

INSPECTION REPORT

BLESSED THOMAS HOLFORD CATHOLIC COLLEGE

Altrincham

LEA area: Trafford

Unique reference number: 106376

Head teacher: Mr John Cornally

Lead inspector: Mrs Marion Thompson

Dates of inspection: 27th – 30th September 2004

Inspection number: 268348

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Modern (non-selective)
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11 – 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	759
School address:	Urban Road Altrincham Cheshire
Postcode:	WA15 8HT
Telephone number:	0161 928 6020
Fax number:	0161 929 7413
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr John Mulholland
Date of previous inspection:	18 th January 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Blessed Thomas Holford is a small, mixed, Roman Catholic, voluntary aided secondary modern. Standards achieved by pupils on entry to the college are around average. Because the college is in a local authority where selection at the age of 11 means that the highest attainers mostly go to grammar schools, the proportion of highest attainers is low. The college receives pupils from a large number of primary schools in the district. This means that standards achieved by pupils on entry to the school vary from year to year. Generally, however, there are fewer of the lowest attaining pupils than is usual, and more pupils reaching the national average than the norm. The percentage of pupils identified as having special educational needs is average and the number with statements of special educational needs is below average. Almost all pupils are of white UK heritage and they all use English as their first language. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is average. Numbers of pupils are around the same as at the time of the last inspection and the school is over-subscribed. The school has been a specialist mathematics and computing college for the relatively short period of one year and the character of the school is beginning to change to reflect this status.

The school's success has been celebrated through three School Achievement Awards, Healthy Schools Award, Sportsmark, the Football Association (FA) Charter Standard Award, the FA Development Award, Investors in People Award and British Airways Languages Award. Pupils are involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and the Realistic Mathematics Education Project. There is community use of sport and fitness training facilities, and some community provision related to specialist status. The school is involved in a number of partnerships with local schools and higher education institutions.

The school has a strong Roman Catholic identity and has as its mission high academic achievement for all, the development of strong personal values rooted in the Catholic faith and the pursuit of excellence.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
2626	M Thompson	Lead inspector	
19720	D Granville-Hastings	Lay inspector	
3758	A Barringer	Team inspector	English
2919	P Armitage	Team inspector	Mathematics
10013	T Wheatley	Team inspector	Science
30901	S Schofield	Team inspector	Art and design, citizenship
7084	J Haslam	Team inspector	Design and technology, work related learning, business studies
12118	A Paver	Team inspector	Geography
8873	C Evers	Team inspector	History
31879	D Rhodes	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
3793	J Ratcliffe	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
11676	G Thomas	Team inspector	Music
33002	J Woodhouse	Team inspector	Physical education
32686	N Elliot	Team inspector	Special educational needs

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Blessed Thomas Holford is an effective and successful school that provides a good quality education for its pupils. Standards are rising, and achievement is good overall. It is very good in relation to pupils gaining five A*-G and one A*-G grades at GCSE. The clear commitment to Roman Catholic values, which underpins the work of the school, is reflected in all aspects of its work, and makes a strong contribution to pupils' academic success and personal development. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Achievement is good throughout the school as a result of good, and often very good teaching.
- Although improving rapidly, achievement is unsatisfactory in music in Years 7 to 9 due to pupils' immature attitudes to work.
- The school is very effectively led by the head teacher who has created a climate of high expectations and success. He is supported well by effective senior and middle managers.
- Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development and attendance are very good.
- Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school and for strategic planning are not sufficiently rigorous to contribute fully to school improvement.
- Mathematics and computing college status has resulted in good use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum, where access allows; however, the National Curriculum programmes of study for ICT are not fully covered in Years 10 and 11.
- The learning resource centre does not yet have sufficient books to support independent learning.

The school has made good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have risen in the percentage of pupils gaining five A*-C grades from below average to the national average in 2003. Higher attaining pupils now achieve well and individual pupil monitoring supports achievement. Previous strengths, such as the quality of teaching and pupil care, continue to improve well.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
	na-	B	B	C

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average
Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

National test results for Year 9 in 2003 were average overall. GCSE results were above average and pupils achieved similar standards to those with similar prior attainment. Results have risen faster than the national trend over the last few years. National Curriculum results for 2004 rose further, whilst GCSE results fell slightly but were good in relation to pupils' prior attainment.

Standards of work seen at the beginning of Year 9 match those expected nationally, except in English, art and design, design and technology and ICT where they are above. Achievement is good and most pupils make significant progress in their studies through Years 7 to 9. At the beginning of Year 11 standards match the national expectation overall, but are above in mathematics, design and technology, art and design, modern foreign languages, history and physical education. Achievement for boys and girls is good in most subjects for all groups of pupils.

Pupils' personal qualities and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very good, fostered by good pastoral support. Attitudes to school are very positive and are reflected in high levels of attendance, low exclusion rates and good behaviour. The very high quality of relationships throughout the school is a major strength.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching and learning are good overall and very good in art and design and physical education, mathematics in Years 7 to 9 and history in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is satisfactory in music in Years 7 to 9 and in some lessons in geography. Assessment of pupils in departments is effective and supports learning well. Pupils of all backgrounds work productively and learn well. The curriculum is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11, where opportunities to follow vocational courses are limited. The programme of study for ICT is not fully covered in Years 10 and 11. Enrichment is good. Good care, support and guidance contribute significantly to pupils' gains in academic achievement and personal development. Partnerships with parents are good. They value the opportunities provided by the head teacher to influence decision-making. Links with the community and other schools and colleges are good and the school has a good reputation.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The head teacher's very good leadership provides a clear sense of direction for the school. He is supported well by the newly formed senior team. Management is satisfactory overall; recent improvements have been made to the management structure and plans are in place to improve monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school and the quality of strategic planning. The school benefits from good and often very good leadership and management by middle managers. Governance is satisfactory. The governing body demonstrates a very high and impressive level of commitment to the school, but it has not ensured that a range of statutory requirements has been met

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and pupils hold the school in very high regard. Rightly, both groups feel children enjoy school, behave well, are made to work hard, make good progress and are taught well. They appreciate the arrangements to help settle children in and the provision of a good range of interesting and enjoyable activities. There is strong support for the leadership and management of the school, all aspects of the pastoral system especially, and for the school's desire to keep parents and pupils involved and informed. The very good quality of relationships which contribute to pupils' personal development was appreciated.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Continue to address the underachievement of pupils in music in Years 7 to 9
- Implement rapidly planned improvements in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school and in strategic planning
- Ensure the National Curriculum programmes of study are fully covered in ICT in Years 10 and 11 and improve access to ICT across the curriculum
- Ensure there are sufficient books to support independent learning in the learning resource centre

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Develop policies for literacy and race relations
- Ensure the programme for work-related learning is taught
- Produce an access plan to ensure the school meets the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were average overall and have risen faster than the average trend over recent years. Achievement was satisfactory, in line with similar schools. Overall standards in GCSE examinations were above average, particularly for boys, and achievement was satisfactory. From the quality of work seen, standards are broadly average at the beginning of Years 9 and 11, with many pupils reaching above average levels. Achievement is good for both boys and girls; all groups make good progress.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well throughout the school, reflecting the hard work of pupils and staff
- Pupils with special educational needs and pupils studying art achieve very well in Years 7 to 9 due to effective teaching
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve very well in history and physical education as a result of very good teaching
- Pupils underachieve in music in Years 7 to 9 as a result of unsatisfactory attitudes to work

Commentary

1. Attainment on entry to the school varies from year to year, ranging between below and above the national average. In all years there is a lower proportion than normally seen of pupils with special educational needs. The school is in a local authority where selection at the age of 11 means that the highest attainers mostly go to grammar schools, so the proportion of higher attainers is also low. In general, boys have performed better than girls on entry to the school.
2. The current Year 7, based on a comparison with the previous year's national averages, has entered the school with above average levels of attainment in English, mathematics and science and with girls performing better than boys. The attainment of the current Year 9 pupils on entry to the school was above average in English and mathematics and below average in science and in most other subjects. In the current Year 11 pupils' attainment was broadly average on entry to the school. The year group of pupils who took their GCSE examinations in 2004 came into the school with lower than average attainment. Evidence from the current Year 7 this early in the school year and from other pupils' work shows that pupils come into the school with below average skills and knowledge in art and design, design and technology, geography, history, ICT, modern foreign languages, music and physical education

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	33.9 (31.2)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	36.2 (34.5)	35.4 (34.7)
science	34.4 (32.6)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 147 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

3. In the end of Year 9 national tests in 2003, results were average in English and science and above average in mathematics. Results had improved in English and mathematics on the previous year and overall results over recent years have risen faster than the national trend. Against schools with pupils of similar prior attainment, attainment was broadly average. The

unconfirmed results of 2004 show a further rise with proportionally more pupils obtaining the higher levels. Pupils' achievement was satisfactory.

4. Inspection evidence indicates that standards broadly match national expectation by early Year 9, with many pupils reaching the higher level 6. Pupils are achieving well overall. In English standards are above expectation, and pupils achieve well, working hard to sustain the high levels they entered school with. In mathematics and science standards match expectations, though a significant proportion of pupils are performing at above average levels. In mathematics achievement is satisfactory overall and good for many higher attaining pupils. In science achievement is good and for some pupils it is very good because attainment was below average on entry.
5. In art and design, where pupils' skills were below national expectation on entry, standards are now above expectation. Achievement for these pupils is very good because effective teaching and the structured nature of the course have given them a good understanding of how to produce their personal works of art. In design and technology standards are above average, and in all other subjects they are broadly average. Overall, this represents good achievement in these subjects. However, in geography achievement is satisfactory and in music in Years 7 to 9 it is unsatisfactory because pupils have immature attitudes to work and slow the pace of learning. Very occasionally, this is also an issue in history. Boys and girls achieve similarly but reach different levels because the attainment of boys on entry to the school is generally higher than that of girls

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	55 (56)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	97 (99)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	36.3 (36.4)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 140 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

6. In the GCSE examinations in 2003, results were above the national average and had improved from the previous year. Over recent years, the performance of pupils has improved at a faster rate than the national trend. In particular, the performance of boys has improved steadily while that of the girls has been more erratic, though on a slow trend upward, reflecting girls' lower attainment overall on entering the school. Compared with schools with pupils of similar prior attainment, results were broadly average, and achievement was satisfactory but for those pupils obtaining five or more A*-G grade passes and one or more A*-G grade pass at GCSE results were well above average. The percentage of pupils obtaining five or more A*-C grades was in line with the national average and with the average of pupils with similar prior attainment.
7. The unconfirmed overall GCSE results for 2004 indicate a slight fall in results, but this particular year group's attainment on entry was below the national average, so pupils performed well compared with their prior attainment. Results were very low in music and low in comparison with expected performance. The school has made some significant reorganisation to staffing to deal with these issues. Considering that this is a school which has fewer than average higher attaining pupils entering in Year 7 in any year, standards of achievement overall are good.
8. In relation to specialist college status, mathematics results have been consistently better than the national average for A*-C grades but below average for the better A*-A grades. This pattern continued in 2004 but the depressed A*-A figures result from an examination entry policy rather than a fall in standards. GCSE results for ICT were below average for 2003 with under a quarter

of pupils reaching A*-C grades and with a restricted pattern of entry. This situation worsened in 2004. This was predominantly due to severe staffing difficulties and equipment problems which have now been resolved.

