

INSPECTION REPORT

PRENTON HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Birkenhead, Merseyside

LEA area: Wirral

Unique reference number: 105093

Headteacher: Robert Winterson

Lead inspector: Clare Gillies

Dates of inspection: 22 – 25 November 2004

Inspection number: 268438

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

© Crown copyright 2005

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 – 16
Gender of pupils:	Girls
Number on roll;	761
School address:	Hesketh Avenue Birkenhead Wirral
Postcode:	CH42 6RR
Telephone number:	0105 844 8113
Fax number:	0151 643 9588
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Joseph Roper
Date of previous inspection:	April 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Prenton High is a smaller than average 11-16 school, with 761 girls on roll. Over 95 per cent of pupils are white, with very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. For about three per cent of pupils English is an additional language but practically all of them speak English fluently. Close to 40 per cent of pupils take free school meals - well above average. A significant number of pupils are in care. The school's catchment includes areas with low levels of employment, low income, poor health, a high percentage of child poverty and where few parents have experienced higher education. Taken as a whole, pupils' socio-economic home situations are well below average.

The percentage of pupils with special educational needs, including those with Statements of Special Educational Needs, is above average. The predominant special needs are for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, dyslexia and physical disability. In past years, with three girls' grammar schools in the Wirral, standards on entry have been at least below average but the present Year 7 entered the school with average standards.

The school received an achievement award in 2002. It is part of an Education Action Zone and also receives funds through the Excellence in Cities initiative. It has strong links with Birkenhead Sixth Form College and Wirral Metropolitan College. The local authority has entered into a private finance arrangement to rebuild five of its secondary schools. Prenton High has endured over two years of building work, which is still not complete. Further details of this are given in the two introductory paragraphs under the heading Part B and in paragraph 32.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
20597	Clare Gillies	Lead inspector	English as an additional language Work-related learning
9334	Jenny Mynett	Lay inspector	
33185	Patricia Nathan	Team inspector	English Media studies Drama
6756	Pat Hanage	Team inspector	Mathematics
8864	Peter Clifton	Team inspector	Science
30899	Ken Boden	Team inspector	Art and design
19096	Sylvia McClean	Team inspector	Design and technology
14704	Jeff Cooling	Team inspector	Geography
20877	David Pink	Team inspector	History
32211	Brendan Geoghegan	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
16042	Paula Haes	Team inspector	French Spanish
7222	Alan Watson	Team inspector	Music Special educational needs
33131	Glen Hayes	Team inspector	Physical education Dance
27226	Richard Cribb	Team inspector	Religious education Citizenship, personal, social and health education

The inspection contractor was:

Cambridge Education Associates
Demeter House
Station Road
Cambridge

CB1 2RS

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be made initially to the contractor. The procedures are set out in the leaflet *'Complaining about Ofsted Inspections'*, which is available from Ofsted Publications Centre (telephone 07002 637833) or Ofsted's website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	8
Standards achieved in subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	13
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	20
OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES	22
Work-related learning	
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	23
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	41

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

All staff are to be commended for coping as well as possible with the long delays the school has experienced with its building programme. For over two years this has made life very difficult for all members of the school community.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the school is good. Standards are average and pupils achieve well. Teaching and learning are good. Leadership and management are good at all levels. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Pupils achieve well because teaching and learning are good.
- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has managed to keep spirits up during the building work and has kept staff focused on teaching and learning.
- Pupils receive very good care and support whatever their particular needs. Those with difficult home situations are encouraged and nurtured very well.
- Attendance is well below average. It is part of the reason why GCSE results were below average in 2004. Punctuality is poor and the school is not consistent enough about recording and following up lateness.
- Pupils behave well and most of them are mature, articulate and caring. They get on well together and are respectful of other cultural traditions.
- Most pupils participate fully in everything the school offers and in Years 10 and 11 they are helped to follow courses that suit their interests and aspirations.
- English, drama, media studies and design and technology are effective and well-organised departments.
- Arrangements for teaching modern foreign languages are unsatisfactory. The introduction of Spanish in Year 9 has not been successful.

The school's effectiveness has improved well since its last inspection in April 1999: standards and teaching in mathematics are better; more learning support assistants are employed so that pupils with special educational needs are supported well; standards in Years 10 and 11 are more consistent across subjects; statutory requirements for information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11 are met; performance management is in place; and pupils' spiritual development is better. The use of form time in the morning is more purposeful but its quality is still variable. The school still does not meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2002	2003	2004	2004
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	D	C	D	C

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

In all years achievement is good; overall standards are average and in several subjects standards are above the national average.

Years 7 to 9: English Year 9 national test results have been average or higher since 2001. In 2004, the percentage of pupils reaching Level 5 improved in English, mathematics and science and exceeded the school's targets. However, only in English did the percentage of pupils reaching the higher levels go up, so the overall point score for the three subjects was below that attained in 2003, when it was in line with the national average. Present standards are above average in art and design and design and

technology, below average in science, French, Spanish and religious education and average in all other subjects.

Years 10 and 11: before 2004, GCSE examination results were improving. Results reflect the pupils' standards on entry to the school so the drop in the percentage of pupils attaining five GCSE grades A*-C in 2004 was expected. Other factors were the disruption caused by the building works and some pupils' poor attendance. Nevertheless, GCSE results improved in several subjects in 2004 – they were above average in English, art and design, French, GNVQ ICT, media studies, design and technology and physical education. The percentage of A*/A grades was high in art and design, drama and media studies. Results in mathematics, dance and Spanish were well below average. Present standards are above average in art and design, design and technology, drama, ICT, media studies and citizenship, below average in mathematics, geography, history and Spanish and average in all other subjects.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Most of them have positive attitudes to work and behave well, although a small number of girls are inconsiderate and spoil a few lessons. Bullying does happen occasionally but most pupils acknowledge that it is rarely serious and that the school deals with it well and will not tolerate it. Attendance is well below average and punctuality is poor – both have a negative impact on the standards that some pupils achieve. The school has recently stepped up its procedures for tackling absence but those for monitoring punctuality are not tight enough.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Both have improved since the last inspection. During the inspection teaching was very good in almost one third of lessons seen. Teaching in English, design and technology, ICT and physical education is often very good. In these subjects there are examples of pupils achieving very well because the teaching is innovative or consistently effective.

The curriculum is good overall with some effective arrangements for pupils who wish to study vocational courses, some off-site. Dance, drama and media studies are popular GCSE options. Extra-curricular activities are very good and pupils appreciate them. Arrangements for pupils' care and welfare are very good, with well-organised child protection procedures, and staff and outside agencies, working effectively to help pupils stay on track.

Academic support, advice and guidance are good. The school's partnership with parents is satisfactory – the school is keen to involve parents in their daughters' education but with some parents this is a challenge. The school's partnership with the community is satisfactory and its links with other schools and colleges are good and developing well - for example, with teachers working in primary schools and collaborating with other secondary schools.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management overall are good. The headteacher has successfully focused on raising standards combined with offering high levels of support for all pupils. The senior leadership team members work well together. The school successfully supports all pupils to achieve their best and to offer equality of opportunity. A core of dedicated and hard-working governors has provided steadfast encouragement throughout the difficulties of the building programme and their work is good. The school does not meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are generally satisfied with the school, although they have concerns about the effect of the building programme on pupils' learning. Pupils are very satisfied with the school and many appreciate that they are taught well and feel safe and well cared for.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Persevere with all efforts to improve attendance and tackle punctuality with a similar determination.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in French and Spanish.
- Move forward as fast as possible to complete the building works.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Introduce a daily act of collective worship.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

Already the signs of a better and more stimulating environment are evident. Several new classrooms are complete and good use is made of the new sports hall. Nevertheless, overshadowing the atmosphere and life of the school is the building programme that has been going on, with numerous interruptions, since September 2002. It should have been finished by December 2003. Present Year 9 pupils have only experienced secondary school education surrounded by a building site and the Year 11 pupils who left in the summer of 2004 studied for their GCSEs in the same situation. A significant number of Year 11 pupils were poor attenders. The school and local education authority made many additional arrangements to try and work around the building problems but it was not possible for them to remove all the obstacles to teaching and learning.

