

INSPECTION REPORT

MEOLS COP HIGH SCHOOL

Southport

LEA area: Sefton

Unique reference number: 104956

Headteacher: A Heaton

Lead inspector: W Baxendale

Dates of inspection: 1st - 4th November 2004

Inspection number: 268420

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11-16
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	593
School address:	Meols Cop Road Southport Merseyside
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	J C Lyon-Taylor

Date of previous inspection: April 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Meols Cop High School is a much smaller than average mixed comprehensive community school, educating 593 students in the 11 to 16 age-range. Attainment on entry is below average. Boys outnumber girls significantly. Whilst each year the school admits a good proportion of high attainers, the attainment on entry of many others is too low for them to cope without extra help. The school is in a deprived area of a seaside town. The students are from well below average socio-economic backgrounds. Student mobility is high. The percentage of students with a first language believed not to be English is a bit above average. The school roll is falling because of a big fall in the local birth rate, felt mostly in Year 7. Entitlement to a free school meal is above average. The school has an above average number of students with special educational needs and of students with a statement of special educational needs; these are because of dyslexia, moderate learning difficulties or social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. There is a facility for students with Asperger's Syndrome. The school receives extra funding because of its small size and also from the Children's fund and the 'Excellence in Cities' (EIC) initiative. The Investor in People award has just been re-conferred. The school has a 'Healthy School' certificate and it won a school's achievement award in 2001. It is also part of a Music-Maker and of a commercial 'New Futures' initiative.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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03943	D Innes	Team inspector	Physical Education
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22524	S Innes	Team inspector	Design and technology
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Meols Cop High is an effective school. It provides a good quality of education that meets the very wide range of students' educational needs well. Standards are rising because teaching and learning are good. Very good, dynamic new leadership is giving the school a distinctive sense of purpose; measures designed to give sustainable improvements are in place. Students develop very well personally and also achieve well. Imaginative curriculum innovation is raising standards and attendance rates. The school analyses performance very thoroughly, acting effectively on findings. The school is well managed. Governance is good. Parents and students alike hold the school in high regard, because it listens to them and acts positively on their views. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The excellent opportunities for students to play a big part in its running.
- Stimulating teaching and first class care lead to students' very good personal development.
- The 2004 GCSE/GNVQ results that were the best in the school's history.
- Good assessment that gives students clear indications on how to improve.
- Very good opportunities for enrichment outside lessons, particularly in the performing arts.
- Very good leadership by a new headteacher gives it clear direction.
- Sometimes work is still not tailored closely enough to individual needs.
- Unsatisfactory leadership in art and design leads to performance that is lower than it should be.
- Provision in parts of design and technology is weak.
- Individual education plans are too vague, making it difficult to measure students' progress.

Improvements since the previous inspection in April 1999 are good. The quality of education has improved; standards are higher and rising. The students' voice in running the school is outstanding, they prize highly the care they see it providing and work harder, as a result. Improved systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's effectiveness are now fully in place and the adoption of the national strategy for improving learning has helped to produce the good quality of education.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Standards are below average compared with all schools nationally, but above average compared with similar schools at the end of Year 9. Well below average GCSE results in 2003 were transformed in 2004, the school was in the top quarter of all schools when background data is considered. **Achievement is good.** Students' key skills in using English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) improve well so, by the end of Year 9, they make up deficiencies they had when starting as 11 year-olds. Reading, speaking and understanding all come on very well. Writing also improves well. Students with special educational needs get good help from learning assistants and they achieve well in Years 10 and 11 after satisfactory starts. Their GCSE results are above reasonable expectation. Students in the Asperger's Syndrome facility also do well. Students from ethnic minorities achieve better than most and many do very well. The curriculum has been modified imaginatively to reflect better the students' needs, the results are clear. Standards are rising because the students have great confidence in their school; it does well by them and, increasingly they want to do well for it. Weaknesses still persist in art and design, English for middle attainers and parts of design and technology.

Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with:	all schools			Similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
	E	D	E	C

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average
Similar schools are those with similar percentages of pupils eligible for free school meals*

Students' personal qualities are good and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well. Students' attitudes and behaviour are good. They enjoy school and are proud of it, especially the cherished new facilities they feel they have created. Rigorous means of getting students to come to school produce satisfactory attendance. The importance attached to the performing arts is just right for students in this area, it channels their street wisdom into confidence in front of challenge. The school has a very good feel that helps learning. Time for reflection is used effectively and moral guidance is very good. The school provides very good opportunities for enrichment. Social and cultural development provision is very good. The promotion of racial harmony is very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is good. Teaching and learning are good. Good assessment raises standards in most subjects. The national strategy to improve the learning of all students is firmly in place, except in art and design where there is room for improvement. Teachers make learning stimulating and interesting. Thorough data collection is used well to help students who are falling behind; learning mentors make particularly strong contributions. Teachers do not make the best use of individual education plans and there are pockets of unsatisfactory teaching and learning. Curriculum provision is good. The curriculum caters well for the needs and wishes of the full range of students. Opportunities to learn outside lessons and off site are very good; they raise standards. A new access course for students in danger of falling out of education is a remarkable success. The care, guidance and welfare of students are very good, and their involvement in school life is excellent. Students feel secure and well disposed to school life in which they learn well and play full parts. The school assesses its results very carefully and acts on them. Very good arrangements for consulting students are typical of a school that has first-rate partnerships in the most important place, the school itself. Partnerships with other schools and colleges are very good. The partnership with the local community is good. The school makes a real difference locally.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. Very good, tenacious leadership by the new headteacher is giving the school a big lift: the school knows where it is going. Leadership by other senior managers is good. Teamwork is strong and the school has an excellent sense of direction shared, most importantly, by the students who are greatly appreciative of what leadership does for them. Leadership is unsatisfactory in art and design. Thorough analysis of performance is effective in improving standards and provision. By very good delegation, the school has a platform for sustainable improvement. Governance is good. Governors tackle weaknesses effectively, but internal conflict is counter productive. Management is good in the school as a whole and in most subjects. Staff training is very effective.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and students hold the school in high regard. The new headteacher has quickly won the support of parents, who are very complimentary about all the school is doing for their child. Some parents find it hard to support learning at home and other parents do not value a good education. Students appreciate what the school does for them and their responses are very positive.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Improve leadership in art and design.
- Raise standards in the resistant materials and electronics parts of design and technology.
- Make sure that work set in English meets better the needs of middle attainers, that even greater demands are made on higher attainers in science and art and design and that work in mathematics meets the needs of lower attainers even better.
- Create easier to use individual education plans by giving them clearer measurable targets.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Achievement is good. National test results for 14 year-olds are better than those of similar schools. Students' literacy, numeracy and key ICT skills improve well, standards are rising. There was much underachievement up to 2003. Because new courses, better teaching and an improved ethos for learning, won by hard graft, all paid off the 2004 GCSE equivalent results were above average compared with previous national figures. They were in the top quarter nationally when all background circumstances are considered. Students with special educational needs achieve well in Years 10 and 11, as do the most able. Overall, boys and girls now achieve equally well. Students from ethnic minorities achieve better than do others.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good.
- Literacy and numeracy improve well.
- Standards are rising; GCSE and equivalent results in 2004 were the best in the school's history.
- Standards in the resistant materials and electronics parts of the design and technology are too low.
- Sometimes the work set does not match students' needs closely enough.

Commentary

1 The attainment of 11 year-olds is below average on starting at the school. Each year there are some high attainers, but a much greater number have weak literacy and numeracy skills that make it hard for them to cope with the conventional curriculum. Some others arrive with no English; they do particularly well. In the end, students from ethnic minorities perform better than do most others. Boys' results at the end of Year 9 have, until recently, outstripped those of girls in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, which is against the national pattern.

2 Pre-inspection work gave rise to concerns over standards in Years 10 and 11. In 2003, the value-added in Years 10 and 11 was in the lowest five per cent nationally. Boys' GCSE results failed to match their Year 9 test results, with too many not staying the course. They did badly in English, mathematics, design and technology and business studies, but well in physical education.

3 Inspection found the concerns to be largely historic. Standards have risen appreciably since the previous inspection. Students now achieve well because the school has altered its curriculum to suit them better; it has also put the national strategy for improving learning quality well into practice in nearly all subjects. New leadership has established a very good dialogue with students to which they are responding outstandingly. Standards are rising because students are well aware of how they are doing and what to do to improve in nearly all subjects. In 2004, GCSE equivalent results were above previous national averages; they showed a twenty-four per cent improvement in higher equivalent grades, A*-C, over the year before. They were the best in the school's history. Better analysis of results has put the school in a stronger position to set realistic targets.

4 A main contributor to good achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good key skill development. For example, the many students who start with lower than expected standards in literacy make up the deficit by Year 9. From the start, reading improves well, not least because of the focus on the performing arts. Good achievement in English is matched in most other subjects. In drama, students regularly read scripts and they all take part in public speaking. Understanding improves, as a result. Religious education and science, for example, help reading: in science, a good link with drama helps students to think about word selection. Most subjects draw students' attention to the

spelling of important technical terms. Note-making skills are good in geography. In mathematics and history there are too few chances for students to improve reading skills. Although writing skills improve well, the major weakness is that not enough teachers' marking of work helps students to think about the language they are using. Notable exceptions are found in English, French, geography and design and technology.