9. Standards seen in Year 11 are average overall, but above average in a large number of subjects. Pupils achieve well due to good teaching and pupils' generally positive attitudes. In English and science standards are average, and above average in mathematics due to particularly consistent effective teaching. In art and design, design and technology, history, modern foreign languages and physical education, standards are above average. They are average in all other subjects, including ICT, which, although improving, has lower standards than might be expected for a college specialising in ICT. Pupils make good progress overall. However, in GCSE physical education a small number of the highest attaining pupils are not sufficiently challenged in theory lessons. Pupils achieve very well in history because they are taught very well and work very hard. Achievement is satisfactory in music; whilst learning is now good, pupils still have ground to recover. It is satisfactory in ICT, reflecting the long-term effects of previous staffing difficulties. Achievement in citizenship is satisfactory and is not better than this because the course is not yet well established.
10. Boys generally perform better than girls though both achieve well taking into account their different levels of attainment on entry to the school. Pupils of all levels of prior attainment, including gifted and talented, achieve equally well. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve well, and the school is effective in providing well-planned support, tailored to the needs of individual pupils. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good overall and very good in Years 7 to 9. The number of pupils with special educational needs achieving five or more GCSEs is impressive. However, pupils in Year 11 with social, emotional or behavioural needs do not achieve as well as pupils with learning needs.
11. Literacy skills across the curriculum are above national expectation. The overall standard of listening and speaking is above that found nationally. Pupils listen attentively in almost all subjects and express themselves articulately and confidently during class discussions. The level of most pupils' reading comprehension allows them to understand fully textbooks and other printed materials. Written work is carefully presented.
12. Competence in numeracy across the curriculum matches national expectation. Pupils' weakness with simple computation is masked by their over use of calculators. Pupils cope with the demands placed on them because many of the demands lack appropriate challenge.
13. Competence in ICT across the curriculum is above national expectations. Pupils are competent and confident users of ICT and use their skills effectively in most other subjects. Pupils are confident in the use of ICT in investigative work and use their skills well. They use presentation software and desktop publishing to enhance their work in most subjects. They are familiar with the Internet and use it well, for example in history for research. They use video for performance analysis in physical education, and computers for data logging and retrieval in science.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **very good**. This results in pupils having good attitudes to school and to their learning. Behaviour around school and in lessons is good. Attendance is also very good and pupils arrive on time.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' spiritual, social and moral development is very good, because of the school's clear communication of its values, beliefs and high expectations of attitudes and behaviour
- Pupils enjoy being at school and tackle the lessons and activities prepared for them with interest and enthusiasm

- Relationships are very good, creating a happy and productive atmosphere in which pupils learn well and are confident and relaxed
- Pupils take on responsibility very well and make a real contribution to the daily life of school
- Attendance is consistently very good

Commentary

14. The importance of pupils' personal development is at the heart of everything the school does and the staff have successfully created a supportive and caring atmosphere in which pupils grow and flourish. Pupils are valued as individuals and for their contribution to school life and there is a feeling of harmony throughout the school. Indeed, a strength of the school is the way in which pupils from all backgrounds live and work together happily and comfortably.
15. There is no written policy for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, but all aspects are embedded in the school's values and evident in the daily life of teachers and pupils, making provision overall very good. All curriculum areas make a strong contribution and encourage values and behaviour based on equality, honesty and fairness. Pupils' spiritual development is very good. The Catholic faith is an important aspect of pupils' spiritual growth and there are many occasions for pupils and staff to pray and reflect together each day and throughout the year. The school day always starts with tutors and pupils praying, thinking about the day ahead and about other people's lives and feelings. The school deliberately and successfully promotes a strong sense of identity and self-worth which enables pupils to value themselves and others. This contributes positively to their ability to learn and their good achievement.
16. Pupils' moral development is very good. All pupils acknowledge and understand the moral code on which their school life is based. Assemblies, tutor time, and high expectations from staff reinforce the values of right and wrong and respect for others. As a result, most pupils behave very well around school. They are polite, friendly, interested in people and appreciative of their teachers. Very occasionally, a small minority of pupils finds it more difficult to achieve the high standards expected and their behaviour can occasionally disrupt learning in lessons despite appropriate handling by teachers. The number of permanent exclusions is low and fixed term exclusions are used appropriately to deal with behaviour not to be tolerated.
17. Pupils' social development is also very good. Pupils quickly fit into the school community because the school's expectations are clear, consistent and supportive. Relationships throughout the school are very good and help to improve pupils' confidence and self-esteem. As a result, pupils' attitudes to school and to their learning are good. Pupils enjoy being at school, enthusiastically joining in with the activities prepared for them. They are loyal towards their school and proud of its mathematics and computing college status. The school creates many opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility and pupils respond very well. Prefects, form captains, monitors, technicians, school council representatives, Year 11 mentors and others make a valuable and practical contribution to the daily life of school which is greatly appreciated by teachers. Pupils' confidence and self-esteem improve greatly through being given such responsibilities. They gain a real sense of belonging to and taking pride in their own community. On leaving school, most pupils are confident, well-rounded people ready for the next stage of their life.
18. Attendance at the school is very good, being consistently well above the national average. Punctuality is also good and lessons begin promptly. This is as a result of the school's high expectations and active approach to monitoring and promoting good attendance, supported well by parents. Such good attendance contributes directly to the good achievement pupils make.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	6.6
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.2
National data	1.1

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	669	31	4
White – Irish	16		
White – any other White background	11		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	13	2	
Mixed – White and Black African	3		
Mixed – White and Asian	4		
Mixed – any other mixed background	6		
Black or Black British – Caribbean	5	1	
Black or Black British – African	5		
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1		
Any other ethnic group	4		
Parent/ pupil preferred not to say	20		
Information not obtained	2		

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of teaching and learning is **good** overall and better than at the time of the last inspection. The majority of pupils learn well and make good progress because teachers plan challenging, effective lessons and relationships are very good. Assessment is **good** and helps pupils to improve their work.

Teaching and Learning

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and contributes to effective learning throughout the school. It is very good in art in all year groups, in Years 10 and 11 history and in mathematics and physical education in Years 7 to 9
- Teachers have high expectations and plan challenging lessons, which lead to good achievement
- Assessment is good and helps pupils to improve their work, except in geography where it is unsatisfactory
- Development of concepts through discussion and debate is a strength of teaching and pupils articulate their views and arguments clearly
- ICT is used well to enhance learning and motivate pupils in many subjects
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good, so pupils are keen to learn

Commentary

19. The quality of teaching and learning is good for all year groups and groups of pupils. It is very good or excellent in three out of ten lessons. It is satisfactory overall in music in Years 7 to 9 and in a minority of lessons in geography when the pace of learning is slowed by difficulties in managing pupils with negative attitudes. Teaching and learning are very good in mathematics

and physical education in Years 7 to 9, in history in Years 10 and 11 and in art throughout the school because lessons have a fast pace and present a high level of challenge. There is significantly more good and very good teaching and learning than at the time of the last inspection and independent learning has also improved. Many subjects, for example geography and ICT, are moving towards setting open-ended tasks to allow pupils to extend their learning and become more independent and motivated. One unsatisfactory lesson was seen in science.

20. Strengths include very high expectations of work and behaviour, which encourage pupils to work industriously and learn quickly. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils ensure that in most classes pupils are keen to learn. These relationships support the Catholic ethos the school consistently promotes. Developing ideas through discussion and debate is a strong feature of the school as a whole, as is learning from fellow pupils. In history, Year 11 pupils deepened their understanding about the causes of the First World War through brainstorming, feedback from others and skilful questioning by the teacher. Mathematics in Years 7 to 9 is characterised by highly interactive lessons, where pupils discuss their findings to ensure understanding and extend their thinking. It is differentiated well so pupils of all abilities achieve well.
21. The school is a specialist computing college and many lessons in most subjects are enhanced by the use of ICT by pupils and teachers. A planned programme of professional development has furnished teachers with the necessary skills and most teachers now use ICT effectively in their teaching. In modern foreign languages, for example, presentation software is used to provide prompts for written work, the interactive whiteboard is used to present challenging texts and pupils undertake research on the Internet using laptop computers in the classroom. In one Year 11 lesson, this motivated pupils to do voluntary extra work at home. In Year 7 gymnastics, pupils videoed their performances to help them improve and in a Year 8 art lesson a projector was used skilfully to demonstrate the effect of rotating a repeated pattern. The acquisition of mathematics specialist status is not yet making an impact across the curriculum.
22. Teachers have good subject knowledge and lessons are slightly better in Years 10 to 11 due to good preparation for public examinations. In history, for example, pupils tackle GCSE level questions confidently from the beginning of Year 10. Where lessons are taught by non-specialists, for example in Year 7 ICT, this does not detract from pupils' learning. Most lessons are planned well, using a good range of teaching strategies, and proceed at a good pace. Pupils learn rapidly and develop skills steadily, working well both independently and in collaboration with others.
23. Teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs are good. There is good communication between subject and special needs staff regarding pupils' needs. This results in well-planned lessons with high expectations of pupils. Because planning is good, pupils are involved fully in lessons and make good progress. Specialist teaching to improve the skills of pupils with literacy difficulties is good. The introduction of a literacy lesson in Years 7 to 9 enables specialist teaching to take place without disrupting pupils' learning in other subjects. The flexible use of staffing in mathematics ensures that pupils with learning needs are supported well.
24. Teaching of numeracy is satisfactory across the school. In mathematics itself pupils' heavy reliance on calculators means that many of them are unable to cope with simple mental arithmetic. Numeracy is applied well in science, art and ICT. In science, graph work is generally good and pupils are familiar with interrogation of graphs. In art, Year 8 pupils consider repeated and cyclic patterns when creating work in celebration of Diwali. The mathematics department has allocated a link teacher to each subject to strengthen numeracy work.
25. In some departments such as mathematics, design and technology and history, teachers pay great attention to pupils' general development in literacy. Good practice permeates most work in these areas. In general, however, teachers are inconsistent with such matters as encouraging a range of aids to reading and helping pupils to structure writing more carefully.