The director of education and cultural services for Wirral notes that “the school has had to endure almost daily disruption over three years”. Examples of specific construction issues that have had a negative impact on teaching and learning are described in paragraph 32. What cannot be quantified is the exhaustion and frustration which the headteacher, senior leadership team, all teachers, and pupils indirectly, have experienced for so long. These have sapped morale and enthusiasm for learning and taken energy away from teaching. The air is often dusty, construction noise is distracting, cleaning is poor, pathways are muddy and access to the school is difficult and changes regularly. Governors, parents and neighbours are rightly concerned about the situation as it has been going on for so long. This report should be read with an understanding that the building works have had, and continue to have, a significant negative impact on all areas of school life.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Achievement in all years is good. Standards in all years are average overall. Before 2004, the overall trend in GCSE examination results was upwards, in line with that seen nationally. Although GCSE results fell in 2004, this had been expected.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- English Year 9 test results have been average or higher since 2001.
- In 2004 GCSE results were above average in English, art and design, French, GNVQ ICT, media studies, design and technology and physical education.
- GCSE results in mathematics, dance and Spanish were well below average in 2004.
- Pupils with special educational needs achieve well.

Commentary

1. English Year 9 test results have been average or higher since 2001. Pupils achieve well in this subject in Years 7 to 9. In 2004, the percentage of pupils reaching the expected level for their age (Level 5) improved in English, mathematics and science and exceeded the school's targets. Only in English, however, did the percentage of pupils reaching the higher levels go up; the percentage of pupils reaching the higher levels in mathematics and science dropped. Hence the overall point score for English, mathematics and science combined was below that attained in 2003, when it was in line with the national average.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2004

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.0 (33.2)	n/a (33.4)
mathematics	32.6 (34.5)	35.5 (35.4)
science	30.3 (32.8)	33.1 (33.6)

There were 153 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year. National figures for English were not available at the time of the inspection.

- Before 2004, the overall trend in GCSE examination results was upwards, in line with that seen nationally. For several years GCSE results have reflected pupils' standards on entry to the school, measured by tests taken in Year 7. In both 2003 and 2004 the percentage of pupils attaining five GCSE grades A*-C exceeded the school's predictions. Although GCSE results fell in 2004, this had been expected. These pupils showed the lowest attainment on entry for several years and did not attain well in the Year 9 mathematics tests in 2002; only 30 per cent of them gained GCSE mathematics at grade A*-C. Further significant factors were the disruption caused by the building works and the poor and erratic attendance of some pupils, particularly in Year 11.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2004

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	39 (47)	53 (52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	93 (89)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (95)	97 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	New points: 269.2 Old points: 32.6 (32.2)	New points: 281.7 Old points: 34.9 (34.7)

There were 157 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year. A new points system was introduced in 2004.

- Nevertheless, as the following table shows, GCSE results improved in several subjects in 2004, particularly art and design, media studies, GNVQ information and communication technology (ICT) and dual award science. GCSE results were above average in English, art and design, French, GNVQ ICT, media studies, design and technology and physical education. Relative to their other subjects, pupils did particularly well in English, design and technology and physical education. The percentage of A*/A grades was high in art and design, drama and media studies. Results in mathematics, dance and Spanish were well below average.

GCSE RESULTS 2003 and 2004 (percentage with grades A*-C) - Bold type shows where performance was above average in 2004

	2003	National 2004	2004	Comments on 2004 results
English language	66	56	58	In language and literature, the percentage

English literature	71	64	56	of A*/A grades improved.
Mathematics	37	49	31	
Science (overall)	46	48	38	12 pupils took separate sciences
Art and design	59	68	69	25% A*/A grades
Dance	6	n/a	30	
Drama	78	68	62	33% A*/A grades
French	61	52	88	Taken by eight pupils
Spanish	41	58	36	Taken by eleven pupils
Geography	28	62	26	Taken by 19 pupils
History	39	64	39	
GNVQ ICT	54	n/a	72	

ICT	--	57	38	
Media studies	86	58	96	Almost 25% A*/A grades
Music	67	69	59	
DT (overall)	75	53	63	Taken by over half the year group
Physical education	70	58	61	

4. The GCSE results must be seen in the light of the significant building problems, and the fact that several pupils were absent or attended irregularly. Mathematics requires constant reinforcement and revision, whereas pupils who have been absent can catch up better in practically based subjects such as physical education or design and technology. Present standards, shown in the table below are encouraging and the inspection supports the school's confidence that GCSE results will improve in 2005.

	Years 7 to 9		Years 10 and 11	
	Standards	Achievement	Standards	Achievement
English	Average	Good	Average	Good
Mathematics	Average	Good	Below average	Satisfactory
Science	Below average	Satisfactory	Average	Satisfactory
Art	Above average	Very good	Above average	Good
Design and technology	Above average	Good	Above average	Good
Geography	Average	Satisfactory	Below average	Satisfactory
History	Average	Good	Below average	Satisfactory
French	Below average	Unsatisfactory	Average	Good
Spanish	Below average	Unsatisfactory	Below average	Satisfactory
ICT	Average	Good	Above average	Good

Music	Average	Good	Average	Good
Physical education	Average	Good	Average	Good
Religious education	Below average	Good	Average	Good
Citizenship	Average	Good	Above average	Good

5. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in all years. Analysis of the 2004 GCSE results shows that these pupils made significant progress in relation to their capabilities. They also achieved well in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and the work-related curriculum, in part because of effective management in lessons and other support sessions. Pupils with special educational needs progress well in improving their reading and spelling ages and those with statements make good progress towards the targets set at their reviews. They also make good progress in gaining self-confidence, social development and organisational skills. Standards have improved since the previous inspection, particularly amongst older pupils. Pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve well, as do those pupils who are gifted and talented.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are good. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Attendance and punctuality are poor.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good attitudes and behaviour of most pupils enable them to make good progress because they are well motivated and keen to learn.
- Too many pupils are not attending school regularly or arriving on time, and this has a negative impact on their attitudes and achievement.
- Relationships throughout the school are good - they generate a harmonious atmosphere in which learning is respected.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness well.

Commentary

6. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour were very good and a strength of the school at the time of the last inspection. The long-running building problems have affected a few pupils, making them less tolerant and considerate. Pupils and parents generally have positive views about the school. Parents are pleased by the way pupils are encouraged to behave well, work hard and achieve their best. Pupils speak enthusiastically of the good teachers, who make lessons interesting, and of their own keenness to learn and to participate in all the school provides. Pupils take full advantage of the many clubs, sporting activities and trips that are offered to help enrich their learning experience. Pupils with special educational needs are well motivated and eager to learn, which is reflected in their attitudes towards school and their good behaviour.
7. Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, responding well within the difficult circumstances presented by the building site. The school has effective behaviour strategies and an appropriate focus on promoting good behaviour and supporting those individuals who find this difficult. Pupils understand the clearly defined programme of rewards and sanctions and enjoy accumulating credit points. In the majority of lessons pupils learn without being disturbed by others. However, there is a small number of girls whose behaviour is unsatisfactory. A small minority can be deliberately rude or disruptive in lessons they find difficult. Often they do not understand work because they have missed previous lessons or sometimes the teaching does not capture their interest and attention.
8. The school is successfully using its learning mentors, the student support room and an alternative curriculum to help and retain disaffected pupils and those with behavioural problems. The school has a strict code of conduct and applies exclusions as part of its behaviour management system. The level of short, fixed-term exclusions increased last year owing to a zero tolerance approach to disruptive behaviour, some of which resulted from pupils' increasing frustrations with the delayed building work. The use of short exclusions is generally effective and the number of pupils re-offending is declining. The level of permanent exclusions is in line with local schools and this sanction is applied only for significant misdemeanours.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Asian

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
699	116	5
4	0	0
1	0	0

Mixed – any other mixed background	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	12	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	3	0	0
Chinese	6	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	31	0	0

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

9. As in several other schools in the Wirral, attendance and punctuality continue to be a problem. The majority of pupils are happy to come to school and learn. However, a significant number of pupils have poor attendance. The school's attendance is well below national figures. This is due to a number of school refusers and disaffected pupils who do not wish to attend, families who take holidays in term time, a proportion of pupils who are absent because of medical conditions and some with parent-condoned truancy. The school has a number of pupils with difficult home circumstances and this affects their attendance levels and contributes to these low figures. The poor levels of attendance and missed lessons are having a considerable impact on a small number of pupils' achievement, especially in Years 10 and 11.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	8.5	School data :	1.9
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.