5 At the start of Year 7, students' mathematical skills are also below expectation, but good achievement in mathematics also helps their learning in other subjects. All teachers are made aware of the ways students work things out and what they should be able to do at given times. Work in science contributes positively to students' skills in using graphs and algebra. In religious education, students study the mathematics of Islamic designs, broadening their cultural awareness as well as their mathematical knowledge. Students get good practice in graphs and statistics in geography. Students' accuracy in measuring develops well in design and technology.

6 Students use and extend their ICT skills satisfactorily to help learning. Good achievement, for example, through the production of quite sophisticated virtual reality tours of a mosque is found in religious education and students use computers well to conduct research in geography. In science and design and technology, students benefit from practical experience of data logging and control technology, which they study in theory in ICT lessons, giving them a good overall experience. Students use video cameras in drama and physical education to analyse their performances; this raises standards, as they criticise each other's performances and so learn well. Sometimes the students find it hard to get onto computers because of heavy usage.

7 Good achievement continues for all in Years 10 and 11. Students with special educational needs have made progress sufficient to let them now achieve well: their GCSE results exceed reasonable expectation based upon attainment as assessed on entry. Achievement is good in most subjects, as the students now enjoy courses that are tailored better to their interests and needs. Achievement in geography is very good because the students are good at making notes, organising themselves and using their graphical skills to good effect. The main areas where achievement is improving rapidly are science and ICT. The access course for students in danger of falling out of education is also proving to be a winner. In each of these courses the end examination requires evidence of practical knowledge and capabilities, to which the students rise very well.

8 There are some weaknesses in English where the work devised for middle attainers does not stimulate their interest, so their achievement falters. Achievement in aspects of design and technology has been unsatisfactory in electronics and resistant materials because projects and coursework were not managed well enough. The school has discontinued the GCSE course in resistant materials; there is a lot of scope for further improvements in electronics. In art and design, students spend too much time collecting images to the detriment of developing ideas and research is weak in examination compositions.

9 The rate of improvement in national tests for 14 year-olds' has been above the national trend since the previous inspection, mainly because of boys' performances. The value-added profile was average over Years 7 to 9 in 2003. Test results are below national averages, but above those of similar schools, which indicates good achievement. Students do best in English, where they obtained above average results in 2003. Mathematics and science results are below average but both compare well with those of similar schools. Since the previous inspection, boys have outperformed girls at this stage, which is against the national pattern. Girls' results in mathematics have been particularly disappointing. The school's actions to improve girls' motivation appear to be working. Girls did much better in 2004; boys slipped a bit. Girls did much better than did boys in English and mathematics and were neck and neck with them in science.

10 Compared with students in similar schools, the proportions of students reaching above expected levels in national tests are above average in English, average in mathematics, but below average in science.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.2 (31.9)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	33.6 (33.7)	35.4 (34.7)
science	31.7 (33.9)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 130 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

11 GCSE equivalent results were well below national averages in 2003, although higher grade, A*-C results improved by a margin over the year before, mainly because girls did better. In 2002, too many students left with no qualifications before completing the course. The proportions leaving with no certification fell to about average in 2003, which is a move in the right direction. However, students failed to sustain their achievement of Years 7 to 9. From the previous inspection to 2003 the average trend of improvement was below the national one. Too many students under-performed in English and mathematics.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	35 (30)	52 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	82 (83)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	96 (92)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	27 (29.8)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 114 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

12 The transformation to above average results in 2004 was the outcome of revised courses, better teaching and close consultation with students who feel increasing allegiance to a school that cares very strongly about them. An increasingly widely used mechanism that measures all background circumstances placed the school's results in the top twenty-five per cent nationally in 2004. Results in GNVQ science and ICT were particularly good. Results in English literature are also impressive, with above average results from a comparatively large entry. Students also did well in textiles and graphics, religious education and drama. Weaknesses are recognised by the school and effective action is taken to overcome them.

13 Students associated with the Asperger 's Syndrome facility achieve well in their learning and their personal development. They are successfully integrated into classes and tutor groups. Learning support assistants who have good understanding of their difficulties skilfully assist their progress. Other students with special educational needs achieve well overall, but their education plans do not set clear enough targets.

14 The slightly larger than average proportion of students for whom English is not their home language achieve well over time and obtains better results than most other students in the school. Their spoken English is not always fluent but they cope well in lessons because of good teaching and effective support. The school's very good pastoral care and the students' own positive attitudes make an important contribution to their achievement. In the 2004 national tests at age 14, students with English as an additional language achieved very well. They attained standards that were above average, and in some cases well above average.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes and behaviour are good. Their personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development, is very good overall. Attendance is in line with the national average; it is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students learn well, as interruption by misbehaviour has been substantially reduced.
- Students are given lots of chances to take responsibility and contribute to the school community. They rise magnificently to these challenges.
- Staff provide students with very clear, firm moral guidance, positively influencing their behaviour and attitudes.
- Performing arts plays an especially strong role in school life, helping develop students' confidence.
- Very rigorous, effective ways for encouraging attendance and for following up absences are raising standards.

Commentary

15 This is a school in which all students, including those with learning difficulties and those with particular gifts and talents, feel valued and supported. Students are proud of the school, especially of the changes that have been made in recent months. They hold the new headteacher in high regard. They are very pleased that their views are listened to and acted upon. Behaviour is good and this small school is a pleasant community where most people know each other. It has a happy, friendly feel to it.

16 Attitudes to learning are generally improving and are positive. The tailoring of the curriculum better to meet students' needs (explained fully elsewhere in this report) means those who were becoming de-motivated have been given a new lease of life because they enjoy what they do. This is having a positive effect on their own and others' studies.

17 Rates of exclusions are low. The school has in place other effective means of excluding students from their peers, for unacceptable behaviour. Students are placed in supervised isolation, and receive help from a teacher skilled in behaviour management. This is proving an effective strategy for demonstrating to students that disruptive behaviour will not be tolerated, whilst keeping them in school, and learning.

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	548	23	3
White – any other White background	7		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	5		
Mixed – White and Asian	5		
Mixed – any other mixed background	8		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	3		
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	4		
Black or Black British – African	3		
Chinese	1		
Any other ethnic group	5		
No ethnic group recorded	4		

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

18 Students who come into the school with a limited knowledge of English develop positive attitudes towards their work because of the very good support given to them by the staff and their fellow students. As a result, they generally settle well into school routines, make friends and are keen to learn.

19 The attendance rate has risen sharply over the last year, and is now in line with the national average. This represents good progress. It has risen because of the improved quality of education and the very good working partnerships evident between all pastoral staff, especially the home and school liaison worker and attendance officer. This team approach is successfully getting students back into the habits of regular attendance, despite the fact that some have very turbulent backgrounds, yet are coming to school often against the odds.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (90.1%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.4	School data	1.4
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

20 The school is taking a commendably strong line in refusing to authorise term-time holidays for students in Years 10 and 11. Because of this, unauthorised absences are higher, as many parents still take holidays even though they have not been given the school's permission. Punctuality is good.

21 Very good personal development stems from the imaginative curriculum, the very good provision for care and welfare and the importance attached to the performing arts as a means of raising students' self-esteem and engaging them in learning. Performance makes a strong contribution to the schools' cultural provision. Every student carries out at least one public speaking event each year as part of what is very good social development. Another reason is because the school genuinely believes in giving students responsibility; they rise to the challenge magnificently. Prefects, school councillors, trained students who help others with problems (called PALS) and members of the geography environmental group all play crucial parts in making the school run increasingly smoothly, with students prominent in decision making.

22 Assemblies and form times are used well to deliver strong messages providing clear moral guidance on issues faced as part of daily life. Moral guidance is very good, as a result. For instance, using the theme of 'caring' and 'actions speak louder than words', one tutor group were asked to think deeply about bereavement and how they might respond. In an assembly, 'caring' was linked into the Live Aid event of twenty years ago. Cultural development is also very good; students are introduced very effectively into living in a community and the responsibilities they have to respect different cultures.

23 There is a good amount of time for thought and reflection. Sometimes in lessons, there are special touches, which really add an extra dimension. In a science lesson, the teacher enthusiastically downloaded an image taken the day before in Palma, really inspiring the class with the wonders of technology, which allowed the viewing of a photograph of a nebula (distant stars) in space. Provision for students' spiritual development is good, because there is provision of this kind. The school complies with the requirement for a daily act of collective worship. A sense of awe and wonder is generated regularly in the work students undertake in several subjects. The GNVQ science course has many elements that get students to think deeply about implications of action and activity. Work in the personal, social and health education (PSHE), history and geography courses does the same, and spiritual and moral values receive strong emphasis in religious education. The use of music in assemblies is carefully chosen to harmonise well with the themes for reflection.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a good quality of education. Students' good achievement and similar attitudes are very closely related to the good quality of teaching that helps them to learn well. Pupils benefit from a good, imaginative curriculum and satisfactory provision is made for those with special educational needs. Care and guidance are also very good.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good. Assessment is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The adoption of the national strategy for improving teaching and learning is working well.
- Teachers make learning stimulating and interesting.
- Good assessment raises standards because the students know how to improve.
- Good teaching has a very positive effect on students' personal development.
- Teachers do not make the best use of individual education plans.
- There are pockets of unsatisfactory teaching and learning.