26. The quality and use of assessment are good and improvement in the school's assessment systems since the last inspection has been good. Regular, professional and informative collection and analysis of data are used well to inform staff. This information is being used very effectively by most departments to respond to the individual needs of the pupils. Assessment is thorough and constructive. Very good practice is used in art and design and in physical education, where pupils have a very good understanding of the level they are working at and the targets they are working towards. Provision is unsatisfactory in geography, as systems are insufficiently thorough to assess pupils' work accurately. Although formal assessment for learning is in its early stages, the actual practice within classrooms is good.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 112 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
5 (4%)	28 (25%)	64 (57%)	14 (13%)	1 (1%)	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.

The curriculum

Curricular provision is satisfactory overall; it is **good** for Years 7 to 9, and **satisfactory** for Years 10 and 11. Opportunities for enrichment are good and accommodation and resources are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is suitably broad and balanced and reflects specialist status
- A wide range of GCSE option courses is available in Years 10 and 11, but only a limited range of vocational courses and few pupils take them
- The provision for ICT does not meet the requirements for the programme of study in Years 10 and 11. Specialist college status has provided funding for good facilities for ICT but access to equipment in a number of other subjects is frequently limited
- Pupils make good use of the wide range of opportunities to study and to follow their interests outside lessons
- The learning resource centre provides good facilities for research using ICT, but, as yet, has insufficient books to support independent learning in some subjects
- Staffing is now good and promotes effective learning
- The school does not have an access plan in place and therefore does not meet fully the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001
- The school does not meet the requirement to have a literacy policy, resulting in inconsistent delivery across the curriculum

Commentary

27. The school provides a curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 9 which is suitably broad and balanced, and enables pupils to achieve well academically and to develop well as maturing young adults. It is appropriate for the school's mathematics and computing college status. However, there is no separate provision for drama so pupils miss some of the range of experiences this provides.
28. The curriculum provided for pupils in Years 10 and 11 offers an appropriately wide range of GCSE courses. The curriculum does not, however, meet the requirements for the provision of ICT in Years 10 and 11 through the taught ICT course, which all pupils take, or through the ICT used in other subjects. This is a major weakness for a mathematics and computing college. The decision to provide a one-year GCSE additional mathematics course for some pupils in

Year 11 has resulted in low examination results. A small number of pupils in Year 10 art have reduced curriculum time and this adversely affects their motivation, as they feel they are falling behind. The time allocation for science in Years 10 and 11 limits opportunities to develop pupils' literacy skills.

29. The school provides a small range of applied GCSE courses. The number of vocational courses available to pupils in Years 10 and 11 at a local college is low. Although the school encourages pupils to opt for courses which are the most appropriate for them, very few pupils choose to take these vocational courses. The school has made good arrangements to ensure that these pupils still cover their work in English, mathematics and science missed because of their attendance at college.
30. The curriculum provided for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory overall. Pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs do not achieve as well as pupils with other learning needs in GCSE examinations. The curriculum for pupils in Years 10 and 11 provides only limited opportunities for alternative or vocational choices. The curriculum for gifted and talented pupils is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11.
31. The school offers a good range of clubs and activities after school and these are reasonably well attended. The split lunchtime arrangements restrict such activities during the lunch break, but they improve order. Pupils' participation in sport outside lesson time is very good. The school enriches the curriculum through events such as theatre visits, school drama productions and trips to France and Germany. Good support for study outside the school day is provided through revision clubs and coursework help groups.
32. The development of numeracy throughout the school is satisfactory. Most departments have a policy to deal with aspects of numeracy in their work. In art and science, numeracy is used meaningfully. In departments where graphical representations are beneficial, few use their interpretation to its full effect. The mathematics department has generated numeracy guidance material based on the Key Stage 3 National Strategy and this contains useful material for each subject, but it is now in need of revision.
33. The development of literacy across the curriculum is satisfactory. The school does not meet the statutory requirement to have a whole school policy and this results in inconsistencies in approaches to marking, especially with features such as spelling and punctuation. Many departments have their own policies, but they are not consistently applied. However, developing concepts through discussion is a strong feature of the work of many departments.
34. Most departments incorporate ICT in their schemes of work and make effective use of the facilities, which are extensive. However, exceptional use of ICT in one Year 11 French class could not be replicated with others, because of problems with access to resources. In design and technology, there is limited provision for pupils to study control systems, robotics and automated manufacture, and there is only limited computer-aided design.
35. Careers education is of a satisfactory quality overall, but is good in Year 11. The personal social and health education (PSHE) programme has limited careers content beginning in Year 9. Good provision is made for older pupils. Guidance is much more intensive in Year 11, so that all pupils follow a structured programme. In addition, each pupil is provided with very helpful individual advice and support matched to his or her needs.
36. The programme of PSHE is satisfactory. This is the first year of PSHE being delivered across the curriculum. The planning is closely linked to citizenship and the programme is structured to cover a wide range of subjects and issues, such as personal safety, stress management and interpersonal skills. Learning is further supported by a residential week in Year 7, to build on team-building skills, and for all years, themed days, such as health days where pertinent issues in sex and drugs education are dealt with sensitively and to appropriate age groups. Links with outside agencies such as the Trafford Drugs Agency offer strong support and advice to the

pupils. Legal requirements are met and the school follows clear guidelines on consultation with parents, but there are few opportunities for parents to learn more about drugs education.

37. Resources are satisfactory overall. Most subjects have at least satisfactory resources, and provision is good in English, mathematics, history, design and technology and physical education. However, electronic equipment needed in music is lacking and resources are unsatisfactory, and there is insufficient everyday equipment, such as microscopes and balances, in science. The specialist college status of the school is reflected in good provision of resources supporting ICT, but in a number of areas they are not easily accessible. The ratio of computers to pupils is above average provision nationally, and the school has 18 interactive whiteboards. There is one in every mathematics classroom as an outcome of the specialist college funding, whilst other subject areas have one each.
38. The purpose-built learning resource centre has the potential to be an important resource for learning but has not yet been adequately stocked and, despite a generous contribution from the parent teachers' association, the funds available are insufficient to address this. Library stock is as yet unsatisfactory in mathematics, English, history and design and technology. The new special educational needs suite is very effective as a learning resource and is used well by pupils for additional support before and after school and at social times. The use of ICT to support the learning of pupils with special educational needs in the special needs and mathematics departments is good. However, specialist ICT to improve access for pupils with special educational needs is not available in all areas of the school.
39. Staffing is good. Teachers are well qualified in their specialist areas and there is a good balance between experienced and recently qualified staff. Where non-specialist staff are used, they are well trained and it does not effect the good quality of teaching. There is a good match of support staff to those subjects that have the most needs. The school does not have any difficulty in attracting new staff, as there are many applicants for advertised posts. The recently appointed head teacher has made good progress with easing the administrative workload of teaching staff, despite a serious shortage of funds available for this purpose. The special educational needs teaching assistant team has a wide range of expertise and is very well motivated. The special educational needs co-ordinator has been very successful in building a cohesive team from staff employed by the local authority and directly by the school.
40. Overall, accommodation in the school is satisfactory, even though accommodation is good within subject areas. ICT has very good facilities with a new, bright, modern computer suite. The learning resource centre is attractive and popular, but sometimes pupils have to be turned away due to demand. Many areas of the school are in need of refurbishment. There are leaking roofs, and maintenance is often done by the school. Disabled access is unsatisfactory, with very few ramps for wheelchairs and there is no access plan for the school so the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 are not fully met.

Care, guidance and support

The school provides a good level of care and support for its pupils, which they, and their parents, appreciate. Health and safety and day-to-day care are well managed. Arrangements for new pupils are good and pupils are involved well in school life.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good relationships result in pupils having confidence and trust in their teachers
- Teachers know the needs of their pupils very well and are flexible in their approach to helping them
- Good arrangements help new pupils settle into school life quickly
- Pupils feel their views are important and they are beginning to contribute to the school improvement through the school council
- Health and safety is managed well across the school and within departments

Commentary

41. The school provides very good support for its pupils' personal development on a day-to-day basis. It is a very caring place where pupils feel safe and comfortable. Staff work together closely and have a very good understanding of pupils' individual circumstances and needs. Because of this, pupils have trust and confidence in their teachers and find them approachable and responsive. Throughout the school, the very good relationships result in teachers and pupils interacting very well and there is a relaxed yet purposeful atmosphere. This supports the school's mission statement and Catholic values.
42. Support for pupils' academic performance is good. Within subject departments there is good monitoring and tracking of all pupils to highlight those that need extra support to achieve well. The termly reviews are useful in giving pupils an overview of their performance and give tutors and pupils an opportunity to discuss progress together. In Year 11, some pupils work with mentors to help them organise and cope with their coursework and revision classes help pupils prepare for their examinations.
43. The assessment of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. A good range of information about pupils' attainment is available, including school tracking records, additional standardised tests and teaching assistant observations. However, this information is not brought together effectively and is therefore not used well in individual education plans or reviews of pupils' progress.
44. Year 7 pupils settle into secondary school quickly and easily, because of the good arrangements to help them. They are well prepared during Year 6 and supported well throughout their first term. A new initiative this term involves Year 7 pupils, their tutors and other teachers going on a residential trip for a week. Many activities – energetic and quiet – are provided to help pupils to forge strong bonds with each other and with their teachers early in their secondary school life.
45. In Year 11, pupils receive good information and support to help them make appropriate decisions about their future once they leave school. Through good information from school and good links with local colleges, pupils get a good insight into post-16 choices. This is doing much to raise the self-esteem and aspirations of many pupils. Last year, 80 per cent of Year 11 pupils went to sixth form or further education colleges.
46. Pupils are very positive about the school and feel that their views and opinions are genuinely considered. The school council has been redefined and shows great promise. Currently only Years 9 and 10 are involved, but they are looking at lots of ways in which they can represent all pupils. The new form captains are to meet with their heads of year each term and the Year 11 prefects make a great contribution to school life in many ways.
47. The school pays good attention to the physical care and well-being of its pupils. There is an effective child protection policy which follows the local authority procedures and all issues are handled appropriately. Good use is made of outside specialist agencies where necessary to help and support pupils and families. Arrangements for dealing with health and safety are well managed, ensuring that the school is a safe place in which to live and work.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has a **good** partnership with parents and parents are very supportive of the school. The good links with schools, colleges and the community support and develop pupils' learning well and broaden their experiences.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Communication between home and school is good and parents are very supportive of the school
- Good links with primary schools and colleges are improving pupils' self-confidence and aspirations
- Good community links extend pupils' opportunities for learning