10. Punctuality is also poor and the late arrival of a large number of pupils disrupts the morning tutor period. Pupils are often not challenged about their late arrivals and lateness is not recorded consistently – which does not encourage prompt arrival. The last inspection noted that the tutor period was not used productively. Its effectiveness now is dependent upon individual tutors. Where the time is used productively, in the majority of cases, it provides a positive start to the day.
11. The school has tightened up its absence and truancy procedures and is currently recruiting an attendance clerk. The heads of year are working closely with the attendance officer and the new educational social worker to monitor the situation and implement new response systems, including more home visits and prosecutions for the worst offending individuals.
12. Pupils respond well to the opportunities presented to take responsibility, develop their initiative and contribute to activities around school. Through the prefect system pupils undertake specific duties, develop their maturity and act as role models to the younger girls. The senior girls are successfully initiating ideas for fundraising and other activities. Relationships between staff and pupils and amongst the pupils themselves are generally good. There are few incidents of serious bullying, and when incidents do occur they are dealt with promptly and effectively. Year 11 pupils are being trained to act as peer mentors. Pupils and parents talk about the 'cattiness' and 'bitchiness' of some girls but feel the school has the right

approach to dealing with this and that neither bullying nor racism is a major problem in the school.

13. Pupils' spiritual development is supported well in several subjects, particularly art, music, physical education and personal, social and religious education. Personal, social and religious education, art and music develop pupils' self-awareness particularly well. Despite a very good opportunity for pupils to pray and reflect in an assembly on the Sudanese famine, tutorial sessions do not consistently provide spiritual opportunities. The school still does not meet its statutory obligation to provide a daily act of collective worship.
14. There is a clear moral code. Pupils clearly know what is right or wrong - reflected in their generally good behaviour. This is reinforced well by teachers in personal, social and religious education and by staff around the school. Pupils are very aware of their responsibilities to the less fortunate. They participate well in fundraising for charities such as the Roy Castle Lung Cancer appeal, the Shoe Box appeal and Red Nose Day. In personal, social and religious education, pupils explore moral issues linked to topics like abortion, euthanasia and war. Consequently, they have a good understanding of how moral codes influence decisions that can affect their lives.
15. Pupils' social skills are particularly well developed in physical education lessons and through the extra-curricular choir and sports activities. A variety of trips - for example, those to the theatre - develops pupils' social and cultural awareness well. Trips to France and Spain play a part in the programme of developing pupils' confidence and awareness of social living. A large number of pupils play an important role in the life of the school through the school council, and working as prefects, form captains and sports captains and acting as reading mentors.
16. Pupils are very aware of the multi-cultural society in which they live. In music lessons, pupils have worked on West Indian, South African, Indian and Sudanese music and instruments. Within art lessons, pupils explore art from different ethnic backgrounds, including Islamic and Chinese art. They study many aspects of different faiths, particularly Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism. The English programme in Year 9 helps pupils to explore, through literature, the cultural background to asylum seekers. Thus, pupils are very aware of the benefits that a multi-cultural society gives them. The few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds are fully integrated into all aspects of school life.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is good.

Teaching and learning are good overall in all years. The quality of assessment of pupils' work is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching has Improved, with close to one-third being very good.
- Most teachers plan their lessons thoroughly and pupils learn well when they can sense a clear structure and purpose to what they are doing.
- Pupils learn well in most lessons because teachers guide their behaviour in a firm but friendly manner.
- Teachers mainly mark work regularly, constructively and with encouragement.
- Not all teachers use assessment wisely to plan lessons and help pupils know how to improve their subject skills and understanding.

Commentary

17. Teaching has improved since the last inspection. Then, the percentage of very good teaching was less than 20 per cent - now it is 30 per cent. There was little difference between the quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11 as a whole. Most very good teaching was seen in Year 10 and in Year 7, although three of the unsatisfactory lessons were in Year 7. As at the time of the last inspection, most of the unsatisfactory teaching was in French and Spanish in Years 7 to 9. Such lessons do not move fast enough or include enough variety to keep pupils interested. The outcomes are that very few pupils opt to study either French or Spanish for GCSE and standards and achievement are not as good as they should be.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 124 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (1%)	36 (29%)	46 (37%)	33 (27%)	7 (5.5 %)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages.

18. In GCSE lessons, all teaching was very good in drama, media studies and music. In all years it was predominantly good or better in English, art and design, citizenship, design and technology and physical education. Key features of the good lessons were the teachers' careful planning leading to a clear structure, firm but friendly control so that behaviour was not an issue, and several different sections and activities, often timed, so that pupils were kept busy. Examples of effective lessons included:
- Imaginative work in personal education and citizenship such as improving the local neighbourhood – a project based on photographs taken during a local walk;
 - Stimulating pupils to develop their numerical skills by exploring mathematical puzzles and explaining their reasoning;
 - Using marked work to invite pupils to read out particular sentences from their English work as exemplars of good writing, or making the importance of personal preferences for literary appreciation very clear;
 - Linking science topics to everyday situations, seen when positive and negative charges were discussed in relation to overshoes worn in operating theatres;
 - Knowing when to stand back and when to offer support, noted particularly in ICT lessons with the result that pupils developed confidence to work independently;
 - Preparing pupils very well for individual art work by drawing out of them, through skilful questions, their understanding of how artists' work is developed;
 - The teacher choosing who will answer questions, so that all pupils have to be alert. This was observed in drama and media studies lessons particularly;
 - A subtle blend of humour and persistence, until the pupils give fully detailed answers in history which explain the full significance of events;
 - Pupils appreciating the teachers' own professionalism and performing skills in music so that they strove to do as well as possible;
 - Breaking down skills in physical education - for example, in volleyball - so that pupils mastered how to improve their own technique and had fun at the same time.
19. Only a few classrooms have interactive whiteboards, although all new classrooms have the necessary wiring installed. Several teachers use PowerPoint presentations effectively, although the quality of pictures displayed - for example, in French - is not always helpful. In an excellent Year 7 ICT lesson, the teacher used a whiteboard very well - pupils had to link up anagrams and words about ICT vocabulary. Teachers select Internet sites for pupils to research carefully - for example, on European tourism in geography or the suffragettes in

history. Other technology, such as electronic keyboards and composition software in music, contributes much to pupils' learning.

20. Teachers prepare different work to match pupils' different abilities particularly well in English. Here, lower-attaining pupils receive extra information sheets, or study characters in literature using pictures or symbols, for example. Such variety benefits all pupils as it makes lessons interesting and lively. Challenge for higher attainers has improved, particularly in English, art and design, drama and media studies, resulting in more A*/A grades in GCSE and more higher levels in Year 9 English tests.
21. In mathematics, science, ICT and religious education, teachers are skilful at quickly assessing pupils' confidence with particular topics and spotting where more practice is needed. Mathematics and science raised the percentage of pupils reaching Level 5 in 2004 but did not maintain the improvement seen in 2003 at the higher levels. Pupils learn well when teachers pose stimulating questions during, not just at the end of, lessons, and wait long enough for pupils to consider before they respond. In design and technology pupils are encouraged to ask questions as they think about their projects and this self-evaluation has helped to keep GCSE results above average.
22. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good and they learn well and make good progress towards their targets. Small group and individual sessions away from main lessons, as well as support in lessons, effectively help pupils to learn. Good quality support teaching is provided by the nine classroom assistants, who work closely with teachers to plan, assess and monitor pupils' progress. In English, mathematics, art and design, design and technology, history, ICT, religious education and physical education, work is particularly well matched to pupils' individual needs; good learning is the result. In physical education, teachers adapt tasks and equipment so that all can join in.
23. Most teachers mark work regularly, and standards and achievement are routinely reported to parents. The whole-school marking policy is currently under review, as parts of it do not ensure consistency. The review is well led and good practice is being shared so, increasingly, courses and lessons are planned to match the range of pupils' needs more closely. Effective methods of structuring lessons, so that teaching makes clear what is to be learned and how this will be assessed, are built into staff training. In French and Spanish some marking is superficial.
24. Information on pupils' capabilities as they enter the school and settle into Year 7 is collated well. From this information targets are identified and distributed to all subjects. At the end of Year 7 assessments determine teaching groups or sets for some subjects in Years 8 and 9. Gifted and talented pupils are taught well overall. Following GCSE examinations the school carries out a detailed analysis of results and reviews performance in order to celebrate achievement and to identify action needed. The school receives very good advice from the local authority about systems for managing data, and has recently made a clerical appointment to support this work, which is good practice.
25. At individual subject and teacher level practice is not always consistent. The available information is not always used fully to inform teaching and learning plans, especially those for pupils of different abilities and to help pupils understand how to improve their work. Most pupils are aware of targets but are less clear about exactly what is required in specific subject knowledge, concepts and skills. Assessment is very good in ICT and good in English, science, design and technology, art and design, music, physical education, religious education and citizenship.
26. Where assessment arrangements are good, teachers develop pupils' ability for self-assessment so that they have a sharper understanding of strengths and weaknesses in their work and are

therefore more capable of working towards their targets. In history, geography, French and Spanish, the arrangements are unsatisfactory because of weaknesses in determining National Curriculum levels and too little reference to assessment information to support pupils' learning.