Commentary

24 The good quality of teaching is the main reason for the students' good achievement. A mixture of successful measures, intended to raise standards and to get students to attend regularly, has helped to create the good learning revealed by this inspection. Teachers organise learning so that it takes place both in and way beyond the classroom: they often set up off site visits and use people with specific interests from outside. Such arrangements make learning informative and interesting for students. Good changes to the curriculum also play important parts in stimulating interest in learning. The expansion of drama, the adoption of GNVQ courses and the introduction of an access course for students in danger of falling out of education are great boons, because they are all taught well and increase students' practical experiences. Successful implementation of a national strategy to raise standards is also making a good contribution in all subjects, except art and design.

25 Whilst the proportions of good or better teaching and learning are just about the same, there is more that is very good in Years 10 and 11. This is because the broad range of courses the school provides appeals to students and helps them focus on examinations.

26 Good quality in teaching and learning has a strong effect on the students' personal development. Because, for example, of big demands on speaking skills, students channel their innate street wisdom into often clear, powerful argument about issues raised in lessons and about the way the school is developing. They do this through unabashed debate with the staff and through the very strong school council: excellent ways of developing citizenship. However, higher attainers are not pushed sufficiently in whole-class Year 7 to 9 science discussions.

27 Students with English as an additional language learn well because they are well taught. The school is committed to meeting the needs of all students, and subject teachers and support staff are adept at finding useful learning materials on the Internet for students with different home languages. Students also benefit from good teaching and regular evaluation of progress in the specialised English sessions where they get to grips with basic language structures and vocabulary.

28 Teachers know which students in their lessons are high attainers and who fall into the gifted or talented category. In several lessons, for example, in geography, science and physical education, teachers made sure these students were fully challenged. In some other lessons, however, no specific provision was made for them and opportunities were missed.

29 Students with special educational needs have individual education plans, which describe their difficulties. The targets set are often too vaguely expressed to be helpful or for progress towards their achievement to be measured or for teachers to make best use of them.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 110 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (1%)	29 (26%)	47 (43%)	31 (28%)	2 (2%)	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.

30 Teachers know their subjects well. They make good use of assessment to help students to do better in Years 7 to 9; they make very good use of it in Years 10 and 11. There is, for example, some outstanding marking in English; through it, teachers ask questions of students, they make suggestions for improvement and also set them targets to do better. In mathematics a very good system also passes precise information to students, telling them not only how they are doing but what to do to improve. Similarly in science, work is marked very carefully and not only are students told how they are doing, but the information is used well by teachers to help in the planning of future lessons. In geography, assessment is used exceptionally well for following progress and picking out underachievement early. In some other subjects, assessment is at a less advanced stage and not yet effective enough to push learning forward.

31 Typically teachers set the scene of lessons, agreeing with the students what is to be learned. Regular references to how learning is coming on occur during the lesson and a systematic recap at the end shows teacher and student how effective it has been. A very good example of such planning took place in a Year 10 access course lesson on how to avoid accidents, the lesson was rounded off not only by a recap but a questionnaire on students' reactions to what they had accomplished. As they left, students were invited to mark the teaching on a felt board, an excellent example of how this school listens to students and acts on what is found. There are weaknesses in art and design and there is room for improvement in ICT. New teachers in drama and music are catching up.

32 Classroom assistants lend good support to students with learning difficulties and especially to those with Asperger's Syndrome. The promotion of equal opportunity, through planned use of these assistants and the provision of work suited to individual needs, is widespread and very good overall. As a result, students gain knowledge and understanding well and their ability to work together or on their own improves as they move through the school. By the time they start examination courses, students' application to their work is good.

33 Good use of resources is typified by the way most teachers exploit computer-driven white boards that interact with students, so captivating them and getting them to put their backs into the work. Occasionally however, such resources are used as no more than very expensive chalkboards, with the result that students' interest is taxed and achievement hindered.

34 Improvements in teaching and learning are good since the previous inspection. Seating boys and girls side-by-side is a practice that works, as they learn well from each other. Assessment has become more effective and the sharing of the lesson's purposes with students has expanded. There are still occasions when teachers talk too much, when the pace of work is too slow and when ICT is not used often or well enough to help learning. In some music and science lessons there is a need to exercise fuller control. Nonetheless, the good quality of teaching and learning clearly contributed well to the rise in examination passes in 2004 and current provision is likely to sustain the upward trend.

The curriculum

Provision is good. Opportunities for enrichment are very good. Accommodation and resources are good. Staffing is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has developed a broad and relevant curriculum for nearly all its students.
- There is a very wide range of interesting activities provided for students outside the school.

Commentary

35 The school is constantly seeking to make the curriculum match the different needs of all its students. It is meeting with good success in many cases. An access course for students who find work in school difficult and who are in danger of dropping out of education is effective in improving attendance and giving students insights into how to make positive contributions to society, as well as essential key skills to allow them to do so. In addition to lessons in basic literacy and numeracy in school they have the opportunity to learn practical skills in local colleges and through extended work experience. The course also provides improved access to post-16 education, training or employment. All students cover the statutory National Curriculum and religious education in all year groups. There is an effective thought for the week discussed in form periods and in an assembly where students reflect on issues of both spiritual and moral importance.

36 The recent introduction of drama into the curriculum is having a positive effect on students' personal development by allowing them to develop self-confidence as they learn to work collaboratively in groups. The breadth of courses in science, including a very successful GNVQ course, is also allowing more students to gain necessary skills and qualifications. In English, some programmes of study for students in the middle ability sets are not always as relevant, and many find little motivation in a fairly narrow range of content. They learn better when they are more actively engaged in a variety of different styles of learning, for example, using computers. There are limitations on the range of provision in design and technology relating to the coverage of resistant materials.

37 In Years 7 to 9, students who have special educational needs benefit from being taught in smaller classes than are usual. The school meets the main expectations of the revised Code of Practice. The school identifies those with needs requiring additional support by the use of information provided by primary schools, the results of national tests and its investigation of concerns expressed by teachers and parents. Reviews of progress are held at the required intervals and parents and students contribute to them. Transition plans are written for students in Years 10 and 11 to support them during their remaining time at school and after leaving.

38 The school makes very good provision for students with English as an additional language. On top of the normal school curriculum, students follow courses and take examinations in their home languages.

39 Although students identified as being gifted or having particular talents are sometimes not pushed hard enough in lessons, the school makes good extra provision for them. Additional funding has been well used to enrich the experience of these students, for example, through workshops mostly linked to performing arts, visits to theatres, galleries, universities and links with local clubs and national sporting organisations, for example, to secure the services of coaches. The school is careful to monitor progress and to analyse test and examination results to demonstrate that targets have been achieved. Students able to accelerate their progress are entered early for GCSE in mathematics, music, drama, French and Spanish.

40 The range of extra-curricular activities is very good. The provision to enrich students' experiences in the performing arts is particularly stimulating. Links with the primary schools for drama help students prepare for the transition from one stage of education to another. Students also produce poetry and video material for the community in response to local need, and therefore learn to write for specific purposes and real audiences. There have been visits to places of great historical significance such as Auschwitz, and to local museums and art galleries to give students a broader social, moral and cultural perspective.

41 Suitably qualified teachers with good levels of subject expertise staff the curriculum well. The exception to this is in the resistant materials aspect of design and technology. Support staff are skilled and make a valuable contribution.

42 The quality of accommodation is good. Recent refurbishment has improved it since the previous inspection and students are particularly pleased with the excellent new toilet provision. Internal decoration is good and students' work is now very well displayed around the school. Recent improvements to changing rooms and laboratories have greatly improved provision in physical education and science. However, in music there are insufficient practice rooms and in drama the teaching space is unsatisfactorily developed.

43 Resources are generally satisfactory. In science, French and religious education they are good and in geography they are very good. Recently installed interactive whiteboards are now available for use in most subjects; this is an improvement since the previous inspection. The drama studio lacks resources.

Care, guidance and support

Arrangements to ensure students' care and welfare are very good overall. Students receive very good support, advice, and guidance. The extent of the school's involvement of students in its work and development is excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school council is a driving force to be reckoned with and has brought about some very positive changes.
- Students receive individual, highly skilled, sensitive support and guidance, which is helping them to achieve more highly and raising their aspirations as a result.
- Relationships are friendly and caring, in a small school family atmosphere.
- Training students to act as 'befrienders' and supporters for their peers, is a helpful strand of the schools' very good pastoral support.
- Students are well versed in how they are doing because staff keep them fully briefed about their progress.

Commentary

44 This is a school where relationships are supportive and caring, provided within a small school family atmosphere. Students are guided very well because different support strategies help them to focus on their work, in order to get the most from their education. This inclusive approach is one of the school's strengths.

45 Staff are very sensitive to the welfare and learning needs of students. They act decisively when alerted to those not performing as well as predicted. A highly effective team of learning mentors, (funded through the schools' involvement with Excellence in Cities) is making a big difference by providing students with frequent support and guidance, helping avert underachievement. Their work in helping to provide for students' often diverse welfare needs, for example, through raising self-esteem, helping with anger management and improving behaviour, is a cornerstone of the schools' very good provision.

46 Students with English as an additional language receive very good support from academic and pastoral staff, fellow students and outside agencies. The 'buddy'-system is especially helpful in enabling students coming into the school with very little knowledge of English to talk to a fellow student who understands their home language.

