew. Symbols and printed words helped some pupils learn the Lord's Prayer. All had the opportunity to hear it chanted in Jesus' language of Aramaic.
97. The subject is well managed. The school makes good use of local churches and clergy to enrich the curriculum and pupils have visited a mosque. Resources are satisfactory, although the school is currently having difficulty in finding suitable multi-faith resources. A good start has been made in assessment. Monitoring of the curriculum, however, needs further development. More in-service education for teachers is planned.
98. There has been a good level of improvement. The curriculum has been broadened to include the study of other religions. Statutory requirements are now met.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

Provision for design and technology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are consistently very good, ensuring pupils achieve very well and make very good progress.
- Design and technology skills, including food technology, knowledge and understanding, are developed and consolidated well.
- Opportunities are taken to promote pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in lessons.

Commentary

99. Provision for design and technology has improved since the last inspection. It was deemed to be good, and is now very good. Good progress has been made. Teaching is consistently very good, with lessons well planned and prepared. For example, in a Year 7 to 9 class, the teacher had planned for half the class to take food technology and the other half design and technology. This overcame the very difficult problem of accommodation. Neither the food technology room nor the classroom is adequate to hold a full class for either subject.
100. In food technology, the pupils prepared for a 'class party' to celebrate the opening of their new classroom the following week. They made cheese scones, following the recipe prepared in symbols as well as text, allowed the scones to cool and froze them. This work involved weighing, measuring and timing as well as a good understanding of temperature in the oven. Pupils showed good skills in mixing and following the recipe. Meanwhile, the other half of the

class were designing and making 'Joseph's coat of many colours'. This involved much skill and imagination in drawing, cutting, sticking and gluing, using a range of tools and working together and concentrating for long periods of time.

101. Because of the excellent relationships in class, pupils respond very well and staff challenge and stretch them in their work. The teacher created a wonderful working atmosphere in class by playing, quietly in the background, the music from the show 'Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat'. Support assistants worked really well and supported those with greatest need in a one-to-one situation. This ensured that pupils of all abilities were fully included in the whole lesson; they all made equal progress and achieved very well.
102. Staff take every opportunity to enhance pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in a wide range of ways. All cupboards are labelled, in text and symbols, and pupils read these when fetching utensils and equipment. They use their number skills in all lessons, measuring, weighing, counting, timing and looking for shapes and designs. Design and technology makes a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
103. The subject is very well managed and the curriculum is well constructed to provide a good range of activities using a variety of compliant and resistant materials, including food technology. Resources and facilities are particularly good for food technology, being of such a standard that a local further education college uses them on a weekly basis.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Only two lessons were observed in art and design and so two in music and it is not possible to make an overall judgement on the quality of teaching and learning. However, there is sufficient evidence of pupils' work in art and design to judge the provision.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are introduced to a good range of media and techniques.
- Work is displayed effectively to raise pupils' self-esteem.
- Learning support assistants enhance pupils progress by the quality of support given.

Commentary

104. In both lessons observed, the quality of teaching was at least good. This was because the planning was clear and detailed, subject vocabulary was explained very clearly and used in context and very good examples and demonstrations ensured that pupils of all abilities understood what was expected of them.
105. As pupils move through the school they become increasingly aware of colour, texture and shape and learn to express themselves in a variety of ways. They make good progress to achieve well in a wide range of art activities. In a Year 7-to 9 class, pupils were making masks and used colour and shape very effectively. They showed a good use of size, shape and textures to make their masks individual. The teacher used artistic language very well, enhancing pupils' understanding of their work. The very good relationships in class allowed staff to challenge and stretch pupils to review and improve their work without upsetting the pupil. Consequently, pupils show very good attitudes towards art, work hard, behave well and show real enjoyment as they take pride in their work.

106. The subject co-ordinator is very committed and provides good leadership to staff teaching the subject across the school. This has been significant in ensuring that the good standards seen at the previous inspection have been sustained.

Music

107. In the two lessons seen, pupils showed very positive attitudes towards the subject. They sang enthusiastically and built up confidence and self-esteem. They participated excitedly in their singing, and followed the rhythm well. When given percussion instruments such as beaters, they kept to the beat well. This enhanced their numeracy skills as they counted. Relationships in class were excellent and pupils responded by participating as fully as they could. Lower-attaining pupils were given extra support from teaching assistants. This worked very well and ensured that pupils of all abilities fully participated in lessons.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils participate in a wide range of activities that promote their physical development.
- Very effective use is made of additional expertise of support staff and visiting teachers.
- All pupils have the opportunity for regular swimming activities.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 take externally-accredited examinations in using the trampoline.
- Teaching and progress in dance are excellent.
- The school hall is too small for many activities and slows the pace of lessons.