The curriculum

The curriculum is good overall, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Opportunities for enrichment, including extra-curricular activities, are good. Despite some very good new facilities and good resources, the quality and quantity of accommodation and resources overall are unsatisfactory, mainly because of the incomplete building programme and its deficiencies.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- With the exception of providing a daily act of collective worship, statutory requirements are met.
- Pupils receive good advice on future career options.
- As well as dance, drama and media studies for GCSE, alternative arrangements effectively broaden pupils' curriculum choices.
- Building problems continue to affect curricular provision adversely.
- Arrangements for pupils to pick up a second foreign language in Year 9 have adversely affected standards and the number studying a foreign language for GCSE.

Commentary

27. Under the leadership of a recently appointed assistant headteacher who has responsibility for the curriculum, the school has begun to clarify its long-term plans. Delays and disruptions caused by the building programme have made curriculum planning and innovation difficult. For example, proposals to broaden curriculum provision to cater more widely for Years 10 and 11 pupils' needs have received a cautious welcome from the governors' curriculum committee in view of the need to provide stability at a time of change. Science, physical education and dance have suffered particularly from the building problems. Nevertheless, the curriculum has been strengthened by the inclusion of dance, drama and media studies, which are increasingly popular options, two of which have strong results.
28. Apart from not providing a daily act of collective worship, many of the curriculum issues raised at the last inspection have been dealt with. The time for English, mathematics and science in Years 7 to 9 has now been equalised and arrangements for ICT are much better. The school acknowledges that its arrangements for pupils to study a second language in Year 9 have not generated enthusiasm for languages, and that this partly explains the low numbers in the French and Spanish groups. Steps have been taken to remedy this. The growth in the alternative curriculum for pupils whose needs are not met by a full school curriculum has been successful (see paragraphs 57 and 58).
29. Extra-curricular activities include general interest and leisure activities as well as curriculum support sessions. Most departments offer after-school sessions that reinforce pupils' subject learning. Despite the building programme, the reduced range of sporting activities still attracts good numbers of pupils. Athletics provision, in particular, has had to be adapted to suit the facilities available. Activities planned with gifted and talented pupils in mind have also been beneficial, in widening cultural experiences for all pupils - for example, through theatre and concert visits, London gallery visits and a trip to the Holocaust memorial. A recent visit to Tuscany gave pupils an insight into the artistic and gastronomic delights of this region. The school is committed to giving all pupils equal access to its curriculum and makes every effort to support pupils who wish to join in these visits.

30. Careers education is well organised and closely co-ordinated with the teaching of personal, social and citizenship education. Pupils receive good advice on future career pathways and the Aim Higher programme has successfully raised pupils' career expectations. Visits to universities and engineering companies, participation in Girls into Engineering and a sample of what a forensic science career would involve have all had a positive impact on pupils' aspirations. In addition to a Careers Fair - a regular feature for the past ten years – the school now holds a business simulation day. Such events receive good support from local business, industry and further education establishments. Work experience for all pupils in Year 10 is very well organised and thoroughly evaluated on pupils' return to school. These activities have contributed to the increased proportion of pupils going on to further study in recent years.

31. Teachers are well qualified and a significant number have taught at the school for many years. Apart from the failure to appoint a permanent head of geography, most departments have specialist staff. Expertise in English, physical education and design and technology is very good. The range and experience of non-teaching staff is also good. Resources to meet the needs of the curriculum offered are good in most departments. Very good resources support teaching and learning in physical education. A key strength is the number of

computers available for pupils, which is above that normally seen in a school of this size. The library provides a comfortable and quiet study area which is used well both during lessons and outside of lessons for independent study.

32. At present the accommodation does not allow the full curriculum to be taught effectively and it is therefore unsatisfactory overall. During the building works teachers have done their best to overcome the considerable problems generated by the construction. These have included:

- At least ten days lost when the school was closed because it was not safe for pupils;
- Unnecessary interruptions to lessons and evacuations when fire alarms were set off by building dust;
- A textiles room which had no heating for one term and too few cookers in the food technology room;
- Many months without any science laboratories;
- A two-year delay in sorting out air conditioning for the computer network server room and the wrong size of computer benches so that the local authority had to step in and pay for different computers;
- A mathematics room where the temperature often reached 80 degrees so that windows had to be opened and glass roofs blacked out;
- Physical education taking place off site because the sports hall was not completed on time.
- Computers destroyed and much information lost;
- Totally inadequate facilities for drama;
- Unattractive lavatories for pupils, housed outside the school buildings.

33. The accommodation is now very good for some subjects but not others. It is good in mathematics, art and design, design and technology, geography, ICT, music and physical education. The new sports hall is very good but hard playing surfaces, the gym and the fields cannot be used. The science laboratories are very good and there is a very good suite of rooms for English. The drama room is poor. The new French and Spanish rooms are too small for pupils to move around easily. Rooms are very attractively decorated with high quality displays. Storage for large musical instruments is inadequate. Although pupils are insulated from the developments outside in lessons, as they move around the school they come across ceiling panels removed for access, loose wires in corridors, steel fences, trenches, mud, and roped off sections around the outside - there is no doubt the school still functions within a building site.

Care, guidance and support

Procedures to ensure pupils' health and safety, support, guidance and welfare are very effective and pupils are well cared for during their time at school. Mentoring systems to monitor and support their personal development are good. Induction processes into the school and careers guidance are good. Pupils have positive views about the school and feel that they are consulted and that their views are taken into consideration.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pastoral system ensures that pupils are well supported and that there is an adult they can turn to if needed.
- The personal mentoring arrangements provide focused care and assistance for individuals with behavioural or other personal difficulties.
- Pupils receive good guidance about their futures, which helps them to make well-informed choices.
- The procedures to ensure pupils' health, safety and security have been paramount during the building work.
- Pupils think the school listens to them and values their views.

Commentary

34. Parents are very complimentary about the school and feel it treats pupils fairly. Pupils have very positive views about the school and appreciate the care, support and guidance they receive; almost all of them like the school. They value the friendly atmosphere, teachers, the range of extra-curricular clubs, activities and trips, and the whole atmosphere. Some Year 11 girls spoke of a feeling of mutual respect between them and the teachers. They feel 'It's a good school to be at', and, although the building work has frustrated them at times, they observe that despite 'the noise disturbing lessons... it will be good in the end'. Although the pupil questionnaires indicated some concerns about behaviour and bullying, during the inspection most pupils felt that this was not a major concern and that any problems were dealt with quickly and effectively.
35. Some older girls spoke of the 'lack of school spirit because of the building work', and many complained about the lack of lockers, the one-way system and the lack of outside facilities because of the building site. Many of these issues will be addressed once the work is completed, although there will be no space for lockers. Pupils generally feel they are well consulted. The re-invigorated school council is considering a number of issues. Pupils feel that their views are now being taken into consideration and that they have an opportunity to be part of decision-making processes in the school.
36. The school has a very inclusive stance towards the pupils' care. The well-structured pastoral system, delivered through form tutors, heads of year and senior staff, provides stability as pupils move through the school, and ensures that there is an adult who knows them and who can provide help and guidance when needed. Specialist advice, counselling and valuable additional support is provided by learning mentors, the school nurse and several outside agencies. These all help those who may be having difficulties, and they also contribute to the well-rounded development of pupils. The link contact with Wirral Metropolitan College offers pupils who work there much helpful advice as well.
37. Procedures to monitor and support pupils' personal development are very well developed. Although academic mentoring with form tutors is in an early stage - currently being piloted in Year 8 - it will eventually be offered to all girls. This should enable them to discuss their progress and negotiate targets, pinpointing what they need to do to improve. The induction processes and support for new pupils very effectively help them to settle into school quickly. This level of care continues, with readily available information about important decisions at key points, such as course options at the end of Year 9. Careers advice is very well developed through the citizenship programme and takes advantage of the good resources in the careers library and links with local colleges and businesses. The citizenship/personal programme and religious education lessons equip pupils well with the knowledge and understanding to make informed choices in their life.
38. Arrangements for child protection issues and addressing the needs of children in care are very well developed. The school carefully monitors these girls and sensitively intervenes where necessary, to ensure that they receive the help they require. The school is rigorous in its approach to health and safety, particularly during the building works. There are almost daily site inspections, regular risk assessments and a direct line to the local authority health and safety officials when concerns are identified. The school and the governing body take their responsibilities for health, safety and security seriously to ensure a safe environment for learning.
39. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good in all years. The special educational needs department is central to the school's focus on the individual. The department responds well to individual needs and creates an environment where pupils want to succeed. When pupils are withdrawn for lessons, their personal development is also effectively nurtured. The

good procedures for identifying pupils with special educational needs are very thorough, and the individual education plans are well written and thoroughly reviewed. The revised Code of Practice is securely in place and its principles and procedures are well understood. The school has made good progress in meeting the requirements of the Disability Access Act ,2001, but access to the upper floor for a wheelchair pupil is not possible owing to the incomplete installation of the lift to that floor.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's partnership with parents and the community is satisfactory. The school's links with other schools and colleges are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good links with partner institutions help promote pupils' educational progress.
- Too many parents are not supporting the school, nor their daughters' education, by ensuring that they attend regularly.