47 Creative use of money for the Aim Higher initiative (also funded through Excellence in Cities involvement) means the school has a dedicated support staff member in place. Her main responsibility is to help more academically able students raise their aspirations towards higher education. Signs are that students are beginning to think more adventurously about their choices on leaving school.

48 There are particularly good systems for training students to support each other, such as the PALS scheme (Pupil Active Listening System). This sees older students specially trained to support their younger counterparts, by being linked with form groups, providing drop in sessions at lunch and break and generally being highly regarded as people who are helpful if you have a problem. This is the main reason why students feel bullying is dealt with well and is not a problem in the school, because there are plenty of people to turn to for help.

49 Heads of Year carry out their roles well and take particular responsibility for monitoring students' academic progress. A benefit of being a small school means that numbers in each year group are manageable enough for this to be possible. They use data well to reveal where extra support is needed. These systems are complemented by the generally good knowledge each pupil has of how they are doing and where they need to improve.

50 The school council has firmly established itself as a driving force, pushing through several initiatives, which have really made life for students and staff so much better. It is an exceptional example of a school council at its best! Certainly, the teacher whose responsibility the school council is, together with the headteacher, welcome this kind of drive and ensure students' energies are sensitively channelled into projects that will make a difference.

51 A lot of recent improvements have been made to the décor, making the school a more attractive place to work and play in. The quality of school lunches has improved since the council chose a new supplier, with the emphasis on healthy eating, for which the school has an award. The organisation of council members into working groups, tackling issues such as fundraising, safe travel to school, website development, means each councillor gets actively involved rather than just voting on issues.

52 Child protection procedures are secure and staff have received recent training. Health and safety awareness is good and there are effective systems for recognising risks and taking preventative action.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The partnership with parents is good. The school is trying very hard but response from parents is mixed. There are some very good links with primary schools and links with the community are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The new headteacher has quickly won the support of parents, who are very complimentary about all the school is doing for their child.
- The 'Grapevine' parents group is playing an increasingly important role by putting across their views and being consulted on improvements.
- Relationships with other schools are highly productive, especially in drama and music.
- The school is increasingly raising its community profile, through performing arts work.
- Some parents find it hard to support learning at home and others fail to value education.

Commentary

53 Parents are very pleased with what the school is doing for their child and they recognise and appreciate the recent improvements. The new headteacher has moved decisively to involve parents more. For example, the 'Grapevine' parents' group, as well as providing much needed fundraising expertise, is now involved in helping to revise students' annual reports; this is entirely appropriate, as currently the format tells parents very little.

54 There is frequent contact with parents regarding their children, staff often find a telephone call or visit home is more productive than a letter. Review meetings where parents meet with the learning tutor in Years 9 and 10 are well attended, although parents' evenings less so. Parents are more reluctant to attend general information evenings, although the school was encouraged by the turn out at the new Year 7 information evening when just over half of all parents came along.

55 There are very good relationships with other places of education, especially primary schools, related to the performing arts. The new Music Maker initiative, where the school has been awarded money from Youth Music, is already a success with those involved. Organised with the help of Year 10 students, Year 6 students from five primary schools are brought into school to enjoy folk music, singing, African drumming, samba, and guitars. Continuing the performing arts theme, the drama teacher works in primary schools on a rotational basis.

56 The school is working hard to raise their profile in the community, to show people what really goes on and how the school has changed and developed over the years. Its reputation as being THE school for public speaking in the town remains strong and links with the Rotary Club of Great Britain reach back years. Close links with Southport traders businesses group means the school often performs at local events such as the opening of a major new store. An exciting new project is taking off, funded through commercially sponsored New Futures money, where students are linking up with two day-care centres for senior citizens, to record an audio-visual living history. All these initiatives are helping to raise students' confidence and are making a significant contribution to their personal development.

57 The school works well in partnership with other schools to improve the range of learning opportunities for students whose home language is not English. It makes effective use of translation services to get in touch with parents and keep them informed about the progress of their children. The very good links established with a local school and the local Language College enable students to follow courses in their home language.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. Leadership by the headteacher is very good. Leadership by key staff is good. Management is good. Governance is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good, tenacious leadership by the new headteacher is giving the school a big lift: the school knows where it is going.
- Students are greatly appreciative of what leadership does for them.
- Thorough analysis of performance is effective in improving standards and provision.
- By very good delegation, the school has a platform for sustainable improvement.
- The governors act effectively to tackle weaknesses, but internal conflict is counter productive.
- Leadership and management are good in most subjects, but unsatisfactory in art and design.
- Staff training is very effective.

Commentary

58 From what were already sound foundations, identified in the previous inspection report, very good leadership by a new headteacher has, in a short time, given the school an excellent sense of purpose and direction. Taking the students' needs and self-esteem as focal issues she has, through sensitive negotiation and decisive action, created a school with a very positive atmosphere for learning and physical conditions of which the students are immensely proud. She has got staff, most governors, parents and students working together very well. Everything is carefully reasoned and planned. The strength of students' contributions to decision making is outstanding. Students' growing appreciation of what leadership has managed to do for them is disarmingly persuasive.

59 The headteacher is supported well by her senior leadership colleagues. Their strong contributions to curriculum innovation, and to very good professional development, are matched by a common aspiration for improvement. Citizenship and key skills provision, for example, have improved through their offices and a recent IIP (Investors in People) re-award, accompanied by a very complimentary report, is part of a very good programme of continuing professional development of staff from identified need. The appointment of a new deputy headteacher, responsible for teaching and learning, is both timely and relevant to the school's planned refinements to what is already good provision.

60 The school's systems for checking on its performance are good. Curriculum change in science and innovation in work-related provision are prime examples of the school's very good data review, study of trends and action to meet needs. The substantial rise in higher grade GCSE equivalent passes in 2004 is proof of success.

61 Very good whole-school strategic planning complements the checking systems. Intentions to 'aim higher' by paying even closer attention to students' views on what they find attractive or off-putting in classroom learning, further careful consideration of alternative curricula and getting students to attend more regularly are prominent parts of well-conceived step-by-step improvement plans aimed solely at raising standards. At the same time, planning and self-evaluation among middle managers varies, they match whole-school practice in most subjects but have scope for improvement, for example, in design and technology and art and design.

62 Leadership and management are good in most subjects and in the school's pastoral work. In most subjects, leaders influence students and colleagues well. Very good leadership in geography and science underlies rising standards, increasing popularity, imaginative curriculum development and good assessment. Enthusiasm and energy characterise leadership in these and other subjects. Staff and students want to do well against often non-too-auspicious backgrounds. The school's practice of getting the best out of latent talent, including enterprising use of learning mentors, forms the basis of sustainable improvement because everyone wants to be part of the action. Teamwork is generally strong. However, there is scope for greater awareness on the part of some middle managers of whole school issues. Data usage has some way to go at this level. Inexperience in music and unresolved staffing issues in design and technology lead to weaker provision in these subjects. There is a particular weakness in art and design where unsatisfactory

leadership is being dealt with by the headteacher and governors. A main concern is a failure to implement the national strategy for improvement, so clearly effective in the other parts of the school.

63 The arrangements for supporting students with English as an additional language are well managed. Information on needs, provision and academic progress is recorded efficiently, and good collaboration with the designated learning mentor enables the teacher in charge to gain a clear understanding of students' personal development. Available funds are wisely spent in improving learning resources. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. The school has identified the needs of a particular group of students, and is rising to the challenge of supporting the growing number of students who arrive with little or no knowledge of English. However, the school has not yet devised a strategy for the management of individual education plans or the monitoring of progress of other students with special educational needs.

64 Governors support the school well, they have been instrumental in taking some hard decisions to improve staffing strength and have made good appointments. They make good contributions to debate over the generous budget, for example helping the school to profit well from the extra funding available through specific standards grants. Governors are very aware of the implications of a falling school population because of a big drop in the local birth rate. They have contingency plans, not fully reflected in the substantial carry over below: this is scheduled for necessary purchases to complete recent, very effective premises improvement projects. Their prime concern is to raise standards as the best cushion and they are, so far, successful in this. As a result, considering the good quality of education and all-round improvements to provision and standards, the school provides good value for money.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2,528,917	Balance from previous year	103,144
Total expenditure	2,524,251	Balance carried forward to the next	107,810
Expenditure per pupil	4,257		

65 Governors do their best within the constraints of voluntary commitment. They use individual governors' background expertise well, in finance and premises, for instance, but some discord undermines not only the smooth implementation of the instrument of governance, but also places members of staff in difficult positions. Whilst making often very good contributions to, for example, appointment committees, the excessive pursuit of personal family interest and seeming vendetta causes unwarranted anxiety to fellow governors and senior staff. The matter is dealt with purposefully by the chair of governors and Local Education Authority support is taking the matter in hand.

66 The school's culture of rising aspiration and its very good ethos for learning are particular aids to learning. The commitments of the teaching staff, careful assessments of need and actions to improve the curriculum are also strong features.

67 Barriers to learning are socio-economic with high rates of participation in a black economy and an outside culture that militates against schooling. The school claims that education is not prized highly enough by many in the area; the frequent difficulties in getting some students to stay on to the end of courses and, before that, to do their homework typify the challenges the school faces.

Work related learning

Provision for work related learning is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All students benefit from a two-week placement in Year 10.
- Selected students attend an extended placement throughout Year 10.
- A number of subjects use work experience well to inform their students' work.
- There is very thorough monitoring of provision by the school, Connexions and the area Education Business Partnership.