Commentary

48. The school enjoys the support of its parents and is constantly looking at ways in which to involve them more in school life. Good quality newsletters and brochures keep parents up to date with activities, events and developments. Their views are sought on topical issues, such as the recent introduction of blazers and on wider issues such as the possibility of a sixth form. A parents' focus group, the parent teachers' association and open meetings are used to find out what parents think and want.
49. Communication between home and school is good and parents are comfortable in approaching teachers with questions or problems. Teachers are quick to contact parents personally to explain problems and how they intend to deal with them. Parents are very supportive of the school and very happy with the experience they and their children have.
50. The school is keen to help parents be a part of their child's learning and has set up the 'Parents Gateway', a website that provides information about the school. Parents have their own password and log on to find out more about school and their children's progress. The termly reviews are another useful way of giving parents a regular update on their children's progress and whether they are achieving as well as they can. The full annual reports give more detail but rarely provide pupils and parents with practical and useful targets that help improvement.
51. The school has some well-established good relationships with primary schools which benefit pupils and teachers in all schools. Through the mathematics and computing college status, the partner primary schools have had the use of laptop computers and interactive whiteboards and advice on how to use them. Year 5 pupils have taken part in a mathematics master class. A regular activity in English sees Year 8 pupils talking individually with Year 2 pupils, writing a story that the younger pupil will relate to and enjoy and then reading the story together with them. The results are very impressive and do much to raise the self-confidence of pupils and to foster good friendships. Similarly, in physical education older pupils coach primary school pupils in such activities as trampolining.
52. The links with colleges are good and most pupils go on to further education. The Connexions partnership works well and the school gets good feedback on how their ex-pupils are doing. The school has a well-developed sense of responsibility towards the teaching profession and works very closely with Manchester Metropolitan University, in particular in the training of student teachers.
53. The school uses its local and wider community well, through a varied and well-planned range of trips, activities, speakers and specialists for all year groups. These add an important extra dimension to pupils' learning, helping them see the relevance of their studies and giving them first hand experience. The school has run mathematics and computing courses for parents and for a group of senior citizens in a local Methodist church. Pupils are quick to want to help others and organise many fund-raising events for local and national charities. Last year they raised £6,000 for Francis House in just one day. A local computer company works with the school on the applied business studies and ICT GCSE courses and the school was well supported by local businesses and the community in its specialist college bid. The school is popular and well thought of in its local area and within its diocese.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **good** overall. Leadership is good overall and the leadership provided by the head teacher is very good. Management and governance are satisfactory overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The head teacher provides a very clear educational direction for the school, and has ensured that the school fulfils its mission

- The school benefits from strong and effective middle management, resulting in good achievement by pupils
- Monitoring and evaluation of the work of the whole school by senior managers are not yet sufficiently developed
- Governors provide very good support and challenge for the school, but have not ensured that a wide range of statutory requirements has been met

Commentary

54. Leadership of the school by the head teacher, who has been in post for a little over a year, is very good. With the involvement of the school community and parents, he has promoted strong aspirations for high academic achievement, the development of personal values rooted in the Catholic faith and the pursuit of excellence. This is evidenced in all aspects of the work and culture of the school. Pupils have high self-esteem and work confidently and teachers expect high standards from them in all aspects of school life. The head teacher is supported well by an effective senior team.
55. Management of the school is satisfactory overall. Recent changes in the management structure have clarified responsibilities and accountability, and have encouraged wider staff and parental involvement in decision making. The senior team recognises the need for more systematic monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school, more consistent dissemination of best practice and more focused strategic planning. This has been incorporated into the planning process. The work of the school improvement group forms a good basis for further development.
56. Management of the specialist college is incorporated into whole-school systems and is satisfactory, but at this early stage the impact is uneven. ICT is having a positive impact across the curriculum and is helping to raise standards in other subjects. Although the teaching and learning in mathematics are good, the subject is not yet making a significant contribution to raising standards across the school. The school has generally met its key targets regarding provision. Take-up is low for the ICT examination at GCSE, but most community targets have been met, both those regarding other schools and the wider community. The school has been awarded 'provider' status for European Community Drivers Licence (ECDL) tuition and uses this effectively.
57. The quality of middle management is good and frequently very good. They are excellent in PE. Heads of department organise work well and provide good leadership, and self-evaluation is good. Pupils are supported well by close tracking of their progress and achievement by both pastoral and academic staff. Teams work well together and leaders at all levels provide good models for other staff and pupils.
58. Leadership of special educational needs is very good. The co-ordinator has planned for and communicated her clear vision and values for including all pupils very effectively. This is reflected in the very positive attitudes of the staff to each other and to vulnerable pupils. She has built a skilful and highly motivated team of teaching assistants. The co-ordination of special educational needs and pastoral provision is good, resulting in very good relationships with external agencies. These have improved the school's ability to meet the needs of all its pupils. Funding is well managed and linked to development targets
59. Management of special educational needs is satisfactory. The co-ordinator has only recently had the time and resources to fulfil her role in monitoring provision across the school. There are good informal links with departments. However, these are not strong enough to make sure that the best practice in assessment and reporting of the progress of pupils is in place. The special educational needs record is complete and gives a satisfactory overview of pupils' needs. Individual education plans are in place but require more detailed information on pupils' individual needs and better focusing and reviewing of targets

60. Provision for staff development and performance management is good. All training courses for staff are closely linked to the school's improvement plans. A clear system of performance management is effective in supporting school improvement. Support staff are mainly trained in school but outside agencies are also involved, such as the local education authority and professional associations. ICT support staff go out to primary feeder schools to train their staff. All new staff are mentored and a programme of events is organised to suit individual needs. The school has a high reputation for initial teacher training and has strong links with local universities and colleges, especially Manchester Metropolitan University. The school organises some courses for its trainees.
61. Governance is satisfactory overall. The governors are impressively committed, particularly to the school's Catholic vision. They have led the school through five changes of status in 12 years, the most recent to voluntary aided and to specialist college status. They are determined to maintain a distinctive school which values all pupils. They have taken advantage of a diocesan initiative to reinvigorate membership and strengthen the committee structure. The chair of governors has a clear grasp of school matters and the new steering group of chairs of committee provides a creative and supportive discussion group for the head teacher. With further training, they are in a strong position to take the school forward.
62. However, governors have not ensured that statutory obligations are met with respect to providing a literacy policy for pupils between the ages of 11 and 14. The programmes of study of the National Curriculum related to ICT are not fully covered in Years 10 and 11, and work-related learning between the ages of 14 and 16 is not fully taught. The Race Relations Act and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 are not fully implemented.
63. The very recent audit shows that financial controls and procedures are good. The new chairman of finance is working hard with the school's financial adviser and the bursar to ensure that procedures are aligned with best practice and that budget holders are conscious of cost effectiveness.
64. The school's budget is broadly in line with the national average but reserves for 2002-03 were too low. Initial specialist college funds have been well spent on additional space for the mathematics department and on a very substantial increase in hardware and software for ICT across the curriculum, except for music. However, management of these resources has been uneven. Additional funding for pupils with special educational needs is very effectively spent.
65. This is overall an effective school which offers good value for money.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	2,682,198
Total expenditure	2,677,273
Expenditure per pupil	£3,603

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	00
Balance carried forward to the next	4,925

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good at the ages of 14 and 16
- Teaching is good throughout the school and pupils learn well
- Relationships are mutually respectful and pupils' behaviour is always good
- There is no separate provision for drama so pupils do not have the full benefit of the experiences offered by the subject

Commentary

66. In national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003, results were above the national average and well above those for similar schools. They were in line with results at the time of the last inspection. Boys did marginally better than girls in comparison with their respective national averages. Compared with their attainment on entry to the school, by the age of 14 pupils' achievement is good. Test results in 2004 showed a marked improvement. In the GCSE examination in 2003, results for both language and literature were close to the national median. Girls and boys did equally well. Pupils' achievement is good, taking into account their level of attainment on entry. In 2004 performance in language was similar to that in 2003 but results in literature were lower.
67. Standards of work observed in Years 7, 8 and 9 were above those found nationally. Levels seen in Years 10 and 11 matched national expectation.
68. The overall quality of pupils' listening and speaking throughout the school is above that found nationally. They listen attentively and collaborate productively in pairs and small groups. Pupils answer questions willingly and articulately. They respond positively to teachers' robust and challenging questioning. Pupils in Year 8, for example, discussing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, offered extended and well-considered answers which showed their knowledge of character and plot in the early part of the play. Pupils' confidence owes much to the very supportive relationships within the classrooms. They know that opinions will be taken seriously and respected. One high attaining group in Year 11 talked with sensitivity and maturity about cultural and moral implications of poems set for examination. By the age of 14 most pupils use standard English. They are courteous and confident when talking to adults.
69. General standards of reading comprehension by the end of Year 9 are in line with expectation. A minority of pupils, however, join the school with a reading age below their actual age. Such pupils receive intensive specialist support and make good progress during Year 7. The majority of pupils read aloud audibly and with clear meaning, but a few fail to articulate well, and read with little variation in pitch and pace. All pupils read a wide range of literature and, by the age of 14, they understand such features as plot, character and themes in plays such as *The Tempest*. They also use the appropriate language of literary appreciation in discussing novels and poetry. Good use is made of the learning resource centre but, as yet, book stock is inadequate to meet the proper needs of pupils, especially through the lack of a wide range of attractive fiction to read for pleasure.