Commentary

108. The school sets out to provide an extended range of activities to support pupils' physical development through devoting a greater proportion of time to it than is usual for pupils of this age. As a result, pupils make very good progress in developing a range of skills and techniques which not only enables them to achieve very good standards, but also contributes very well to their personal development and self-confidence. During the week of the inspection, pupils undertook gymnastics, keep-fit training, yoga, trampoline, swimming, volleyball, football and dance. All activities are entered into with enthusiasm and pupils constantly strive to improve their performance. This is particularly noticeable in 'circuit' activities, where pupils try hard to beat their previously recorded best performance, and in trampoline, where they are working hard to meet the standards required for each level of the British Trampoline Federation awards.
109. Pupils show increasing understanding of the effect that exercise has on their bodies and they examine and compare the results of different activities on their heart rate, for example. Their awareness of this ensures that they participate sensibly and enthusiastically in the warm-up activities that mark the beginning of every lesson and take great care to avoid risk of damage to themselves and others, for example when moving at different speeds and changing direction.
110. Pupils make good progress in swimming, often from an initial point where they need to gain the confidence to enter the water. They work for a series of badges that mark their progress through basic water skills and lead on to, for many, achievement of the 25-metre standard. A few pupils become highly proficient and swim distances of up to half a mile and gain the survival award at bronze level.
111. Pupils learn basic ball control skills for a range of games in which they develop the ability to stop, control, dribble, pass and shoot, or, in the case of volleyball, to guide the ball over the net. They learn to travel in different ways and make balances and shapes at different heights, which

they combine with movement to make sequences. These skills are brought together very effectively in dance, where pupils develop, rehearse and repeat a series of sequences to create a themed response to music. Pupils of all levels of ability work very well in pairs and small groups, making very good use of support staff to help them develop and refine their ideas.

112. Teaching in the subject is consistently at least good, often very good, and, in dance, outstanding. Lessons are very well planned to build on pupils' previous work and take good account of the level of skill the pupils have already shown. Lessons are lively and, to the extent that accommodation permits, are conducted at a good pace. Lessons sometimes are less effective because the hall is too small to permit the number of simultaneous activities that would otherwise ensure that all pupils are fully occupied throughout the lesson. All staff play an important part in providing role models for activity and in supporting pupils' learning through very good oral assessment and feedback. The school makes very effective use of specialist skills of staff; for example in providing skilled support for work with the trampoline as well as bringing in outside expertise as in dance, or in working with disability sports co-ordinators. Overall, assessment is well managed, both in terms of measurable outcomes, such as in circuits, or in the quality of dance sequences developed. Very good use is made of video and still photography to record pupils' achievements and this is well used in subsequent discussion and review.
113. The subject is well managed and monitored so that development planning is secure. Resources are generally good and suitable for the support of the well-structured and varied curriculum, which fully meets National Curriculum requirements at an appropriate level. The school makes good use of community resources, for example for swimming, but the school's own pool has been allowed to decay over a number of years, to the point where it can no longer be repaired. This is a significant lack, particularly for those pupils who require hydrotherapy activities on a regular basis. The school has recognised this and an appeal has been launched to raise funds to construct a new pool.
114. At the previous inspection, standards were found to be good overall. The school has made good progress in maintaining and improving on those standards, in particular through the quality and range of experiences and opportunities that pupils are offered.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils develop a very good sense of community and value this.
- Health and safety guidance is carefully tailored to pupils' level of understanding.
- Pupils are confident in participating in decision-making, taking their responsibilities seriously.

Commentary

115. The school sets out to develop a very strong sense of community and is very effective in assisting pupils to develop appropriate attitudes and awareness. The message is constantly given, and lived out in practice, that this is their school, which is managed on their behalf by the staff, so that they become confident in setting forth their aspirations and wishes. This orientation pervades all the work of the school, and is very well supported by lessons in the subjects that emphasise the importance of choice, as well as in the daily life of, and interactions within, the school.

116. The formal provision for personal, social and health education has a clear structure and content and covers a wide range of information and concerns, which are presented at a level that matches pupils' experience and understanding. Very effective use is made of role-play in examining situations that pupils might encounter and they participate in these with great enthusiasm.
117. The programme deals sensitively with such issues as sex and the abuse of drugs, enabling pupils to consider their response within a social and moral understanding. They are increasingly confident in considering not only the personal, but also the social, implications of these areas. When sensitive issues such as bereavement and self-esteem are being explored, the services of a trained counsellor are valuable in enabling pupils to manage their feelings.
118. For those pupils with the greatest difficulties, there is very good provision to enable them to make appropriate personal development. Feeding programmes and pupils' individual comfort are well addressed. In addition, experiential lessons are provided that enable them to develop an enhanced awareness of their surroundings, as in a very good lesson using the sensory room, where they experienced the colour blue, in a calm and peaceful context. For higher-achieving pupils, the arrangements to enable them to participate in activities leading to the Duke of Edinburgh Award enhance their personal development and provide good opportunities for demonstrating their social awareness.
119. The school makes good provision for enabling pupils to have an understanding of the principles of healthy living. Planning in other lessons, such as food technology and physical education, ensures a practical context for becoming aware of the importance of exercise and diet. Plans are well advanced for the school to gain the Healthy Schools award.
120. Citizenship is promoted very effectively and pupils are encouraged to be aware of their responsibilities for their decisions and the choices they make, and how these affect others in their families or in the school. Through the formation of a School Council they have a growing understanding of why societies of all types need rules and who is responsible for making them. In school, the pupils themselves have drawn up class and school rules. Pupils are keen to talk to visitors and explain to them how they held elections to create the first council, and what they hope to do on the council. Pupils themselves ensured that pupils of all abilities and disabilities were represented on the council, showing again that this school is truly inclusive in all its work.
121. Pupils are encouraged to enhance their self-advocacy, and the system of peer advocacy works well; more able pupils are always supporting their less able friends throughout the school. By Year 11, many pupils pursue 'community service' as a prelude to work experience. During this time they enhance their social skills and competence through educational visits, the Japonica Project, college visits and opportunities to share resources with members of the public, for example at the local leisure centre.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