Commentary

68 The work related learning programme provides very good opportunities for all students to experience the work place. The school works very effectively with the EBP (Education Business Partnership) to ensure all placements are carefully selected. Each student's progress is carefully monitored and, as a result, nearly all students successfully complete their placement. In school, a number of departments, including English and modern foreign languages, make good use of students' experiences to inform specific pieces of work. The new GNVQ courses in science and ICT make very strong contributions to the work related curriculum provision.

69 Extended placements provide a significant alternative curriculum for those students who are identified as being particularly suitable. They benefit from three placements throughout the year, but also continue with their core curriculum, ensuring they receive an education most suited to their needs.

70 Very good, shared management ensures students derive real benefit from their placements. The good link established with the local Further Education College also significantly broadens provision for vocational education.

71 Connexions personnel provide effective careers work in the school, they conduct careers interviews and give extra guidance to students on post-16 courses and other opportunities.

72 Resource provision is shared between school, the college and employers and is sufficient to meet the needs of the programme. Overall, this is a programme of very good quality that raises the achievement of all students by enriching their educational experience significantly.

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

- Higher attaining students write very well.
- Most students improve their reading aloud through practising public speaking.
- The marking of students' work is very good.
- The many opportunities for working with people from outside school helps students in their personal development.
- The curriculum for middle and lower attaining students in Years 10 and 11 is too narrow.

Commentary

73 Results in the National Curriculum tests for Year 9 in 2003 were above the national average and well above average compared with similar schools. Students equalled the national average in 2004. Unusually in recent years, the boys have achieved better than the girls have, although the balance changed in 2004. Standards seen in lessons reflect this picture with many boys and girls achieving well by Year 9 considering the low level of literacy skills recorded on entry to the school. Those in the higher sets achieve very well and students with special educational needs also make good progress, although the targets of their individual plans are not precise enough to be measured easily. Students who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as most other students. The clearly structured lessons, based on the National Literacy Strategy, provide the consistent approach that benefits the students and helps them to build on previous learning. The greatest improvement is in their ability to read aloud clearly and with understanding due largely to the high emphasis placed on public speaking.

74 Compared with all schools the proportion of students obtaining higher, A* to C, grades at GCSE in 2003 was lower than average in English but in English literature, where more than half the year group were entered, standards were above average. In 2004 there was a slight improvement in English and a similar slight decrease in standards in English literature. Standards seen in lessons show that higher attaining students are certainly above the national average but middle-attaining students do not always reach the levels expected of them. Some students in the middle attaining sets in Years 10 and 11 are under achieving because they are not interested in many elements of the course. Despite well-organised teaching that uses a variety of methods, these students show little motivation. However, the overall achievement of most students is good. Some of the written work in response to literature contains well-argued conclusions. It is fluent and original with clear references to the text to show good understanding of the questions. Students understand the use of terms such as parody when they review films like "Shrek". The composition of poetry is often very moving and students are encouraged to write imaginatively from an early age. Their skills develop well by the time they reach Year 11 although some of the spelling is careless.

75 The quality of teaching is good. In the higher attaining sets the teaching and learning are often very good. Students respond well to the demands of some challenging work such as reproducing the power and imagery of a Dickens description in their own words in Year 8. Older students show good understanding of "The Ancient Mariner" because the teaching had helped them to focus on the key lines of the poem. The marking is at times exemplary as teachers help students to refine their work with questions, suggestions and clearly defined targets. Too little use is made of ICT, though availability of these resources is limited.

76 Leadership and management are good. The department forms a mutually supportive team with high morale. Monitoring of teaching and learning is good and the systems for the assessment and moderation of work and for setting improvement targets are also good. The curriculum is greatly enriched by the large number of visits to theatres and art galleries. Students are encouraged to write for a variety of audiences and they produce imaginative and attractively presented work for the local community. This adds to their social and cultural experiences. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good with a marked rise in standards at GCSE.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

77 Although many students enter the school with lower than expected standards in literacy they have made up the deficit by the time that they reach Year 9. This good progress is maintained in Years 10 and 11. Students make good gains in their ability to read because of the focus on the performing arts. In drama they regularly read scripts and in English they rehearse for public speaking competitions. In science, students are helped to read quite difficult material and there is a good link with drama, which helps them to think about the words they choose. Religious education teachers encourage students to read aloud. In mathematics and history, there are not enough chances for students to develop reading skills. Most subjects draw students' attention to the spelling of key technical terms. In drama the final part of many lessons is used to reinforce students' understanding of the terminology of the subject by referring to words on the walls. Students use clear annotations to show understanding when studying the work of different artists. Note-making skills are good in geography. The major weakness is that few teachers apart from those in English, French, geography and design and technology mark work with the specific intention of helping students to consider the language they are using.

French

Provision in French is **satisfactory**.

Strengths and weaknesses

- The subject is well led by a new head of department and standards have risen at GCSE.
- Pedestrian teaching methods and insufficient use of French are barriers to learning in some lessons.
- Students benefit from good quality resources and good guidance on how to improve their work.

Commentary

78 Students achieved well at GCSE in 2004. Results matched those of 2002, with most students obtaining higher grades, A*-C. This represents a substantial improvement on the results in 2003 when changes in the marking system had an adverse effect on borderline grades.

79 Standards in Year 9 are below average, but achievement is satisfactory in relation to students' low standards of literacy on entry to the school. Most students reach broadly average standards in Year 11 because they are actively involved in improving their understanding of the language through speaking, reading and writing. Their listening skills are slower to develop but they generally achieve well and are keen to show what they know. Higher attaining students have a confident grasp of language structures and they speak with good pronunciation. Students with special educational needs achieve well as a result of good support from department staff. However standards in some groups are not as high as they could be because not enough use is made of French and so students do not have sufficient opportunity to speak it.

80 Teaching and learning are satisfactory. A strength of the teaching is the focus on grammar in order to provide a solid foundation on which students can build up their understanding of language structures in French. The most effective lessons are those that have high expectations of

students' achievement together with a sense of fun. They offer a variety of stimulating learning activities to encourage lively and accurate responses in discussions and written work. Boys and girls learn well in these lessons because they are challenged to think things out for themselves and because they enjoy working in pairs and groups. Where learning is less successful it is because too much time is spent on one activity so students lose their concentration and the pace of working slows down. In such lessons, teachers use too much English and make unimaginative use of computerised white boards. Assessment of students' progress is generally good. Students are given a clear idea of what they need to do to improve and are encouraged to develop a critical approach to their work.

81 The subject is led and managed well. The recently appointed head of department has a clear sense of direction and is full of enthusiasm and energy. The focus is on developing students' awareness of how to improve their work and good resources for learning are being built up. The subject is given prominence through the award of "linguist of the month" which gives students in all classes an incentive to succeed. The department shows its concern for the well-being of different groups of students by organising fast track examination courses in home languages for older students coming into the school. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good assessment of students' work provides a sound basis for individual improvement.
- Good leadership and management provide appropriate educational opportunities for all students.
- Test results at the end of Year 9 are below the national average.
- Teaching is good, it engages students well in their learning.

Commentary

82 Year 9 test results, in 2004, were well below average. This was a dip after a rising trend. There was a slight improvement in the performance of girls but boys did less well than in previous years. Results were in line with those expected for similar schools. The results represented satisfactory achievement, given the students' low levels of attainment when they entered the school. In 2004, Year 11 GCSE results were above those of 2003 but remain below the national average. This was an improvement on recent years and represents good achievement by students.

83 Achievement in lessons is good overall. It is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. About one-eighth of students are of extremely low ability and there are very few high attaining girls in any years. Work seen in lessons and in scrutiny matches the test results. Although the work is well below what is expected, it shows satisfactory achievement. However, the most able students achieve well and make good progress. By the end of Year 11, standards are below average overall. The most able students are given opportunities to enter for GCSE in Year 10 and study an AS level module in Year 11. The quality of work seen reflects students' good attitudes to learning. There is no difference in the achievement of students from different ethnic or social backgrounds. All those with different, challenging learning needs and low attaining students are achieving satisfactorily and all are entered for GCSE examinations.

84 Teaching and learning are good, giving rise to the students' good achievement. The best-taught lessons focus well on students' abilities and needs. They have pace and challenge whilst developing students' understanding. Lessons were least successful when there was insufficient challenge or the teaching style did not match the learning capabilities of students closely enough, especially the least able. Teachers ensure all students are closely involved so they progress at an appropriate pace. Good use is made of the interactive white board to stimulate students' interest.

85 Leadership and management are good. Analysis of examination data has led to appropriate changes in curriculum, providing good opportunities for all students to achieve well. The very good assessment system provides accurate information on students' standards. Students know how well they are doing, what their targets are and how they can improve. The implementation of the national strategy for improving learning is clearly effective. The use of ICT as a teaching tool is developing but, currently, not all students have access to computers at appropriate times.

86 Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. All the issues raised have been resolved and a rising trend in standards has been more or less sustained. Teaching and learning have improved and assessment gives students a much clearer idea of how to do better.