70. The overall quality of written work by the age of 14 is above that expected nationally. By the age of 16 many pupils write knowledgeably and fluently about literature, showing mature and well-informed understanding. Most pupils present work carefully with neat handwriting. They write effectively for a range of readers and purposes. During Year 8, pupils write stories for Year 2 in local infant schools. After having visited the infants and discussed the sort of stories they like to read, pupils write lively books, which they later read to the infants. The quality of writing shows shrewd understanding of appropriate choice of subject and the use of a level of language accessible to their readers. Standards of book production are very high and demonstrate the strength of desktop publication available in the school. Some lower attaining pupils at the age of 14 have continuing difficulty with sentence structure, paragraphing and precise expression of ideas. By the age of 16, the general standard of written work matches that found nationally. High attaining pupils, however, produce assignments matching the highest grades at GCSE level. One such class demonstrated thorough knowledge of the features of persuasive language including understanding of the relevant terminology to describe their work. The best written outcomes reached levels commensurate with GCSE A and A* grades. Pupils' oral presentations of their writing were of outstanding quality and showed good command of rhetorical and other devices to influence an audience. Much attractive writing by pupils is on display.
71. Overall, the quality of teaching throughout the school is good. In Years 7, 8 and 9 it is always good and is very good in just under half of lessons. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is very good or excellent in nearly half of lessons. Lessons are always thoroughly prepared. Objectives are clear and pupils know exactly what is expected of them. Teachers make skilful use of questioning to draw the best from pupils, and insist that detailed answers are justified by sound reasoning and knowledge. A particular strength of all teaching within the department is the mutual respect created between teachers and pupils. This results in pupils feeling confident to explore ideas and share them with classmates. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace, with teachers using a variety of effective techniques. In the very best lessons, because of outstandingly skilful preparation, management and communication by teachers, pupils work at a very high level of understanding and express themselves in mature and sophisticated language. Pupils' work is conscientiously marked in Years 7, 8 and 9, but occasionally, comments are not sufficiently diagnostic or precise and do not give sufficient advice to help pupils to improve. In Years 10 and 11, however, coursework is marked in great detail and helpful targets for improvement are set.
72. The curriculum is broad and balanced and requirements are met. Departmental documents are thorough and well presented. Staff know their pupils well and keep careful records of their progress and expected levels of performance. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. They share the same vision and commitment. Relationships are positive and morale is high. Much of the effectiveness of the department is due to very good management and energetic leadership.
73. National Curriculum requirements for drama within English are fully met. Drama as a separate subject is not, however, included in the timetable and so pupils miss an entitlement to experience the range of communication and life skills offered by a full course in the subject. To compensate for this lack, the English department arranges regular theatre trips and many groups of pupils take part in local and regional drama activities.
74. Since the last inspection the overall quality of teaching has improved well. Marking, particularly in Years 10 and 11, has improved. The new learning resource centre offers an attractive environment for learning but, at the moment, the book stock is inadequate for supporting research in English.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

75. Whilst standards in literacy are above average, provision is satisfactory. In other subjects across the curriculum the great majority of pupils listen attentively and the quality of spoken

language throughout the school is above that found nationally. Group work is encouraged and forms an integral part of the learning process in almost all curriculum areas. Almost all pupils read well enough to understand printed materials presented to them and the language of their textbooks is well matched to their levels of reading comprehension. Only in design and technology and history is there clear evidence of pupils being helped with a variety of reading techniques. Key words are displayed in several departments and are particularly well used in history.

76. Pupils' presentation of their written work is good in the majority of subjects. In design and technology and history constructive help is given to develop a range of skills such as note-taking and the structuring of extended writing. Marking is inconsistent, especially with regard to correction of spelling mistakes. Although some departments have their own policies, which are followed closely, the lack of a whole-school policy has resulted in uneven practice. Some departments such as mathematics, design and technology and history have made good progress but in other curriculum areas there is little evidence that the best practice has been fully integrated into everyday classroom teaching.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Provision in modern foreign languages is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well in response to good teaching
- Teachers manage pupils very well, so relationships are very good
- Leadership and management are very good and result in good learning for the pupils
- Whilst pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9, very few pupils now follow a language course in Years 10 and 11

Commentary

77. There is no information on standards at the end of Year 9 in 2003. However, written work seen from Year 9 in 2004 indicates that higher attaining pupils in this group already did work worthy of a mid-range grade in GCSE. Standards have risen considerably since the inspection of 1999 due to the impact of a new head of department. Even for pupils with above average prior attainment this is good achievement. However, most of these pupils did not continue with a language in Year 10.
78. In the GCSE examinations of 2003 results were above average in French but well below in German. Girls' results were well below those of boys, who did better in relation to their other subjects than boys did nationally. These were the last results from a full cohort of pupils. In 2004, with around 30 candidates in each language, standards rose substantially in French and even more sharply in German. Such results represent good achievement.
79. In Years 7 to 9 half the pupils take French and the other half German. Standards seen in Year 9 were in line with those expected nationally. Higher attaining pupils are above average for their age. Lower attainers including those with special needs are below average, but their achievement is satisfactory. Overall achievement is good, because the majority of pupils achieve well in relation to the difficulty they experience in their early language lessons. There is little difference between the achievement of boys and that of girls. Pupils have developed skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing well. They are articulate and confident enough to initiate communication, and many write extended text.
80. In Year 11 there are over 20 candidates in German, but only 15 in French. All pupils are working in line with GCSE standards, and a number of them in line with the higher grades. This is good achievement, though not yet matched in Year 10.

81. Teaching in both languages is good overall and sometimes very good or even excellent in both French and German. Teachers use their language skills well to generate spoken responses, which come readily because relationships are very good. Teachers' and pupils' skills in ICT are developing well because these teachers are also contributing to its teaching. The newly acquired interactive whiteboard is making a strong impact on learning. In Year 10 there is a work-related aspect to learning, because all pupils take the British Airways Languages Award. High standards are expected, which are supported by additional study sessions for older pupils. Assessment is used well to track pupils' progress and to support the setting and review of targets.
82. Leadership and management are very good. Shared vision and commitment have led to the establishment of a cohesive department with steadily rising standards, despite the fall in numbers in Years 10 and 11. Many pupils benefit from the visits abroad organised annually to France and Germany in turn. All this has been inspired by the outstanding personal example of the head of department.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11
- Learning is good in all year groups as a result of good teaching, provided by staff with good subject knowledge
- ICT is having an increasingly beneficial impact on standards of work and on pupils' attitudes
- Given the school's status as a mathematics college, numeracy across the curriculum is only satisfactory

Commentary

83. In the National Curriculum tests taken by pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2003, results were slightly above average. Over the past few years, although results have fluctuated a little, they have shown an upward trend with the gap between the better results of boys and those of the girls narrowing. Given this cohort's above average standard on entry to the school, these results represent satisfactory achievement. The most recent 2004 tests produced a slight fall in results, also with a small gender difference.
84. In the GCSE examination taken in 2003, results were above the national average. They were in line with predictions when account is taken of this cohort's good performance in 2001 when they were aged 14. In these terms, they made satisfactory progress overall. The 2004 GCSE results maintained standards, increasing the proportion of pupils achieving an A*-C grade but with a sharp drop in the proportion achieving higher, A*-B grades. This fall is the result of the examination entry policy rather than a drop in standards.
85. Standards seen in lessons are in line with the levels expected nationally by Year 9 and achievement is satisfactory. In a good lesson, when the class was dealing with substitution in algebraic expressions, the pupils occasionally showed a weakness with mental arithmetic. A lower set of 14 year olds worked on number patterns employing a 'function machine'. Simple multiplications such as 5×20 were thought to require a calculator. The very few pupils of minority ethnic origin have a good command of English and their progress is in line with that of the class. With grouping by ability, most pupils with special educational needs are in the lower sets in each year. Here, the small groups and very good quality learning support enable these pupils to make good progress commensurate with their ability.
86. Standards by age 16 are above average and pupils achieve well. A small group following a 'fast-track' free-standing Alevel programme were beginning three-dimensional trigonometry. After

some initial difficulty identifying the correct right-angled triangle to be employed in the given problem, they quickly and successfully settled to work. Pupils working towards the less demanding foundation programme worked well when handling areas and perimeters. Here again, simple mental arithmetic was an issue. No in-class support was available in this lesson, but the small class size – 10 pupils – meant the teacher was able to provide each pupil with one-to-one help.

87. Teaching and learning are strengths of the department and are good in all years, with little variation between boys and girls in terms of response or attitude. Teaching and learning were very good in a quarter of lessons seen and good in a further two thirds. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Teaching was characterised by very good planning and the almost universal adoption of an interactive style of work. In this approach, an answer to a teacher's question is thrown back to a different pupil by "What do you think of that?" or "Is she right?" The respondent must comment and then give his or her reasoning. By use of careful questions and by targeting particular pupils these explanations reinforce the learning of the whole class. In all lessons teachers demonstrated a good, and sometimes very good, command of the subject. The use of ICT in mathematics is satisfactory. It is having a marked and increasingly beneficial impact on the work of the department. Most teachers begin lessons with a thoughtful display which catches pupils' attention. Few pupils use the interactive whiteboards, but they do have an opportunity to use the department's set of laptop computers. Homework is set regularly and, as with class work, is marked regularly and annotated with constructive comments.
88. Leadership and management in the department are good. Despite the present inter-regnum of an acting head of department, well-considered developments are under way, as is an enhanced assessment process. Monitoring of the work of the department and individual pupils is thorough. Information gained from regular tests and reviews is shared with the pupils and their parents/carers. The department operates its own very good internal support system, whereby a teacher in a non-contact period will join another class in support. This is done either to help staff new to the school or in classes where individual pupils are known to need additional help. Literacy has made a strong impact on the subject. Not only do pupils vocalise their reasoning, but opportunities are also provided for extended writing in most years. The department has created some useful modules incorporating citizenship issues, but makes little contribution to whole-school spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
89. Since the last inspection, GCSE pass rates for A*-C have doubled, but the use of mathematics in other areas of the curriculum is still only satisfactory. Pupils' attitudes to work and the quality of teaching remain strengths. Marking of work and assessments generally remain good. The level of resources has improved, particularly with regard to ICT.