Commentary

40. The school seeks to build effective relationships with parents and involve them in their daughters' education. When this happens, it has a positive effect on pupils' learning and their levels of achievement. However, there are still a significant number of parents who do not get involved in their daughters' learning and do not value education enough to ensure that they attend regularly and arrive on time. The very small numbers of parents who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire and attended the parents' meeting were generally satisfied with the work of the school. However, they were too few to be considered representative of the parent body.
41. Whilst there is no newsletter celebrating the school's successes, parents are updated about activities and events and provided with relevant documents to ensure that they are fully informed about key events as their children progress through the school. Home/school links are effectively maintained with the form tutors through pupils' planners, and parents are contacted when there are problems or if their child has done well. Parents' views are sought via questionnaires and through the home/school association.
42. Parents receive regular progress reports and are advised about their daughters' progress through consultation and review meetings. The annual reports to parents are under review. They are not very helpful as they show only what has been covered, provide a brief comment about progress with grades for effort and attainment. The written comments are not evaluative and rarely propose targets for improvement. Parents of pupils with special education needs are kept well informed of their progress and are involved in the review processes.
43. Links with the local community have been limited by the building work. Use of the facilities for adult education courses, sports and other events has been put on hold. The school is well aware of the disturbances caused for its neighbours by the construction site. This has been beyond the school's control and it has welcomed the support from the local authority in dealing with these concerns. To enhance aspects of the curriculum, the school has developed valuable links with local community groups such as the Salvation Army, Zero Tolerance and the Wirral Youth for Christ. A number of local businesses give support through sponsorship deals or by offering pupils work experience.
44. The school has developed effective links with local colleges and makes use of their range of vocational courses and resources to support the work-related programmes. Wider links are

being established with schools abroad in France, Spain, Holland and New Zealand. The school seeks to develop effective links with its large number of feeder primary schools. A well-structured liaison process helps to ensure a smooth transition into Year 7. There are very close links with the adjoining primary school, with visits from Prenton art teachers and English teachers, to promote poetry. A forensic science course has been offered to some primary

schools as a transition project for Year 6 pupils – this is good practice. In previous years sporting links and opportunities for primary school visits were better developed; these have had to be withdrawn because of the building works.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good at all levels. The work of the governing body is good. The building works have generated many problems for the school over the last couple of years (see the two introductory paragraphs under the heading Part B, and paragraph 32).

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher and senior leadership team have managed to focus on raising standards and achievement despite the problems generated by the building programme.
- The school successfully includes all pupils in worthwhile education and has their welfare as a top priority.
- A core of dedicated and hard-working governors has provided steadfast encouragement throughout the building programme. The governing body works well.
- The business manager is efficiently and effectively streamlining financial control and management.

Commentary

45. The headteacher and senior leadership team provide very good role models to teachers, staff and pupils and they motivate them very well to pursue higher standards and achievement – until 2003, GCSE results overall had been improving since the last inspection. The recently restructured senior leadership team is working well and new members are playing key roles in the oversight of teaching and learning and work-related learning. The very experienced deputy head continues to oversee pastoral care with professionalism and dedication.
46. The headteacher and senior leadership team have coped extremely well during the building programme. They have done everything possible to keep the school functioning normally, whilst giving due regard to health and safety. As the headteacher of another school experiencing building works observes, "Only those of us who have experienced the traumatic impact can fully understand how well our staff cope despite the difficulties."
47. One significant area of leadership that has suffered is the number of lesson observations carried out, apart from performance management requirements. This means that the senior leadership team, although aware of weaknesses, was not fully alert to the degree of unsatisfactory teaching or the unsuccessful curriculum arrangements in French and Spanish. It also means that heads of department have not had time to monitor teaching and learning enough, both to share good practice and also to spot problems at an early stage.
48. The school has moved forward in evaluating its own performance and using performance data to analyse patterns and take action. The senior leadership team considers test and examination results overall and establishes the links between pupils' performance and their attendance and home situations very well. Some departments are further ahead than others at responding to analysis of test and GCSE results. The English department has responded

with specific changes to its teaching and curriculum in response to its analysis, focusing more on poetry, for example.

49. The school's very strong commitment to including all pupils in worthwhile education is put into practice in many ways. The headteacher and senior leadership team are fully involved in the child protection and care arrangements, in the promotion of personal education and citizenship and in developing alternative curriculum arrangements for those pupils who find full-time school difficult. They appreciate that attendance is not good enough and that poor punctuality must be tackled as strongly.
50. Leadership of four successful departments - English, design and technology, ICT and physical education - is very good. Within these subjects there are examples of pupils achieving very well because the teaching and learning are innovative or consistently effective. Geography is without a head of department but temporary arrangements are keeping the subject afloat. Leadership of French and Spanish is unsatisfactory because standards have been low for too long and pupils do not learn enough in a significant number of lessons. Leadership of special educational needs is good. The co-ordinator has a clear focus on meeting pupils' individual needs and on supporting teachers to do this as well. Teachers and classroom assistants work well together. Governors provide good support for special educational needs and funding is spent well.
51. The governing body has a few vacancies and does not find it easy to attract new members. A small core of hard-working and dedicated governors, well led by the experienced chair, is aware of the school's main strengths and weaknesses and clear on how it wants the school to develop - for example, seeking to gain specialist status. Inevitably, governors have given up much time to supporting the school through its building problems, especially those likely to threaten pupils' health and safety. Consequently, they have not always probed in depth the reasons behind differences in standards among subjects. One governor observes that the committees are becoming more important and now expect to challenge the status quo and development ideas more rigorously.
52. Financial management is satisfactory. The recently appointed business manager is efficiently and effectively streamlining and tightening systems of financial control and management. Financial issues related to the construction of the new building have made this difficult to achieve at times. The school makes good use of the local education authority services in its financial management. The Leadership Incentive Grant is used to support collaboration with seven local schools, including two grammar schools, and all involved benefit from the sharing of good practice. Prenton and another school's science departments have worked together on improving assessment. Leaders of subjects which are not tested at the end of Year 9 have met to agree on standards against National Curriculum levels.
53. The school spends the extra funds it receives wisely. The learning mentors, for example, funded through Excellence in Cities, have successfully worked with many pupils who do not find school life easy. Parents see them as a point of contact with the school with whom they can share their thoughts about their daughters' behaviour or other issues. Funds spent on provision for gifted and talented pupils - on the design and technology trip to Italy, for example - often benefit other pupils indirectly. The Year 6 to Year 7 transition project, funded by the Education Action Zone, has been very successful.
54. The recent audit gives a satisfactory picture of financial control, and action has been taken on nearly all of its recommendations. The outstanding issues are currently being dealt with. The governors' finance committee is well informed about progress on these items. The school accounts show a large positive balance carried forward from last year; there is a similar one this year. These funds are earmarked for resources and equipment for the new accommodation when it is completed. The expenditure per pupil is above average. However, in relation to the quality of education provided this represents good value for money.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2,960,973	Balance from previous year	203,290
Total expenditure	2,884,286	Balance carried forward to the next	279,977
Expenditure per pupil	3,726		

55. The school's effectiveness has improved well since its last inspection. Standards and teaching in mathematics are better; more learning support assistants are employed so pupils with special educational needs are supported well; standards in Years 10 and 11 are more consistent across subjects; statutory requirements for ICT in Years 10 and 11 are now met; performance management is in place; and pupils' spiritual development is better. The use of form time in the morning is more purposeful but its quality is still variable. The school does not meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

WORK-RELATED LEARNING

Provision for work-related learning is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Work experience is well organised and worthwhile.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 can study practical, work-related courses.
- The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme is offered to pupils in Years 10 and 11 as an interesting alternative option course in the curriculum.