Mathematics across the curriculum

87 Students' mathematical skills are below those expected nationally but are sufficient to support their learning in other subjects. A successful, whole-school training programme in the development of students' numeracy across the curriculum is bearing fruit. The numeracy co-ordinator has mapped the timing of skills development, so all teachers are aware of the ways students work things out and what they should be able to understand at given times. In science subjects, teachers contribute positively to students' skills in the use of graphs and a wide variety of units and algebraic transformations. During art studies, students prepare graphs from data gained from surveys and, in religious education lessons, students study the mathematics of Islamic designs. The geography department has mapped its use of mathematics and plans its use well throughout its curriculum where much use is made of graphs and statistics. During design and technology and textiles lessons, teachers develop well students' accuracy in measuring.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching, learning and students' very good attitudes and behaviour lead to good achievement.
- The good curriculum provision helps to motivate students.
- Very good leadership and good management are improving provision.
- In some lessons in Years 7 to 9 there is insufficient challenge to meet the needs of the highest attaining students.

Commentary

88 The results of the 2003 statutory assessments in Year 9 were below average when compared to schools nationally, but above average compared to similar schools. Although there has been some improvement since the previous inspection, the (unconfirmed) 2004 results were lower than expected. The 2003 GCSE examinations results were well below average in comparison with schools nationally but above those for similar schools. Boys out-performed girls in the Year 9 SATs and in GCSE examinations. Unconfirmed results in the 2004 GCSE examinations indicate a very significant improvement in standards in Year 11 as a result of very good teaching and the introduction of more appropriate courses for some students.

89 Inspection evidence supports these improvements. Although students achieve as well as can reasonably be expected, standards are below those expected by the end of Year 9. Students have a sound grasp of different forms of energy but are not always clear about the difference between, for example, compounds and mixtures. By Year 11, all students achieve well as, at this age, there are no significant differences between boys and girls. They use scientific language effectively and higher attainers have a good grasp of electrical circuits and chemical bonding. Students are enthusiastic learners and behave very well. This contributes to good learning in most

lessons. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as other students because of effective support. However, their education plans lack clarity and precision.

90 Teaching and learning are good in most lessons. In Years 10 and 11 teaching has very good features, including high challenge, especially for the gifted and talented students and very good use of time and resources, including ICT. A few lessons are less than good in Years 7 to 9 because higher attaining students are insufficiently challenged, particularly in whole class discussions. Most teachers are enthusiastic about the subject and convey this well to students, who, consequently, think learning is fun. This was exemplified when Year 10 students downloaded Internet images of distant stars within hours of them being transmitted from a working telescope. Students' work is very carefully marked and assessment data is used well to plan lessons and monitor individual progress. Most students are well aware of how well they are doing, although they are not always clear about how to improve.

91 The curriculum is a strong feature and has improved since the previous inspection. The recently introduced GNVQ course provides a much better match to students' interests in Years 10 to 11, and helps to motivate them. In Years 7 to 9, the recent change to a new, well-resourced course has also contributed to better learning. Good opportunities are provided for further enhancement, such as ecology trips and the well-used link with the Liverpool telescope.

92 The department is very well led. The head of department is an enthusiastic teacher who, with the strong support of dedicated teachers, has helped to make science popular. Management is good. Competent technical support helps in the daily, smooth running of the department. Since the previous inspection good improvements have been made in raising standards and in the provision of ICT.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are average and students achieve well.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Students have very good attitudes to learning.
- Leadership of ICT as a subject is good.
- Co-ordination of ICT across the curriculum is not yet fully in place.

Commentary

93 Standards of work seen during the inspection are average at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Although GCSE examination results reported for the previous inspection were above average, the proportion of students entered was very small. Much larger numbers now study the subject and they are now entered for the GNVQ examination. The first reported examination results for this were in 2003 and almost all students achieved pass grades. Results were good because the course content and style of teaching and learning were a better match to the needs and interests of students.

94 By Year 9, students use computers confidently to research, analyse and present work appropriately. They show sound understanding of recent work to control events on screen to simulate fairground rides. Higher attaining students successfully design more complex systems and understand the principles of using sensors.

95 By Year 11, students have a sound understanding of how to plan and manage ICT systems to help to run small businesses more efficiently. They approach the design of business stationery creatively and show understanding of the purpose of using logos and special letterheads. Students research their work thoroughly and present it to a good standard. Most students find some of the

concepts associated with web page design difficult but they make good progress with learning because teaching is well structured and supportive.

96 Achievement is good overall across all Year groups in relation to earlier attainment and assessed ability. Students with special educational needs are very well supported by teachers and are given help that requires them to think for themselves and so complete work with a reasonable degree of independence. Teachers monitor the progress of students closely and provide work that is appropriately challenging for all. Students' very good behaviour and very good attitudes to learning are a significant factor in their progress in lessons.

97 The quality of teaching is good. There is a significant proportion of very good teaching. Teachers have a very good understanding of new examination courses and provide work that matches the needs of students very well. They use the national strategy, particularly in Years 7-9 to help students learn effectively and to remember what they have learned. This results in students being able to build on previous learning and to consolidate learning of aspects of the work they find difficult. Teachers explain work well so that students can work on practical tasks confidently.

98 Leadership and management of the department are good. There is a stable staff who work well as a team. The newly introduced GNVQ courses are making a significant difference to raising attainment in Years 10 and 11. Improvement is good since the previous inspection, particularly to resources and to the quality of teaching.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

99 Students use their ICT skills competently to help them learn in other subjects, although getting access to computers is sometimes problematic. There are very good resources available in art and teachers are highly qualified and experienced so students are helped to improve their projects through the use of ICT. Good use of the Intranet occurs in geography for research. In religious education students extended their ICT skills and knowledge of other cultures when they produced, for example, their own guide for a virtual tour of a mosque for use by non-Muslims. In science and design and technology, students have practical experience of data logging and control technology, which they study in theory in ICT lessons, giving them a good overall experience. Students use video cameras in drama and physical education to analyse their performances. The contribution of ICT in other subjects has been audited and specialists, including technical staff, provide good support. The co-ordination of cross-curricular work is not yet fully developed, but much has been done towards the school's aim to improve provision. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection in the quality and quantity of resources. The school is responding well to the increased demand for more ICT resulting from teachers being more competent and keen to use it. There are sustainable plans for further improvement.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent leadership successfully translates vision into practice through all-embracing monitoring.
- Lively teaching incorporating assessment is raising standards.
- Students' extended writing needs to be more broadly developed.
- New topics, reflecting contemporary issues have encouraged more students to choose GCSE geography.

Commentary

100 Standards of work seen at the end of year 9 are average. There is a rising trend, as improved systems for tracking progress and identifying underachievement, active learning and assessing learning against lesson aims have become established. Students and parents add comments to those of teachers after each topic assessment: a powerful partnership, supporting very good achievement. In lessons, students' use of 'who, what, why' questioning of sources effectively raises important issues about development, sustainability, exploitation of human and environmental resources. Teachers' diverse ways of emphasising key words means that students accurately use geographical terms and factual knowledge to explain the causes and implications of, for instance, living in less economically developed countries in relation to more economically developed ones. Students explore these issues in relation to a wide range of countries and through very relevant topics investigating the fashion industry, crime and sport.

101 Good graphical and numeracy skills help interpretation, although some lower attaining students struggle with complex maps. Speaking develops well through role-play, presentations (some using ICT), "hot-seating" and regular decision-making in pairs.

102 Higher attaining students are efficient note-makers and confidently reconcile conflicting viewpoints, although students have too few opportunities to apply knowledge in writing at length for different purposes. Students with special educational needs make good progress because of sensitive guidance from learning support assistants and because teachers actively involve them in the work. Education plans are, however, not tight enough to be easily measured for progress.

103 In 2003, GCSE results were comfortably above average as were students gaining A*, marking a rising trend. Numbers were well below average, but have substantially increased, reflecting the vitality and coherence of the department.

104 Standards of work in Years 10 and 11 are average, although students are doing better than predicted. Good annotating, graphical skills, note-making and organisational skills help them to accurately demonstrate the development and impact of glaciers, earthquakes and the sustainability of tourism in Chester. Very good teaching enables them to analyse exam answers, comparing each other's, and to target writing at the grade they are aiming for, so they know how to get there. Coupled with enthusiastic commitment, this indicates very good achievement.

105 Teaching and learning are very good, characterised by imaginative ways of involving students so they all contribute orally every lesson. Excellent lesson planning around the national teaching and learning strategy accelerates and enriches learning. Teachers devise various means of supporting students with writing and refer to outstanding displays for key words, geography skills and student-friendly assessment targets.

106 Excellent leadership and management have revitalised experience for students and capitalised on teachers' considerable strengths. Continuous monitoring and evaluating day-to-day practice ensures that a clear vision for raising standards is evident in practice. Therefore, improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Consequently, significantly larger numbers choose GCSE geography.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A significant proportion of students' under-developed literacy skills are a barrier to raising standards in GCSE examinations.
- Good quality teaching is raising achievement in all year groups.
- Good leadership and management have led to rapid improvements in curricular provision.

- Most students enjoy history and, as a result, work and behave well.
- Very good curriculum enrichment broadens the outlook of students in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

107 Teacher assessments, for Year 9 students, indicate broadly average standards. Students now in Year 9 achieve average standards and this is good achievement in comparison to prior attainment. Students in Year 11 achieve standards that are below the national average, but meet externally set targets. A significant proportion has weak literacy skills that impact adversely upon their written work. Oral standards are broadly average, most students can comment appropriately on source material to identify causation, bias and motive. They do not have sufficient contextual knowledge to write in sufficient detail and use an enriched subject vocabulary, to gain higher marks for their work. Given the entry profile of students into this cohort, achievement is good. Students with special educational needs achieve well, especially where teaching assistants help those with specific learning needs.