Numeracy across the curriculum

90. Numeracy across the school is satisfactory only. As a mathematics and computing specialist college, mathematics has not yet had sufficient time to impact appropriately on other subjects. A successful numeracy staff-training day was run some years ago and, as a result, some subjects do have a numeracy policy and take account of it in their planning. In the majority of subjects pupils cope adequately with the modest numeracy demands placed upon them.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The achievement of higher attaining pupils is good
- There is much good teaching and learning
- In a small number of lessons the pace of work is too slow and this limits learning
- The time allocation in Years 10 and 11 limits opportunities to develop pupils' literacy skills

Commentary

91. In the end of Year 9 national tests in 2003, results were broadly average and have been at this level over recent years. The percentage of pupils obtaining the higher levels in the national tests was broadly average, a good achievement taking pupils' prior attainment into account. The unconfirmed results of 2004 were lower than those of 2003. Compared with schools which have pupils of similar prior attainment, the 2003 results were average overall. In the GCSE examinations in 2003 results were average overall and have improved over recent years. There were no A* grade passes but also very few lower grades, representing good achievement taking into account pupils' attainment on entry to the school. The unconfirmed 2004 results were lower than in 2003. Staffing changes were a factor in lower results and while that particular issue is now resolved a key member of staff is now on extended illness absence.
92. Boys performed better than girls in the end of Year 9 national tests and in the GCSE examinations in 2003, the years leading up to 2003 and in the unconfirmed 2004 results. However, with the exception of the current Year 7, the attainment of boys on entry to the school has consistently exceeded that of girls. Inspection evidence shows a similar picture and also that the achievement of boys and girls are similar to each other.
93. In Year 9, standards seen are broadly average and most pupils of all levels of prior attainment achieve satisfactorily and many well. The small numbers of pupils from ethnic minorities also achieve satisfactorily. Pupils generally have a sound understanding of the subject. Year 9 pupils understand what respiration is and the highest attainers refer to the chemical equation for respiration with confidence and also know that this reaction takes place in the muscle tissue, where energy is needed. These pupils have achieved well. All pupils conduct experimental work carefully and safely and exercise books show that they are confident in predicting and interpreting experimental results. On rare occasions, the pace of a lesson is slow and while the main significant points are learned, consolidation of these is not possible. Pupils' literacy skills are average overall; they benefit from opportunities to write at length, which aids their understanding. Pupils' use of numeracy is broadly average and their use of ICT is good.
94. In Year 11, standards are average overall, though the highest attaining pupils are working confidently towards the highest GCSE levels. While there are not many of these pupils, the knowledge they show about sub-atomic structure and metallic bonding is good. Generally, achievement is satisfactory and that of the highest attainers is good. Good achievement is evident where the pace of lessons is good, the work is varied and challenging, and work is reinforced so that pupils have a sense of achievement at the end of the lesson. Achievement is only satisfactory where the pace of work is too slow and on those occasions when trivial use is made of ICT, that is, where other means could be used more effectively to engage pupils in discussion about the subject matter. Pupils have good attitudes to their learning mostly and work hard, striving to do their best. On rare occasions the behaviour of a small number of pupils is poor and disrupts the learning of others. As in Years 7 to 9, the development of literacy skills is satisfactory overall; there are generally good opportunities to discuss work, to write about investigations and to use technical terminology accurately, but too few opportunities to explain understanding.
95. Teaching and learning are good overall. The quality of work in pupils' books over time indicates high expectations and work matched to pupils' needs. As a rule, this is evident in lessons, but there are some anomalies. Occasionally the pace of lessons is slow and pupils become bored, the use of ICT does not add any extra challenge to the work, and management of pupils is unsatisfactory leading to disruptive behaviour. Nevertheless, lessons are usually well planned with challenging and interesting activities that hold pupils' interest and successfully encourage hard work. While there are inconsistencies in marking, generally it is informative and gives pupils clear direction of how to improve. Assessment information is used well to organise pupils into groups according to their capabilities, to change groupings where necessary and to set targets for pupils. Homework is good and used well to support class work.

96. The subject is well led with a clear view of the areas for development. Support for new staff to the department is good. Management is satisfactory overall; the absence of the key member of staff is causing some minor disruptions. Resources are managed well, but the spread-out nature of the department exposes deficiencies in some basic apparatus as well as more expensive items, such as microscopes. Monitoring and evaluation of the department's work are satisfactory – analysing and using assessment information are good, the programme of teaching observation is satisfactory. The curriculum is good in Years 7 to 9 but in Years 10 and 11 teaching time allocation limits opportunities for some activities that would benefit pupils' learning, for example extended writing. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, though the provision of resources is still unsatisfactory.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The quality of provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in Year 9 are above average, representing good achievement
- The curriculum for applied ICT GCSE in Years 10 and 11 does not cover fully the National Curriculum programme of study
- Teaching from an experienced and dedicated staff is good
- There is an imaginative and flexible scheme of work in Years 7 to 9
- Very good resources are maintained by a very good technical team

Commentary

97. In 2003, over two-thirds of pupils gained level 5 or above in their teacher assessments at the end of Year 9, indicating standards above national expectations. The 2004 teachers' assessments show the proportion of pupils reaching level 5 or above to have risen to 73 per cent. In lessons seen, standards are above national expectations in Year 9, and pupils achieve well as standards on entry for this subject are below average. Pupils follow a challenging course with a suitable time allocation over Years 7 to 9 that enables all pupils, including those with special educational needs, to achieve well
98. Results at GCSE in 2003 were well below national averages. However, staffing difficulties resulted in pupils being taught by a number of different temporary teachers, which has had a profound effect on their examination results. The effects of these difficulties have influenced results in 2004, which have shown only a slight improvement. In addition there was no access to equipment for some time due to theft. However, the quality of work observed during the inspection is such that standards of the current cohort of pupils are in line with national expectations, and their achievement is satisfactory.
99. The GCSE course in applied ICT, followed by almost all pupils in Years 10 and 11, enables pupils to acquire a wide variety of skills, knowledge and understanding, relevant to the modern world of work, but does not cover fully the National Curriculum programme of study. They do not apply as appropriate the concepts and techniques of using ICT to record, respond to, control and automate events. The college is an accredited centre for the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) and this very valuable course is offered to the small group of pupils who do not take GCSE.
100. Teaching of ICT is good. The specialist teachers have in-depth knowledge and understanding of the subject and are well led. An ongoing programme of professional development and support for staff has enabled non-specialist teachers to acquire the necessary skills and they are now successfully deployed in teaching ICT to Year 7. Lesson planning is good. Lesson aims are clearly stated and displayed, and pupils are clear about what is expected of them. Pupils are given good quality support material that helps them to become more independent,

and targets for completion of tasks. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and work, and as a result, pupils are for the most part well motivated and keen to learn. The consistently good teaching features energy and enthusiasm, giving pupils the clear message that ICT is well worth the effort. Homework is well used to reinforce and extend pupils' learning. Teachers' effective behaviour management techniques and strategies ensure that a small minority of potentially disruptive pupils do not inhibit learning, which consequently is good.

101. The school is now very well equipped with computer hardware and software that is well maintained by a very good team of technicians. Each of the ICT rooms is well equipped with a suite of networked computers, printing facilities, a data projector and an interactive whiteboard. On entering the school, pupils are made aware of the requirements for responsible use of the computer systems, including the Internet. There are appropriate protection measures in place and access rights can be withdrawn in the rare event of inappropriate use.
102. There is extensive use of the computer systems out of school hours. Pupils have a computer club and access the facilities outside lessons to enhance their work, and to pursue their own interests. A group of pupils have been trained as 'pupil technicians' and they are now able to provide technical assistance to their peers and teachers in lessons.
103. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. There is no longer any weak teaching in ICT, and the successful bid for mathematics and computing college status has meant that resources are now very much better. Leadership is good and management is satisfactory; plans are in place to ensure full coverage of the curriculum.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

104. The cross-curricular provision of ICT is good overall. There are examples of good practice in several subjects, and ICT is well on the way to becoming embedded in the teaching and learning of the school. Pupils at all stages are competent and confident users of ICT; they use desktop publishing to enhance their written work in most subjects, they use video and performance analysis software in physical education, they use the Internet effectively for research in many areas and they make high quality presentations, using presentational software.
105. Teachers in all departments have a high level of capability in the use of ICT and many use ICT extensively in their teaching. The school is now very well resourced and all departments have access to adequate resources. However, in some areas, the arrangements for access are too inflexible to allow access to all pupils.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most pupils achieve well
- The unsatisfactory behaviour of a small minority sometimes slows progress for the whole class
- Leadership is good and standards are beginning to rise
- Teaching and learning are good overall, because teachers are implementing effective new styles of teaching
- The use of assessment is unsatisfactory overall
- Good strategies for managing gender learning differences are not yet evenly implemented

Commentary

106. Prolonged sickness absence and unstable staffing over the last three years have depressed pupils' standards in Years 9, 10 and 11.
107. By the age of 14 in 2004, attainment was estimated by the department to be well below average, with the girls attaining much better than the boys. Performance was under-estimated and attainment seen in books of the 2004 cohort was below average. Standards seen in class by age 14 are average overall and match the national expectation. Standards are rising. By the age of 16 in 2003 results at A*-C were above the national average but there were too few of the highest grades. Unvalidated results for 2004 were slightly lower. Standards seen in class by age 16 are average.
108. Achievement overall is satisfactory and better on the GCSE course than before the age of 14. In recent years, progress by the age of 14 has been satisfactory, from below average attainment on entry in geography. Achievement seen in books and lessons is accelerating in response to new teaching styles, but it is diminished in some Year 9 classes by the unsatisfactory behaviour of a few boys. Achievement is better in Years 7 and 8.
109. In 2003 pupils added good value to their prior attainment at GCSE. Unsatisfactory value overall in 2004 is attributed to the negative influence of some disaffected boys. Validated coursework marks are high because the quality of fieldwork done in Llandudno is good. The GCSE course does not have a sharp enough focus on target setting or examination practice to drive up results. Nevertheless achievement seen in class is good and is better in Year 10 than in Year 11.
110. Teaching and learning are good in three quarters of lessons and satisfactory in the remainder. All lessons are well structured and many have challenging open-ended tasks which allow all pupils to work at their own level and pace. Consequently, those of high prior attainment are stretched and those of low prior attainment are given appropriate work. Effective learning assistants help pupils with special needs make good progress towards their targets. Good strategies for managing gender differences in learning, such as ensuring girls answer questions as often as boys, are unevenly implemented. Good questioning draws out and builds on what pupils know and understand; consequently there is much good comment in extended pupils' talk. However, they do not yet write enough and mathematical examples given are often too simple. Marking is thorough and encouraging but does not involve pupils closely enough in their own improvement. Good new procedures are not yet fully implemented; consequently assessment is unsatisfactory. Teachers are beginning to make effective use of the one available data projector.
111. Leadership is good. Teachers co-operate effectively. Planning, based on a strong teaching and learning policy, is good. Teachers have embraced with enthusiasm a national initiative, the Key Stage 3 strategy, designed to improve teaching and learning. They are redesigning their schemes of work, strengthening lesson planning and changing what does not work. Management is satisfactory, because the new styles are only just beginning to take effect. Support for newly qualified teachers and for trainees is very good. Access to computers is restricted. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory overall.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most pupils have very positive attitudes to their work and therefore achieve well
- Pupils learn very well, due to good teaching in Years 7 to 9 and very good teaching in Years 10 to 11