Commentary

56. The school has offered GCSE media studies, dance and drama for several years. Such vocational courses are popular and each year a few pupils continue with one or more of these subjects in further education. A few decide to pursue ICT at a higher level, having taken either GCSE or GNVQ in Years 10 and 11.
57. The success of the Year 11 pupils who took vocational courses at Wirral Metropolitan College in the previous academic year has led to Year 10 pupils starting NVQ level 1 courses in hairdressing and catering, with the option to continue to a higher level, or take a further level 1 course when they move into Year 11. Pupils' attendance at the college is better than their attendance at school. Most of them went into college when the school was closed because of the building works. Some of the Year 11 pupils taking GCSEs in 2004 and attending college were persuaded to attend school for their GCSEs in English and mathematics as they appreciated they could not continue at college without these qualifications. For a growing number of pupils this work-related learning is very worthwhile.
58. A small group of pupils in Years 10 and 11 undertake the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme instead of one GCSE. This is successful and, for several of them, the outdoor element is particularly worthwhile and they enjoy it. Pupils work on useful work-related skills such as team work, co-operation, taking responsibility and planning. Their self-confidence improves and this benefits their work in other subjects.
59. The work experience programme has received a quality award, which confirms the benefit pupils have from their one week out of school in Year 10. Preparation is thorough and pupils evaluate what they have learned afterwards. The careers programme (see paragraph 30) focuses pupils' thoughts on how their future education will affect their working lives. It is made quite clear to pupils where qualifications lead in terms of future employment.
60. The senior leadership team member with responsibility for vocational courses and work-related learning has carried out an audit to establish in which subjects these aspects are not emphasised enough. Few heads of department have considered this in depth but they cover several key areas through the focus they place on citizenship. The school is wisely considering

accrediting pupils for the skills they acquire through mentoring and possibly introducing applied ICT, and business courses in Years 10 and 11.

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 **very good**.

Standards are average	Pupils achieve well
Teaching is very good	Learning is very good
Leadership is very good	Management is very good
Improvement since the last inspection has been very good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE English language results have been consistently above average with an increasing percentage of A*/A grades.
- Leadership and management are strong and effective.
- Teachers write high quality, detailed plans for the curriculum and lessons.
- There is a lack of consistency in assessment and marking, even though very good practice exists.

Commentary

61. In 2003 Year 9 test results were average. They improved in 2004, particularly at the higher level, Level 6 and above. As in mathematics and science, GCSE results dropped in 2004; they were still above average in English language, but not in English literature. The percentage of A*/A grades improved in English language in 2004 showing that higher ability pupils did well. Teachers plan lessons very well so that pupils are motivated and interested. Teachers use the Key Stage 3 Strategy effectively and split lessons into short sections, often timed, which help to keep pupils focused. Because of this, pupils learn very well and make good progress in lessons.
62. Pupils speak and listen well. Teachers plan sessions for talking and pupils participate confidently in discussions. Teachers urge pupils to give extended answers and expect them to justify what they say by reference to the texts being studied. Pupils are keen to express their ideas and, by referring to one another's views, they show that they listen attentively. Teachers ask very good questions, which are particularly effective when targeted at specific pupils. Teachers introduce discussions about contemporary issues such as bullying or refugees and pupils are used to having their views challenged.
63. Pupils read a wide variety of texts, both fiction and non-fiction, and show in a number of ways that they understand what they read - for example, through reviews or studies of plot and character. Teachers encourage pupils to read widely by having attractive books in the classrooms for pupils to borrow and by sharing opinions about texts. Pupils write well in a variety of forms because teachers model and share writing and mark pupils' work with enthusiastic comments. Teachers set interesting assignments, such as writing letters to authors or writing poetry in the style of GCSE set poets. They invite pupils to read out their work but sometimes miss opportunities to point out the good features of this work.
64. Pupils are taught in mixed-ability classes and teachers take into account their wide range of needs - supporting lower attaining pupils by giving extra information sheets or by adding

hints; this approach was seen working effectively in a poetry sequencing lesson. Sometimes teachers offer different approaches, such as grids to chart character and plot or to compare poems. Character studies are prepared using pictures, symbols and objects. Regular competitions for poetry, short stories and scriptwriting encourage budding writers. Some teachers use the last session of lessons expertly to assess pupils' progress; such very good practice is not shared widely enough.

65. Although the marking policy has recently been revised, assessment procedures are not consistent. Teachers mark finished work in folders regularly, often giving pupils clear advice about how to improve, but pupils do not keep their folders. Pupils do not understand how to reach their end-of-key-stage targets. They are not always given short-term, easy to understand targets with specific advice on how to reach them. Most pupils structure their writing well but they need to be reminded to check spelling, which is not strong, and teachers do not present enough starter activities to revise spelling rules and use of apostrophes, for example.
66. The head of department leads a very effective team. She responds to changing needs quickly. The 2004 GCSE scripts have been analysed and plans made to improve the teaching of poetry. As pupils achieved best in the written tasks in the Year 9 tests, so teachers are preparing them more thoroughly for the reading and Shakespeare papers. The department meets weekly to share planning and good practice; all pupils experience the same, well-balanced curriculum. Teachers moderate written work and review and revise the schemes of work regularly.
67. Very good extra-curricular activities include regular book weeks, a reading scheme where Year 10 pupils support Year 7 pupils, a twice weekly reading club for Year 7, Easter holiday classes, regular competitions, visits from theatre groups and visits to see poets perform their work. The Year 10 drama class is preparing to perform the Key Stage 3 Shakespeare scenes to Year 9 pupils - excellent learning for all involved. The English team is now based in a suite of well-kept rooms with attractive and useful displays and well-used audio-visual resources. Drama and media studies are described in paragraphs 115 to 117.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

68. Standards of literacy are satisfactory. Staff undertook whole-school training last year. Literacy is included in every department's action plan and is monitored by heads of department and line managers. Pupils are confident speakers and listen well to teachers and to each other. Opportunities for talk are planned into most lessons. Key words are defined and technical language is explained well in the majority of lessons. Teachers remind pupils of the need to use the correct terms in both speaking and writing.
69. Writing frames support pupils' writing in a range of subjects. There are examples of writing for a range of purposes in science and opportunities for extended writing in history. In geography, pupils are encouraged to extend their vocabulary by searching for a wide range of adjectives in preparation for creative writing. At present the focus in writing in design and technology is on evaluation, investigation and annotation.
70. In all subjects pupils need to be reminded about spelling correctly. Spelling is not always corrected and pupils frequently misspell common words and misuse apostrophes. Year 7 pupils are given much good support to improve their reading. The library is an inviting environment where pupils can attend a daily after-school homework club during which they can use computers and receive good support from teaching assistants.

French and Spanish

Provision in French is **unsatisfactory**.

Standards are below average in Years 7 to 9 and average in Years 10 and 11	Pupils achieve unsatisfactorily in Years 7 to 9 and well in Years 10 and 11
Teaching is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11	Learning is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11
Leadership is unsatisfactory	Management is unsatisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory	

Provision in Spanish is **unsatisfactory**.

Standards are below average	Pupils achieve unsatisfactorily in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11
Teaching is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11	Learning is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11
Leadership is unsatisfactory	Management is unsatisfactory

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pace of lessons is often slow so that pupils lose concentration and make little progress.
- In Years 7 to 9, the content of lessons does not always stretch the higher attainers.
- The introduction of Spanish in Year 9 has not been successful, leading to poor motivation and some disruptive behaviour.
- In French in Years 10 and 11, innovative teaching methods and challenging content lead to enthusiastic and productive learning.
- Day-to-day marking of written work and formal assessments are not effective in highlighting weaknesses and pointing the way to improvements.

Commentary

71. In 2004, seven of the eight candidates entered for GCSE French gained grades A*-C. Pupils did better in French than in most of the other GCSE subjects they took, which was a big improvement on 2003. In Spanish GCSE, only four of the eleven pupils attained grade C. Pupils did not do as well in Spanish as in their other GCSE subjects and the results were lower than in 2003.
72. In both French and Spanish in Years 7 to 9, listening skills are the strongest feature of pupils' attainment. Teachers are very anxious that all pupils should do well and understand the content of the lesson. In classes with a wide range of ability, this can result in a slow pace. Average and higher attainers lose concentration, some fill in the time with gossip, and pupils generally do not achieve as well as they should. The activities and resources chosen are sometimes dull, so that pupils are not always motivated to learn.
73. Motivation is especially poor in the Year 9 groups which are beginning to study either French or Spanish as a second language - many are reluctant learners. When they may already be struggling with their first modern foreign language, they do not want to learn a second one. Finding themselves thrust back to the beginning of a new language, they feel inadequate and unhappy and some pupils show this in poor behaviour. It is unlikely that the new arrangement will improve the very low take-up of languages at GCSE – fewer than 30 Year 11 pupils, although closer to 40 Year 10 pupils, are taking a foreign language for GCSE.