108 In 2003 insufficient numbers of students were entered for the GCSE examination to produce validated comparisons against national averages. In the 2004 GCSE examination, below average proportions obtained higher grades, A* to C. The number of students choosing history in Year 10 is rising rapidly, because good teaching motivates them and the revised curriculum has broader appeal. Teachers have a very secure knowledge of their subject, plan lessons carefully, make good use of resources and match tasks well to ability. In some lessons students need better background information to help them. For example, students can describe Hitler's powers of persuasion, but are less secure in relating his policies to changing international events. Teachers identify subject vocabulary clearly in lessons, but students are not always challenged sufficiently to use it in oral and written work.

109 Leadership and management are good. The newly appointed head of department is tackling barriers to progress. She has a clear view of the importance of improving literacy, especially in Years 7 to 9, through giving students sufficient time to consolidate their learning through written work.

110 The very good curriculum enrichment in Year 10 provides significant opportunities for students to broaden their understanding of the world around them and the importance of learning the lessons of history. For example, last year students visited Auschwitz. This is a very good example of citizenship being promoted effectively. The good behaviour and mature attitudes displayed by students of all ages and ability is both a reflection of good teaching and an indication of good personal development. Most students contribute well and offer valid opinions on their work. The good quality of assessment ensures students are given guidance on how to improve through individual targets. Good quality displays are an indication of the positive ethos in the department. Overall, provision is good and improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and areas for development

- Good teaching and relationships lead to good achievement, attitudes and behaviour.
- Students' attainment is better than that predicted, but still below average.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Study of the subject makes a very good contribution to students' personal development.

Commentary

111 The below-expected levels of literacy skills and subject knowledge of many students on entry to the school have a negative effect on standards. However, students of all abilities, including

those with learning difficulties achieve well, make good progress over time and attain levels above predictions. The 2004 GCSE higher grade, A*-C, results were well below previous averages, but were a big improvement over the previous year's. The proportion of results at any grade was average, which is good considering starting points.

112 Teachers are skilled practitioners who use a range of methods, activities and materials to engage, challenge and stimulate students. Developments such as the national strategy for improving teaching and learning; use of 'Thinking Skills' and 'Philosophy' approaches; a more appropriate GCSE course and greater use of ICT are having a significant impact on students' learning and achievement. Homework often includes research requiring analysis and interpretation, which is effective in developing thinking skills as well as extending subject knowledge and understanding. The 'Philosophy Club' and visitors from charities and local faith communities effectively extend learning.

113 Teachers have a strong sense of care for students and have high expectations of them. Students respond with a willingness to learn, work hard, improve and achieve well. They apply themselves conscientiously to work independently and with their peers. Consequently, they acquire new knowledge and understanding of the religions they study and the skills to reflect seriously on their attitudes and spiritual and moral values.

114 Awareness of the need to develop language and numeracy across the curriculum is good and some religious education lessons are planned particularly to address these issues. Classroom environments are stimulating. The quality of display to support both the subject and acquisition of key skills is excellent. Students' work is very well displayed and they are proud of it.

115 Assessment for learning is good and improving through the use of regular standardised tasks. Thorough marking tells students what they must do to improve. However, students do not have a clear enough understanding of how to practically translate the guidance into their work to achieve higher grades.

116 The acting head of department has worked hard and successfully to raise standards. Inclusion is central to the work of the department and a more appropriate curriculum with accompanying materials is being implemented to better support the teaching and learning of students of all abilities. He has a clear idea of what the department needs to do to continue to improve and appropriate measures are identified in departmental documentation.

117 The department has made good progress since the previous inspection and has far exceeded what was identified as necessary for improvement at that time.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are below average, but improving; achievement is satisfactory.
- There are weaknesses in the teaching and in students' understanding of resistant materials and electronics.
- Students have good practical skills in textiles and food technology.

Commentary

118 Standards of attainment are average overall. Current work is improving, particularly in the quality of presentation of written work and learning about materials, because of recent attention to improving the quality of teaching and assessing students' work.

119 Students enter the school with varied experience of the subject, but generally well below average attainment. Achievement is satisfactory overall; students do well in textiles and food technology, but achieve unsatisfactorily in resistant materials and electronics. Good progress is indicated in the quality of work in books in Year 7 where students show greater understanding of materials and scientific processes. They sustain satisfactory improvement thereafter. Standards are lower in resistant material and knowledge because there is currently no specialist teacher for this area and not enough time is spent on developing skills. As a result, students do not achieve well enough and study of resistant materials is currently discontinued after Year 9.

120 By Year 9, students plan, develop and evaluate the quality of their work to a satisfactory standard. Students have good practical skills in textiles and food technology and show understanding of the materials used. Knowledge of nutrition is below that expected for students of this age but is above expectations based on their previous experience and assessed ability. Although practical work is satisfactory, students' understanding of components and systems is weak in electronics, so achievement is unsatisfactory.

121 Standards of attainment in work seen in Year 11 are better than those achieved in examinations in previous years. This is because the development of coursework is more closely monitored and there is a stronger focus on project management. GCSE results were well below average for students obtaining higher grades, A*-C, in 2003 and provisional results for 2004 are similar. Students' understanding of electronics is well below average and their knowledge of resistant materials is weak. Students do best in textiles where learning is very well structured and theory and practice are well integrated.

122 The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Occasionally, it is good or very good, especially in textiles. In the best lessons, students work independently and creatively. They contribute to planning work and are challenged and interested by it. Students with special educational needs are treated with respect and are well supported in lessons. In consequence, their self-esteem and confidence are raised and they make similar progress to others. At the same time, their education plans are too vague to be easily translated into progress. In unsatisfactory lessons, the pace is too slow, teachers talk too much and there is not enough independent involvement of students.

123 Leadership is satisfactory. There is now more critical self-evaluation leading to improved teaching and learning. This is leading to improved standards. Staff work closely as a team, sharing good practice and planning in-service training using existing expertise as well as seeking guidance from wider sources. There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. Marking is now consistent across the department and helps to guide students' work. Planning for different groups of students is better.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Unsatisfactory leadership has meant that the school's and national priorities for improving teaching and learning have not been adopted.
- Lessons are effectively managed and teachers convey a sense of urgency about the work.
- Insufficient time is given to several important parts of the course.
- Teachers use ICT well: this makes an important contribution to the students' learning.
- Visiting artists and designers, gallery visits and residentials enrich learning.

Commentary

124 Attainment on entry is just below expectations. Achievement is satisfactory and attainment improves to be about in line with expectations by the end of Year 9. Students are able to explore ideas and collect visual information, often from the Internet. They use a range of materials, methods and processes and are able to explain their work to others. Most students with special educational needs achieve well, although a lack of concentration restricts the progress of some when work is not tailored closely enough to their stage of learning and their education plans are imprecise.

125 By the end of Year 11, attainment is below average, although compared with schools in similar circumstances students perform well. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. Most able students show that they are prepared to work beyond the brief; boys and girls produce work of equal quality. There are weaknesses; research is under-developed in final examination pieces and too much time is spent collecting images rather than developing ideas. As a result, personal interpretation by students is weakened. The development of visual literacy by in-depth studies of colour, tone, form, pattern and composition is also weak.

126 The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Lessons have sound introductions; teachers are enthusiastic and they manage classes effectively. There are good qualities, such as the good use of demonstration to instruct and challenge. In Years 10 and 11, the use of ICT is a regular, effective feature. Interesting projects include the design of 'pop-up' books, supported by a visiting graphics artist; a painting based on the work of Edvard Munch and the design of a box for a wine bottle. However, the breaking down of lessons into clear stages does not always happen and not all teaching caters well enough for students' different learning needs.

127 Leadership is unsatisfactory. Leadership has failed to make sure that the school's key strategies to improve teaching, learning and assessment are in place. The Year 7 to 9 curriculum is sound but basic skills are underdeveloped at first. Students' targets aim at quantity rather than quality of work. The curriculum gives students too few chances to work from primary source materials. Work from direct observation does not feature as an element in its own right and is not sufficiently developed in both design and painting projects.

128 Management is satisfactory. A sound improvement plan is in place. The policy for students with special educational needs reflects the special qualities of art and design. The department also recognises the contributions it can make to citizenship. Schemes of work are sound but the pace of work is not challenging enough, particularly for the most able students in all years.

129 Since the previous inspection the department has made satisfactory progress. Schemes of work have a much clearer structure; students have a broader experience through visits of artists and designers, as well as a residential experience and visits to galleries. The use of ICT is now a strength. GCSE examination results are higher, although the highest grades, A* and A, remain elusive.

Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of attainment in Years 7 to 9 are below average.
- GCSE results improved significantly in 2004.
- Higher attaining students in Years 7 to 9 are insufficiently challenged.
- Behaviour in Years 8 and 9 is unsatisfactory.
- There is very good use of a variety of resources, particularly ICT as a teaching aid in Years 10 and 11.

- Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subject.

Commentary

130 In Years 7 to 9, standards are below expectation. Composition work is very basic with little extended work, even in upper sets. In their listening work, the students show understanding of simple concepts but then there is insufficient development of analytical skills, particularly for higher attaining students. The achievement of the students in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory. This is the result of previous staffing difficulties and discipline problems for inexperienced staff. There is also sometimes a lack of challenge for higher attaining students. However, students with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily, helped by small teaching groups and work well matched to their prior attainment. There are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls.