- The department is led and managed very well; very good progress has been made since the previous inspection
- The department makes a very good contribution to the development of pupils' speaking and writing
- The number and range of books in the resources centre are insufficient to support pupils' independent learning

Commentary

112. By the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment is in line with that expected nationally. Most pupils begin Year 7 with standards in history that are below the national expectation. The standard of work seen during the inspection was in line with that expected nationally. Most pupils achieve well and make good progress in Years 7 to 9. Pupils with special educational needs usually achieve well because teachers support them well. A very small proportion of pupils do not achieve as well as they should do because they behave in an immature way and do not concentrate on work.
113. Most pupils in Years 7 to 9 have good knowledge and understanding of the past. The highest attainers write very well at length, expressing and justifying an opinion with relevant evidence. Lower attainers use sources successfully for information, and the higher attainers make valid deductions from a range of sources.
114. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2003 were below average. In 2004 the results were higher than those of 2003 and were above the 2003 national average. A smaller than usually seen proportion gained an A or A* grade, but all who took the examination passed. The results represent good progress for Years 10 and 11. The work seen during the inspection was above the standards expected nationally and the work of a significant minority reached the highest standards. The majority of pupils achieve very well because they are taught very well and are prepared to work hard in order to succeed.
115. The majority of pupils in Years 10 and 11 have good knowledge of the topics they study and understand well why events happened. The highest attainers produce very good quality extended writing. They successfully evaluate the reliability and usefulness of sources – a skill which the lower attainers struggle to master. Pupils use ICT confidently to present their work.
116. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and as a result, pupils learn well. Very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 promotes very good learning. Teachers have very high expectations of behaviour and hard work, and very effective classroom management creates a purposeful learning atmosphere. The enthusiasm of the teachers for their subject is clear and it motivates the pupils very effectively. Teachers ensure that pupils are actively involved in their learning. The pupils in Years 10 and 11 are prepared extremely well for their examinations, and the work set is appropriately demanding. The comments on pupils' work ensure that they know clearly how they can improve in future. There is good emphasis on improving pupils' speaking and writing; pupils' oral answers are articulate and often lengthy. Although teachers encourage pupils to use the resources centre for independent research, it does not contain enough books of an appropriate standard to allow pupils to develop their independent learning successfully.
117. The department is led and managed very well. The energetic, enthusiastic head of department has a very clear commitment to raising standards still further and has taken action to achieve this. Significant improvement has been made since the previous inspection. The quality of teaching, the standards at GCSE, the demands put on the highest attainers and pupils' oral skills have all improved. The department rigorously reviews its own performance and has shown a willingness to embrace change where such change would help to raise standards.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching leads to pupils achieving well
- The quality of assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress and attainment is good and results in effective learning
- The range of curriculum opportunities for design and manufacture is restricted by the lack of computer equipment and teacher planning
- The quality of leadership and management is very good

Commentary

118. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall standard of attainment was below the national average in 2003. In the 2003 GCSE examinations for design and technology, results were in line with the national average overall. The GCSE results for 2004 show a significant improvement over the previous year.
119. Work seen during the inspection confirmed that standards have improved. By the end of Year 9 standards are average, representing good progress, as standards on entry for this subject are below average. Pupils produce articles of good quality and they are developing skills to express their ideas well and communicate their designs clearly. Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 11 is above the standard expected nationally. Pupils throughout the school make good progress when considering the low level of attainment at the end of Year 9, as shown by teacher assessment. Higher attaining pupils are capable of high quality work, as can be seen, for example, in the detailed and well-presented project folders, and the good quality practical project work. In general, pupils make limited use of computers, particularly computer-aided design and manufacture. Pupils are challenged to focus clearly on the requirements of the GCSE examination. As a result, pupils understand what they need to do and are helped to reach higher grades. The improvement seen is a result of better planning of lessons, higher expectations and high quality assessment.
120. In the lessons seen, teaching and learning are good. Teachers use their good subject knowledge, enthusiasm and high expectations to engage pupils. Effective classroom management is based on good relationships. The good range of activities ensures that all pupils are actively involved in their learning. Lessons are sharply focused and the objectives are shared sufficiently with the pupils. Key learning points are systematically reinforced and new knowledge is introduced as and when it is needed, so that pupils use it immediately to develop their understanding. Teachers work well with pupils with special educational needs, helping these pupils to progress well. Pupils' work is marked regularly and teachers provide encouraging, motivating comments that show pupils how to improve. These assessment outcomes are used consistently and effectively to adapt future planning and teaching.
121. The head of department provides very good leadership. Management of the department is very good. The head of department has rightly focused on lesson planning to improve teaching, the use of assessment and the tracking and monitoring of pupils' progress and attainment to help raise standards. Systems for assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress and attainment are well developed and are good. Assessment systems are well established and information from assessment is used to set targets. There is good technician support for the department, preparing materials and maintaining equipment. The lack of computer equipment and teacher planning restricts the range of curriculum opportunities, particularly for computer-aided movement.
122. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good and result in very good achievement in Years 7 to 9 and good achievement in Years 10 and 11
- Assessment systems are very good and help pupils to improve their work
- The leadership and management of the subject are very good
- Contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good

- The timetabling of less teaching time for some pupils in Year 10 impacts on their motivation
- There are too few visits to art galleries, which impacts on extending work to the highest standards

Commentary

123. In the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003, results were well above average. Over recent years results have risen and are better than at the time of the last inspection.
124. Since the last inspection, results in GCSE examinations have been above the national average. In 2003, due to staffing instability, the number of pupils gaining grades A*-C fell to slightly below the national average. However, results rose in 2004 and achievement was good.
125. Standards seen in Year 9 are above the level expected nationally but are of a lower level than recorded in last year's teacher assessments. Nevertheless, this represents very good achievement, given that the pupils arrived in Year 7 with a below average level of skills and understanding. Pupils use technical skills competently in a wide range of media and show a good understanding of how to develop and research work. By studying a range of artists' work from different cultures such as Indian and Aboriginal art, they learn new techniques that they apply confidently to their work. They learn quickly because the effective teaching and structured nature of the course give them a good understanding of how to produce their personal works of art. Teachers encourage written evaluation and analysis of artists' work and pupils' literacy skills are above average. ICT is built into planning and used well for research and creative purposes.
126. In Year 11 the standards seen are above average. Standards are different from the 2003 GCSE results because staffing has been stable and the pupils have been consistently taught well. At this level pupils take more responsibility for their projects and use independent learning skills to achieve their best. High standards are reached when interpreting whole class themes and pupils confidently use a range of materials and techniques, including ICT to express their creative ideas. They explore, interpret and analyse when researching areas such as Surrealism and use spiritual themes such as the crucifixion as an influence for exciting large-scale work. A strength of the department is the emphasis put on the pupils' personal response and this builds on the confidence of lower attaining pupils who respond well to projects based on themes such as their own identity. Far fewer boys than girls choose to study art at this level and where their work is below the expected standard, it is frequently linked to poor organisational skills. Although achievement of most pupils in lessons is very good, some pace is lost over time for the groups who have less curriculum time in Year 10 and who feel they are falling behind. Although time is to some extent made up in Year 11, this difference has a demotivating effect.
127. Teaching is very good; consequently pupils improve and develop their skills and understanding consistently throughout the school and learning is at least good and usually very good. Teachers have a very good command of their subject, which is evident in their frequent reference to artists and cultural influences and this strongly supports learning. Lessons are very well planned to include a wide range of enjoyable and challenging activities for all levels of attainment. For example, pupils explored the traditions and art work of the Hindu festival of Diwali as an influence for printed designs in a graphics project. Most pupils enjoy art and behaviour is frequently very good. Specialised vocabulary is built into projects and used in discussion and in evaluation of work. In the very best lessons teachers give very clear introductions using presentation software, demonstrate techniques and build in an element of humour to maintain pupils' interest.
128. Assessment is very good. Data is used well to plan the curriculum, which is closely monitored and modified. Assessment systems within the department give pupils a very good understanding of the level they are working at and what to do to improve. Pupils are involved in their own self-evaluation and peer evaluation, which is further supported by exemplars of grade levels and descriptions in classrooms.

129. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory; however, there are still outstanding issues: technician time is still inadequate and storage is still outdated and insufficient.
130. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department promotes a culture of high expectation and achievement and the department has a strong commitment to raise standards. A high emphasis is put on the pupil's spiritual, moral, cultural, social and citizenship development by building aspects into all projects. Well-attended extra classes are held before and after school, but visits to art galleries have been restricted. This impacts on the stimulus to extend work which is needed to gain the very top examination grades. The exhibiting of pupils' work in galleries and the high quality of display within the classroom and corridors strongly support learning and give the subject a high profile.

Music

Provision in music is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is now good in Years 10 and 11 as a result of good teaching
- Pupils in two thirds of lessons in Years 7 to 9 underachieve due to unsatisfactory attitudes to work and low pupil expectations
- Leadership is now very good and is resulting in rapid improvement to all areas of the department's work
- Insufficient specialist rooms and limited classroom resources have an adverse effect on standards and inhibit access to a broad and balanced curriculum
- The department makes a good contribution to the spiritual, social and cultural development of the pupils

Commentary

131. At GCSE in 2003, results were below average and in 2004 were very low, with no pupils attaining the highest A* and A grades. Analysis shows that the teacher assessments of pupils' standards at the end of Year 9 were inaccurate.
132. In lessons observed during the inspection, standards were average and improving throughout the school. However, two thirds of pupils in Years 7 to 9 are still underachieving due to immature behaviour in lessons, low pupil expectation of behaviour and attitudes, and a lack of confidence when performing. Pupils sing enthusiastically, use appropriate music vocabulary, and develop musical memory in rhythm work and concentrate in extended listening work. These same pupils, however, suffer from embarrassment when playing individually or in pairs, resulting in weak final performances. In Year 11, pupils identify different influences such as jazz, reggae and the music of other countries in the compositions of Sting, Paul Simon and Darius Milhaud. The number of pupils receiving private instrumental tuition is low. The achievement of pupils of different abilities is similar.
133. Teaching is good and results in good learning in Years 10 and 11. In the majority of lessons, pupils' learning is enhanced by the excellent subject knowledge and is stimulated by the excellent performance skills of the teacher. Lessons benefit from stimulating starter activities, effective planning, good lesson structure and use of time and resources. The pupils, as a result, are swiftly on task and actively engaged in practical musical activities, where the accommodation and resources allow. Homework is fairly often used to prepare for, or consolidate, classroom work. Where teaching and learning are satisfactory, it is in Years 7 to 9. Here, pupils show insufficient application, concentration and maturity, resulting in unsatisfactory progress, especially in paired work. Learning objectives are explicitly shared in lessons so that pupils are aware of, and engaged in, their learning.