74. In French in Years 10 and 11, where the group sizes are very small, pupils' listening skills are strong as a result of the extensive use of French by the teacher, a native speaker. The content of the lessons is very challenging and pupils acquire a wide range of interesting vocabulary and solid grammatical structures. The methods chosen are often very innovative and delivered with humour. As a result, pupils are thoroughly engaged and they learn with enthusiasm. With excellent individual and choral repetition, pupils speak and read aloud well. The pace of lessons is swift, often measured by a timer, so that all pupils learn productively.
75. In Spanish in Years 10 and 11, pupils' command of structures and their range of vocabulary are below expectations. This is partly because most of these pupils had not studied Spanish before Year 10. Preparation for the examinations is thorough and some appropriate activities are chosen, so that most pupils learn satisfactorily, particularly at the beginning of the lessons. However, the wide range of attainment in the groups and the use of some mundane methods make it difficult for the higher attainers to achieve as well as they should.
76. Teachers' marking is irregular and mostly superficial; too many errors go uncorrected and mistakes become entrenched. Formal assessment, although regular, is not followed up stringently enough to overcome the weaknesses in marking. As a consequence, pupils do not recognise how well they are doing or what steps they need to take to improve. The new classrooms are small and the layout does not allow for active teaching styles, such as role play, which promote good learning. The equipment does not match up to the latest modern standards.
77. The head of department has built a good team spirit in the face of the extensive disruption caused by the building work. The team has worked hard to provide enrichment in the form of visits and exchanges to France and Spain – about 40 pupils from Years 8 to 10 are involved in these. The department's new policies are detailed but implementation is patchy and goes unchecked because the quality of teaching and learning is not monitored adequately. Too many unresolved issues remain from the last inspection: below average standards, some unsatisfactory teaching, learning and achievement in Years 7 to 9, the inconsistencies in assessment and the lack of challenge for the higher-attaining pupils.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Standards are average in Years 7 to 9 and below average in Years 10 and 11	Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11
Teaching is satisfactory	Learning is satisfactory
Leadership is good	Management is satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection has been good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have adopted the Key Stage 3 Strategy effectively and widened the range of their teaching styles to help pupils learn.
- The department is well led, with a strong emphasis on improving teaching and standards.
- There is not enough formal monitoring of teaching and learning, so good practice is not shared.
- Poor attendance adversely affects the achievement of a small minority of Year 11 pupils.
- The mathematics area of the school is now very attractive and conducive to learning.

Commentary

78. Standards on entry, of the current Years 9 and 11 pupils were below national expectations. For the 2004 Year 11 pupils they were well below. Year 9 test results in 2003 were average and showed a strong upward trend. Pupils achieved better than expected. Test results in 2004 were much better at Level 5, but a smaller proportion of pupils achieved the higher levels. The National Key Stage 3 Strategy has had a strong impact on improving the variety and effectiveness of teaching and learning, and consequently on achievement. Higher attainers now attain above average standards.
79. Although GCSE results in 2003 were below average, pupils' achievement was better than expected. In 2004 nearly all pupils attained a pass grade and the percentage of A*/A grades increased, but that for A* to C grades was lower. This was because some girls, mainly average and lower attainers, did less well than they should have done because of erratic or poor attendance. Pupils' learning was also interrupted by problems related to the new building. Higher attainers' study skills enabled them to cope more effectively than other groups with the disruptions caused by the building work.
80. The present picture in Years 10 and 11 is varied. Higher ability pupils achieve well - reflected in the increasing proportion of girls working at well above average standards. The improvement in their algebraic skills in Years 10 and 11 is an example of this. Their study skills have enabled them to cope more effectively – as did last year's Year 11 - than other groups with the disruption due to building problems. Achievement for most average and lower ability pupils is satisfactory but for a few it is unsatisfactory because they do not attend regularly. Teachers hold many additional catch-up sessions after school and revision sessions near to examinations, but frequently the pupils who most need them do not attend.
81. In all years, the well-planned curriculum provides pupils, whatever their ability, with a firm foundation in knowledge and techniques across all aspects of mathematics. Pupils have a good repertoire of skills to apply in different situations. Not all pupils talk confidently about their work and the reasons behind their choice of methods. This variation in explaining reasoning is also reflected in their written work and is directly related to the quality of teaching. For example, pupils in a lower-attaining Year 9 group talked very well about what they were doing, because of the exciting practical activities that had helped them to learn. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as other pupils in their class; learning support assistants play an important part in their progress.
82. All teachers are good at quickly assessing how confident pupils are with a particular topic and whether any skills need reinforcement. This helps pupils to learn more effectively and enjoy what they are doing. There is some variation in the way in which teachers mark written work, but any problems are dealt with effectively in class. When teaching is good or very good, there is a strong emphasis on getting pupils to talk about mathematics - for example, why they have chosen particular methods. Pupils enjoy their work and there is a lively buzz in the classroom.
83. The head of department provides good leadership to a specialist team of teachers, with a strong emphasis on improving teaching and standards. The team has coped well in difficult circumstances. For example, heating was difficult to control so teaching in the autumn term could take place only with all the windows open. The new classrooms now provide a very attractive atmosphere for learning, with colourful displays of pupils' work. Good systems to monitor the work of the department are in place but are not yet fully implemented. There is not enough formal monitoring of teaching and learning to share good practice more fully. Teaching, standards - especially in Year 9 - and achievement have all improved since the last inspection. Teaching is more interactive, involving pupils more in their learning.

Mathematics across the curriculum

84. Pupils' mathematical skills make a satisfactory contribution to their progress in other subjects. They have the necessary skills to calculate and measure accurately - for example, in design and technology. They use data handling skills in geography and science to present and analyse data collected in surveys and investigations. Their graphical skills are good. They are able to use formulae and adapt them as required - for example, in ICT and science.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Standards are below average in Years 7 to 9 and average in Years 10 and 11	Pupils achieve satisfactorily
Teaching is satisfactory	Learning is satisfactory
Leadership is good	Management is good
Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff are strongly committed to raising standards and the department's action plan outlines a clear way forward.
- Teaching has many good features and promotes interest and good behaviour.
- Innovations in assessment are beginning to improve standards.
- Pupils work hard and produce a good amount of work.

Commentary

85. The percentage of pupils reaching Level 5 and above in 2004 was average in the Year 9 tests, although the overall point score was below average. This was because the proportion of pupils reaching Level 6 was well below that expected. However, when considering their prior attainment, pupils had made reasonable progress. GCSE results in 2004 were below average, a drop since 2002 when standards were average. However, data about pupils' standards when they entered the school show that progress has been satisfactory. Learning was affected by the building programme - for several months the laboratories and many science resources were unavailable. Given the practical nature of the subject, the staff worked effectively to minimise the impact of this.
86. In Year 9, pupils have a clear idea about their current level of work, by doing tests and receiving helpful comments from teachers. However, a few pupils currently working at Level 5 lack the confidence to believe that they could aim for the higher Level 6. Year 7 pupils have made a satisfactory start in the school, and Year 8 pupils are making good progress. Pupils used their understanding of particles to explain the differences between solids, liquids and gases well. In lessons observed, Year 8 pupils worked well together and persevered to understand ideas about, for example, light bending through glass or how weathering of rocks occurs. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported by teaching assistants and are taught in small groups, which ensures that they get the attention they need.
87. The department's own test results, and coursework, clearly show that present Year 11 pupils will attain better GCSE results than those attained in 2004. Teachers provide helpful comments in pupils' books and there are some good examples of units of work which build up ideas systematically. In one lesson, pupils made good progress in their understanding of static electricity because the teacher gave a good practical demonstration and posed questions which made the pupils think and apply their knowledge and understanding.
88. Teachers are skilled at finding out what pupils know and can do. A new initiative to develop assessment practice, which helps pupils to know the levels at which they are working and targets to aim for, is working well. The quality of teaching and learning ranges from satisfactory to very good. A strong feature in several lessons was the way teachers shared objectives at the beginning and reviewed whether they had been achieved at the end. This provides both teachers and pupils with clear information about what has been learnt. In the best lesson seen, in Year 11, this was made explicit in the way the teacher questioned pupils

about activities at different times during the lesson and frequently referred back to the original learning objectives; pupils had a keen sense of their own progress. The weaknesses in teaching, in parts of some lessons, were due to teachers answering the questions that they asked, with the result that some pupils did not think enough for themselves. On other occasions the objectives were not sufficiently sharp and some discussions lacked clear purpose.