131 The number of students entered for GCSE in recent years is too small for meaningful comparisons with national statistics. However, the 2004 results indicate a significant improvement on previous years. In work seen in Years 10 and 11, standards overall are average although numbers are small and there is wide variation within the group. Students in Years 10 and 11 are achieving well considering their prior attainment and the lack of instrumental experience within the group. Higher attaining students and those with special educational needs do well because of the high level of individual attention, which the small group sizes allow.

132 The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 10 and 11. They are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, but some problems of management and control in Years 8 and 9 undermine achievement. Both classroom and instrumental teachers have good subject knowledge. Lessons are well prepared and a good variety of resources are very well used. Students with special educational needs are fully integrated into all activities and support staff contribute effectively, ensuring a good level of individual attention. Teacher and students use ICT most effectively in Years 10 and 11 but a lack of equipment denies students' participation in Years 7 to 9. The department has good systems in place for students to evaluate their own and each other's work, but there is insufficient marking to ensure that students know how well they are doing and how they can improve.

133 Leadership and management are satisfactory. The inexperienced teacher in charge has taken over in difficult circumstances but has made progress in regenerating instrumental teaching and extra-curricular work. New schemes of work are being implemented and assessment systems are being developed. The accommodation for music is unsatisfactory. The lack of practice rooms inhibits group work and affects the quality of learning. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. After an initial decline in standards the trend is now upwards. More instruments have been provided for the classroom. Curriculum time for music has been increased and instrumental teaching has been developed.

Drama

Provision in drama is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching helps students to develop skills in improvisations and other practical work.
- The subject provides many students with broader experiences in personal, moral and social education.
- Students are less assured at evaluating their own work in order to make improvements.

Commentary

134 Drama has been successfully introduced as a separate subject for Years 7 to 9 since the previous inspection. It is starting to make a significant difference to students' personal development. They are learning greater self-control and how to work together in groups. The

teacher skilfully provides a range of relevant tasks to channel the ebullience of students helping them to build up a range of good dramatic techniques such as “freeze frames” and “thought tracking.” As a result, students are starting to reflect more on their actions and how to refine them with greater conviction in performance. Encouraged by the teacher’s comments and questions they are becoming more aware of stagecraft. Standards seen in Year 9 are in line with expectations and this represents good achievement.

135 Standards in GCSE drama have been well above the national average in 2003 and 2004 but with very small numbers. The current entry is larger and standards seen are average. Considering students in Year 11 had little previous experience in drama their achievement is good. Students in Year 10 show more confidence and have a better foundation based on their work in Year 9. Students have good skills in conveying character and mood through gesture and movement but are less articulate in describing the strengths and weaknesses of performance. Their knowledge of technical terminology is good and they read scripts with good dramatic interpretation.

136 The quality of teaching is good. The teacher’s very good lesson planning alongside his obvious specialist knowledge and natural enthusiasm motivate most students, and the older classes in particular respond positively and work hard in lessons. When classes are large, the devices for bringing them under control are not always effective and this adversely affects pace and continuity.

137 The subject is managed well by the head of English. There are good links between the two subjects and these contribute to students’ greater understanding of Shakespeare and their skills in speaking and listening. Whilst there is a good space to teach the subject, resources are very limited and reduce the scope of work students are able to attempt. There are very good links with outside theatre groups and in particular with primary schools. This is giving the subject a higher profile in the development of performing arts in the school. Assessment is at an early stage as the teacher is new to the school and few students have previous experience of drama but it is starting to influence the planning of lessons and the setting of realistic targets.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is good.
- Students have positive attitudes.
- Leadership and management are good.
- Standards of attainment are average.
- There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

Commentary

138 Standards are average by Year 9. This represents satisfactory achievement overall with good achievement evident in activities such as gymnastics and volleyball of which students had little or no experience when they entered the school. Students have good understanding of ways of warming up for different kinds of exercise and satisfactory awareness of which muscle groups are being exercised. Higher attainers are quick to grasp basic techniques needed for successful performance and are ambitious in planning sequences of movement for example, in gymnastics. Others are more dependent on direction and help from teachers. Students show satisfactory skills of identifying qualities of successful performance and the means of improvement.

139 Results at GCSE were above the national average in 2003, particularly for the proportion attaining higher grades. Students following GCSE courses have good practical skills, for example, evidence of good ability to change team tactics to frustrate the opposition without direction by the teacher was noted in a Year 11 basketball lesson. Students at all levels of skill achieve standards

appropriate to their abilities. . Writing is usually clearly expressed and shows appropriate knowledge and understanding of the course requirements.

140 Teaching is good. Occasionally it is very good and it is never less than satisfactory. Teachers plan lessons well and are careful to provide appropriate challenges for all levels of ability. Talented students have opportunities to extend their skills; individuals achieve high standards in a range of sporting and athletic activities developed in lessons, in extra-curricular activities or through membership of local clubs. The achievements of all are recognised so that confidence grows. The least able students benefit from extra assistance. Teachers use questions well to confirm understanding and encourage students to offer suggestions and make decisions. They have high expectations of effort, behaviour and progress. Students respond positively because they enjoy their work and know their efforts will be valued. They work well as individuals and as members of groups. The pace of lessons is usually brisk with smooth transitions from one activity to another so that interest and concentration are sustained and progress is good. Lessons are less successful when the pace slows.

141 Leadership and management are good. There is effective sharing of responsibilities. Good use is made of digital cameras, computers and devices such as heart monitors to enrich learning and to record and monitor achievement. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. Indoor facilities are much better. GCSE courses are now successfully established and attract above average proportions of students. Some grassed areas are uneven and slow the development of technical skills.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

142 Two lessons of **business studies** were sampled, one in Year 10 and the other in Year 11. This is a popular course. Students find it different, practical and interesting. They become more aware of different types of business and the ways in which they work. Written work shows satisfactory understanding and that of students from ethnic minorities is equally as good as other students. The course makes a good contribution to citizenship. Teaching and learning are good. Achievement is also good, although some Year 10 students have difficulty handling technical vocabulary. Girls do better than boys; girls' GCSE results were above average in 2003, those of boys were well below average. The proportion of higher grade passes fell in 2004.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The election work of the school council provides a very effective voice for students.
- Very good leadership supports all staff effectively.
- The good curriculum provides wide variety of provision and meets the needs of all students well.
- Current assessment arrangements do not provide sufficient information on how well students achieve in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

143 The fully democratic school council is truly representative of all students, the school gains a significant input into its' decision making process. Students' views certainly count and have real influence upon the leadership and management of the school.

144 The provision for citizenship and students' personal and social development is firmly established throughout the school. Standards in citizenship are satisfactory throughout Years 7 to

11 and achievement is good in Years 7 to 9. A definite evaluation of achievement is harder for Years 10 and 11. Students enjoy this subject and speak highly of it. They develop a good range of communication skills as they learn about a wide range of national and international organisations. The curriculum provides many opportunities for discussion and reflection. Through this work students develop an appreciation of differing societies, their concerns, priorities and values. The comprehensive scheme of work shows clearly that all students enjoy good access to the full statutory curriculum.

145 A limited number of lessons were observed during the inspection. From these examples of good teaching and satisfactory teaching emerged. Overall, teaching of citizenship is good. Where practice is good, students are actively engaged in informed discussion, with the class teacher skilfully presenting ideas and information to promote this. The curriculum is taught effectively through tutorial periods and across a range of subjects with learning objectives being clearly identified. For example, in a lesson on business re-location, students completed a decision making exercise to plan a new factory. In a history lesson, good links were established between Tudor social problems and those of today. Year 10 students, in danger of dropping out of education, reap great benefit from an access course that gives them close insights into the ways societies work. The quality of teaching, mainly by learning mentors, of such aspects of the course is captivatingly good.

146 The very good leadership is energetic in providing support for all staff. The Local Education Authority draws on this to spread good practice in local schools. There is a very clear determination to develop and improve provision through the school. Good management ensures there are effective procedures to monitor progress, especially in Years 7 to 9. There are thorough procedures in place to audit provision and monitor the quality of teaching.

147 Special 'citizenship' days and clear learning objectives within subject areas provide considerable enhancement. As a result, the overall curriculum is good. Assessment procedures provide clear evidence of students' progress in Years 7 to 9. These enable the school to fully meet reporting requirements at the end of Year 9. Assessment is less secure in Years 10 and 11. As a result, the school has more difficulty in determining precisely how well older students achieve in citizenship.

Personal, social and health education

Provision in personal social and health education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The PSHE course is well received by students and it makes a good contribution to their personal growth.

Commentary

148 All students' benefit significantly from personal and social development lessons. These provide the core PSHE provision. The PSHE programme is effective because it relates to the needs of the students. The course covers a wide range of topics including learning how to lead healthy lives and to recognise the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Students are made aware of important issues such as bullying and respect for the law. A good library of books, magazines and ICT facilities supports the well-planned course.

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	2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its previous inspection	3
Value for money provided by the school	3
Overall standards achieved	3
Students' achievement	3
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)	2
Attendance	4
Attitudes	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	3
The quality of teaching	3
How well students learn	3
The quality of assessment	3
How well the curriculum meets students needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	3
Students' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for students	2
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	1
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	2
The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	3

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