134. A recently appointed head of department is now in place and, the department benefits from clear vision and whole school support. Whilst three weeks is a short time over which to judge the effects of leadership and management, staff and pupils commented on the positive changes taking place. There are high aspirations reflected in the imaginative planning and in the expectations of pupils and teachers. The head of department provides a good role model and has prepared a significant amount of useful documentation and analysis with which to develop the department and its pupils.
135. The department documentation meets National Curriculum requirements and the programmes of work for the whole school are under review. Pupils are being encouraged to participate in a growing number of enhancement activities, including peripatetic lessons and working with visiting artists. There are five visiting instrumental and vocal teachers, employed by the school, providing individual lessons for pupils. The peripatetic teaching observed during inspection was good. As yet there are no lessons on string or brass instruments. The parent teachers' association has assisted with the provision of new keyboards for the music room. These keyboards have USB connectivity, but no computers; the pupils have insufficient access to computers or classroom percussion instruments to allow them to benefit from a broad and balanced music curriculum. Similarly, a few classes are adversely affected by the lack of a second specialist teaching space.
136. The department is particularly strong in its contribution to the spiritual, social and cultural development of the pupils, as well as its focus on both literacy and citizenship.
137. There has been unsatisfactory progress on the many serious issues raised at the time of the last inspection until recently. In the brief period since the new head of department has been appointed, improvement has been rapid and effective. There is a clear vision for improvement. GCSE pupils benefit from a more detailed and focused syllabus, as well as from changes to the Year 10 syllabus which reflect the strengths of the candidates. Assessment is developing well. There still issues to be addressed regarding access to appropriate accommodation and resources.

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well and often very well as a result of very good teaching
- The highest attaining pupils are occasionally insufficiently challenged in GCSE theory lessons
- Leadership and management of a very effective team of teachers are excellent
- Pupils are clear about their level of performance and what they need to do to improve
- Pupils' self-esteem is raised through the frequent celebration of their achievements
- Performance data and analysis are not organised so that strengths and weaknesses are identified clearly

Commentary

138. In 2003, GCSE results were above the national average in relation to A*-C grades and pupils did better than expected overall. In 2004, there was a decline, although pupils did slightly better than expected. GCSE dance was particularly successful, with pupils doing much better than expected.
139. By the end of Year 9, standards are in line with national expectations. The achievement of pupils is good in relation to their capabilities and they make good, and often very good, progress. In Year 7 gymnastics lessons, boys show a marked improvement in their skills as a result of very effective teaching and the help of video replays to further improve their

performance. In Year 9, girls were seen to make good progress supported by the expertise of the teacher.

140. By the end of Year 11, standards are above national expectations. Achievement of the pupils is good and they make good, and often very good, progress. In team games, boys of widely different abilities were all seen to make very good progress with passing and control skills as a result of the coaching and organisational skills of the teachers. In trampoline lessons, girls also make very good progress, because of the skills of the teacher and the coaching responsibilities given to more talented pupils. In GCSE dance lessons, girls worked with enthusiasm and enjoyment. The teacher helped them improve their performance through the introduction of new techniques. Overall, the attitude and behaviour of the pupils are very good.
141. Teaching and learning are very good. All teachers have a good knowledge of their subject. In practical lessons, pupils are made aware of how different muscles are affected by different types of warm-up activities. In GCSE theory lessons, more progress is made through the teacher developing and illustrating answers given by the pupils. Teachers have high expectations and lessons move along at a very good pace, which helps to maintain the interest of the pupils. Lessons are well planned so that pupils make progress through a series of clear stages, although at the beginning of lessons, they sometimes need to be made more aware of what they need to achieve. Pupils with physical disabilities and more talented pupils are well catered for in particular lessons. In theory lessons, higher attaining pupils are not consistently provided with extension work.
142. Pupils are clear about their level of achievement and what they must do to improve. Pupils benefit from regular opportunities to evaluate their own performance; the use of video cameras and digital technology is particularly effective. Achievement is rewarded and celebrated regularly, which helps to raise the self-esteem of the pupils.
143. Leadership and management are excellent. The head of department has very clear ideas and a vision that extends beyond the boundary of the school, such as the current use of specialist coaches both during and after school, to improve the achievements and experiences of pupils of all abilities. The department is a very effective unit with each teacher having clearly defined but flexible management roles. The quality of teaching is monitored regularly, so that ideas are shared and standards improved. Analysis of pupil and departmental performance is not presented in a clear and user-friendly form.
144. There has been very good progress since the last inspection, which has resulted in a rise in standards and achievement.

BUSINESS STUDIES – APPLIED GCSE

Provision in business studies is **good**.

145. The focus was on applied GCSE business studies. Two sessions were observed. The standards were average and pupils achieved well. The teaching and learning were good. During the lesson there was good use of questioning and explanation, regular review of pupils' progress and a well-structured sequence of activities. In one lesson, good use was made of video clips to show good practice in business administration. This led to pupils gaining a secure knowledge and understanding of business practice. The review of pupils' work and teachers' planning showed good progress over time and regular marking which included comments about the levels achieved.

CITIZENSHIP

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and areas for improvement

- Teaching and learning are good and pupils achieve well
- A clear reflection of the values promoted by citizenship permeates the wider life of the school.
- Active citizenship within the school is good
- Assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress are in the early stages and an effective structure is not yet in place

- There is no mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching the subject
- There is no system to map the pupils' experience, to ensure that all have equal access to the curriculum

Commentary

146. No discrete lessons in citizenship were observed during the inspection. The system for delivery has changed and this is the first year of aspects being taught through subject areas, theme days, extra-curricular activities and leadership opportunities for pupils.
147. Pupils reach average standards in Years 9 and 11. Teachers have made a sound start to delivering citizenship in this manner and are teaching aspects well. Most pupils demonstrate good attitudes, see the relevance of the subject and achieve well. The emphasis in the curriculum on active citizenship positively encourages pupils to take responsibility and to take on positions of leadership within the school. Pupils demonstrate a growing awareness of their role within the school and within the community.
148. By Year 9, pupils are developing knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens and know how to make their voice heard at a local and national level. They are aware of the importance of voting. In Year 8, visits from outside speakers such as the local Member of Parliament build on pupils' understanding of political representation. They have firm views about their rights and responsibilities. In interviews pupils strongly present their own opinions about school and discuss maturely how they can bring about change. Many pupils in Year 7 attend the residential retreat where skills in team building and problem solving are developed. In discussion, pupils show respect for each other's values and in lessons such as art, the diversity of cultural backgrounds.
149. Year 11 pupils consider personal responsibilities and ways of dealing with different situations and how to make choices. They show a good understanding of social issues and have good skills in discussion. They deploy their knowledge, express and justify their opinions and understand the opinions of others. In English lessons, pupils consider environmental issues such as the impact of expansion on a village and role-play the public meeting in the village hall. In religious education pupils demonstrated a very good understanding of political and social issues when producing high quality presentations using presentation software packages on, for example, the life of Martin Luther King.
150. Teaching is good. A high emphasis is put on helping pupils to understand conflicting viewpoints on controversial issues. Imaginative planning and challenging questioning encourage pupils to think for themselves. Teachers support pupils well, give them the confidence to respond positively to discussion and use a good variety of methods to deliver aspects. Pupils learn well because they feel their views are of some importance and they confidently express them when dealing with issues such as bullying. A clear reflection of the values promoted within citizenship lessons permeates the wider life of the school
151. Pupils understand their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. Many show this in their discussions with one another, their teachers and with other adults. However, the school council has only recently been formed and there are no representatives from Years 7 and 8. Although initiatives such as pupils attending the youth parliament are in place there are currently insufficient opportunities overall for all pupils to be involved. Pupils are presented with plenty of leadership opportunities and encouraged to take on roles such as form captains, peer mentors and ICT technicians, which positively build on their sense of worth and encourage them to contribute to the community of the school. Extra-curricular activities such as The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme strongly support pupils' development. Pupils have begun to collate a record of their experiences, both through the curriculum and through other opportunities, in a citizenship log. Involvement within the community is well supported by the St Vincent De Paul group, who visit senior citizens and organise collections for charities.

152. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. A new system has been designed for the teaching of the subject. It is still in the early stages and some areas have not yet been fully addressed. Assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress are in the early stages and an effective structure is not yet in place. There is currently no mechanism to evaluate the delivery and effectiveness of teaching the subject or systems to map the pupils' experience to ensure that all pupils have equal access.

WORK-RELATED LEARNING

153. Pupils are reaching standards in line with those expected nationally in the vocational subjects offered by the school and they are generally motivated to learn about work. In discussion, they show a satisfactory understanding of local employment, but are less secure in their understanding of aspects of the workplace such as health and safety, changes happening in the world of work and their understanding of business enterprise, such as key roles at work.

154. Pupils have good careers guidance, including individual interviews through the Connexions service. Pupils are generally happy with the support they are receiving. They are guided well, both about progression to post-16 and about future careers. The teaching of careers education observed during the inspection was good, with teachers showing good knowledge and understanding of employers' requirements, that enabled them to conduct question and answer sessions with confidence.

155. Work experience is well planned and the school arranges relevant and stimulating placements for all pupils. The preparation and debriefing for those on work experience are good. Visits to the school by employers take place and pupils have the opportunity to visit local retail outlets, but the range of employment sectors represented is more limited than would usually be found.

156. There was very little evidence available concerning work-related learning during the inspection. Limited teaching of it was taking place and there was very little written work or evaluation recorded by pupils. The teaching about working conditions in the industrial revolution, seen in a history lesson, was satisfactory. Though pupils take responsibility around the school, there are limited opportunities to learn about business enterprise. No co-ordinator has been identified for work-related learning. Statutory requirements are not met and the effectiveness of the school's provision for work related learning is poor.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