Provision in the sixth form is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The well taught and effective curriculum provides good opportunities for learning and provides the opportunity for students to achieve appropriate accreditation.
- Relationships are very strong and this supports the students' very good attitudes.
- Progress towards independence through externally-accredited courses is very good.

Commentary

122. Overall, the coherent nature of the management and structure of the school ensures that students at post-16 benefit from the same high quality of education as pupils in Years 7 to 11. However, the school ensures that there is an appropriate change of focus, so that work in the two post-16 classes provides a very good transition from school to the wider world.
123. Post-16, students have good opportunities to work at literacy and numeracy, and to improve their qualifications. Very good provision for the social use of language helps students to speak to others appropriately. This helps their social development and behaviour. Almost all show interest in books and almost all, with help, read very simple text. Some are developing real enthusiasm for leisure reading. Students continue to write simple continuous prose, or copy words and phrases. Independent writing is a significant strength, but students make too little use of information and communication technology to present their work in striking and original ways.
124. Students continue to extend their knowledge of the world by good college links. They prepare for effective transition to college by further developing their skills of independent living and supported self-study. Provision for their personal and social development continues to be a key strength and this is well supported by religious education lessons where, for example, students enumerate things that make them happy. These range from attending the School Council and being a prefect, to “getting a certificate”. They show objects brought from home and say why these make them happy.
125. Much of the work is structured around the externally accredited *ASDAN* programme, which provides students with a good range of challenges. They follow a well-planned series of activities designed to develop their skills and confidence to prepare them for independence. Students go on a week-long adventure holiday, which they plan in great detail before they go and evaluate on their return. Their literacy skills develop well as a result, particularly in speaking and listening, as a result of the opportunities for discussion and joint oral planning. Some students use a range of ICT applications well, usually as a result of experience outside school. However, in common with the rest of the school, the lack of sustained opportunities, especially for the use of ICT in presentation, means that achievement at post-16 in ICT is no better than satisfactory overall.
126. Students at post-16 make good use of the opportunity to pursue their design and technology in a local college. During the week of the inspection, a group went to college on a catering course. This worked well and students made good use of the extra facilities at the college, showing very good behaviour and mature attitudes to their work, taking responsibility for cleaning up after their work and putting away all their equipment.
127. The curriculum has improved since the previous inspection in that religious education is now offered to all students, which was previously a shortcoming. All students now receive a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their needs well.
128. Relationships and attitudes are very good. For example, in a post-16 lesson on ‘time’, students were preparing a real timetable of events that they would use when they go off on an adventure holiday week. Text and symbols were used very well as students cut out and stuck these onto their individual timetables to represent what they would be doing, morning, afternoon and evening. One young man with a well-developed sense of humour announced that he would go to the pub every evening. This was dealt with very sensitively and in a good-humoured way by staff, indicating the excellent relationships and trust between staff and students.

129. Teaching is good overall, with good support being provided by support staff, who contribute well to the adult relationships that characterise the approach in this part of the school. There is very good leadership, which supports an ethos that continues the best work of the school, while creating a distinctive, more adult, learning environment. Although accommodation is still too small for the number of students, what there is is well organised to provide an appropriately adult environment for these students, and there are well advanced plans to provide additional space through linking the two classrooms and forming a self-contained post-16 centre.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	3	3
How inclusive the school is		1
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3	3
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	3	3
Overall standards achieved		3
Pupils' achievement	3	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		1
Attendance	3	3
Attitudes	2	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
The quality of education provided by the school		3
The quality of teaching	3	3
How well pupils learn	3	3
The quality of assessment	2	2
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		3
Accommodation and resources	5	5
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
The leadership and management of the school		2
The governance of the school	4	4
The leadership of the headteacher		1
The leadership of other key staff	2	2
The effectiveness of management	2	2

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

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