89. The overall strengths in teaching outweigh the few weaknesses. The department's work in piloting new assessment materials is proving successful. It is developing pupils' understanding about what they need to do to improve their own work. The monitoring of teaching is satisfactory, and the stronger focus on learning and on sharing good practice, identified in the action plan, is timely. The recently refurbished laboratories are spacious and well resourced. Teachers use interactive whiteboards well and ICT regularly. The department has a strong team spirit. Levels of commitment to improvement and the capacity for further improvement are good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Standards are average in Years 7 to 9 and above average in Years 10 and 11	Pupils achieve well
Teaching is good	Learning is good
Leadership is very good	Management is good
Improvement since the last inspection has been good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In one lesson teaching was excellent, imaginative and lively.
- Standards are improving as teaching is good and pupils are very positive about using computers.
- Teachers do not observe each other teaching, to share good practice.

Commentary

90. In 2003 and 2004, teachers correctly assessed standards at the end of Year 9 as being average. When girls enter the school they have limited experience of using computers but make good progress in Years 7 to 9. In these years girls have two ICT lessons a week, which exceeds the recommended time to cover the ICT strand of the Key Stage 3 Strategy. This means that girls acquire firm foundations for future study. The number of pupils taking an accredited ICT course in Years 10 and 11 is increasing. GNVQ results in 2004 were above average; those for the GCSE course were below average. Girls who do not choose to follow a formal course learn enough, by using computers in other subjects, to cover the requirements of the National Curriculum.
91. Pupils learn to use ICT well in a range of contexts and annotate their work very well to illustrate their understanding. Teachers help pupils to learn by preparing good resources which pupils find interesting. Girls learn to use computer models well and, because teachers emphasise this, they use technical vocabulary confidently. Girls' understanding of how to deal with problems in managing their ICT projects is not well developed and holds back higher ability pupils from attaining higher standards.
92. Teachers know their pupils well and ensure that they all get the support that they need. Girls concentrate for long periods of time. Teachers set relevant and practical homework using an

effective homework booklet. Knowing the routines well, girls usually enter the computer room in a very orderly way and sit down and log on to the school's network efficiently.

93. Inspirational teaching in a Year 7 lesson resulted in very high standards of work. The teacher's opening review of the homework on the ICT vocabulary used for presenting information allowed girls to confidently and excitedly recall their work and link up anagrams and words on the whiteboard. As the teacher questioned and praised the girls about what they had learned recently, she revealed the lesson's objectives. She carefully included as many girls as possible, listened carefully to what they said and did not rush them. The girls were busy and productive throughout the lesson and, seating having been arranged by the teacher, they helped each other when necessary. They used books, the Internet and relevant software to produce high quality presentations on endangered species. They clearly understood the purpose of and the audience for their presentations. Two pupils who had been absent received excellent support to help them make quick progress.
94. The head of department is an excellent role model for pupils and she expects them to aim high. The department is managed well, with accurate evaluation of standards informing planning. The excellent teaching is not shared. External contract arrangements stop the efficient technicians from dealing with some problems that they could sort out. It is very good that there are more computers than are normally seen in a school of this size.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

95. Pupils' competence in using ICT in other subjects is reasonable. In music they use composing and music writing software well, in history they use the Internet for research and in physical education teachers evaluate performance using digital and video cameras. Satisfactory use of computers, mainly to gather and present information in coursework, was seen in all other subjects. In a small number of lessons, interactive whiteboards and digital projectors are capturing girls' interest and getting lessons off to a brisk start but access to this technology is limited.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Standards are average in Years 7 to 9 and below average in Years 10 and 11	Pupils achieve satisfactorily
Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11	Learning is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11
Leadership is satisfactory	Management is satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staffing changes in September 2004 have improved provision so that it is now satisfactory; standards and achievement in Years 10 and 11 have begun to move forward.
- Teaching in Years 7 to 9 is often good because of effective planning and well-chosen activities.
- Learning is strengthened in lessons that make good use of fieldwork, ICT and aspects of citizenship.
- Assessment is not consistently used to help pupils understand how to improve their work. In Years 7 to 9 assessment is not referenced accurately to National Curriculum levels.

Commentary

96. In 2003 and 2004, teachers assessed standards at the end of Year 9 as being above average related to National Curriculum levels; this was over-generous and not reflected in standards seen during the inspection. On entry to the school pupils' overall geographical skills are underdeveloped. The strong emphasis in Year 7 lessons, on building competence with maps and knowledge of places, enables pupils to make satisfactory progress.
97. At the time of the last inspection GCSE results were well below average. The number of pupils choosing geography for GCSE has declined, with only 18 pupils in Year 11. As in 2003, in 2004 GCSE results were well below average and significantly below pupils' results in other subjects. Since September 2004, well-organised schemes of work, good relationships and staffing changes have raised the quality of teaching.
98. Imaginative teaching seen in Year 7 not only improved pupils' map reading skills by very good use of a PowerPoint presentation but also helped pupils draft accurate written work. Pupils quickly grasped the concepts of scale and the difference between physical and human features on maps because of the imaginative presentation of photographs and the teacher's skilful questions, which challenged pupils to think. When these features combine, learning and achievement are good.
99. In Years 10 and 11 achievement has been unsatisfactory in recent years. This is because of the high level of staff absence and the impact this had on pupils' motivation, learning and progress. Achievement was also held back by a small number of pupils' failing to make up work missed through absence. The building programme has caused further disruption and loss of teaching time. Now, there are signs that achievement is improving. The number of pupils opting for geography in Year 10 has increased and revised staffing arrangements give more consistently effective teaching.
100. The quality of teaching is often good. In Years 7 to 9 the teachers' good subject knowledge and awareness of pupils' prior learning lead to effective use of good resources. In a Year 9 lesson on the development of tourism in different European countries, lower-attaining pupils, some of whom have special educational needs, gathered information from Internet sites, textbooks and travel brochures. These Year 9 pupils received good support from both the teacher and the classroom assistant and achieved well. In Year 11 a small group of pupils explained confidently how they had collected information in Birkenhead and used this fieldwork to test hypotheses on models of urban development. Teachers' marking is satisfactory and most pupils are aware of their targets but do not always have an adequate understanding of what they need to do to improve. In some lessons progress is held back by weaknesses from the past in knowledge, skills and understanding.
101. Work now includes more fieldwork, ICT and consideration of environmental issues that enhance aspects of citizenship. Weaknesses previously identified in standards at GCSE have not been tackled. Very recent staffing changes have improved the situation and, with good support from senior staff, the subject is now in a stronger position to move forward. Pending the appointment of a new head of department, the school has made satisfactory temporary arrangements for the leadership and management of the subject. The head of history has been supporting the subject in recent years and continues to provide valuable guidance. There is a clear commitment and the capacity to make further improvements.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Standards are average in Years 7 to 9 and below average in Years 10 and 11	Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11
Teaching is good	Learning is good
Leadership is satisfactory	Management is satisfactory
Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Well-qualified and experienced teachers provide stability for pupils to learn during a period of severe disruption.
- Assessment data about Year 9 performance is used effectively to raise pupils' expectations for their GCSE examinations.
- Teachers do not assess pupils' historical skills well enough in Years 7 to 9.
- Work is not adapted enough for pupils' differing abilities.

Commentary

102. As in 2003, GCSE results for 2004 were well below average. This was due to a significant number of absentees for the examination and a few pupils' erratic attendance. Up to 2004 standards had been below average. Teachers use school data on pupils' performance at the end of Year 9 effectively, to set targets and to raise pupils' expectations. History is a popular option subject in Years 10 and 11. However, teachers do not assess pupils' knowledge and understanding of, for example, evidence, chronology and research well enough. This adversely affects standards.
103. The quality of teaching and learning is occasionally good or very good in Years 7 to 9. Well-qualified teachers, with high expectations, create an encouraging atmosphere for learning. This gives pupils confidence and supports their good achievement in Years 7 to 9. Teachers expect pupils to present work carefully and neatly, and they do. However, when marking work, teachers do not indicate clearly what pupils have achieved and how they can improve. Pupils lack a clear understanding of the small steps needed to do better.
104. Teachers use ICT well to interest pupils. In Year 7, for example, after watching a video, pupils understood better the tactics used by the Roman Army; in Year 9 pupils researched the activities of the suffragettes on the Internet. This provided them effectively with an historical background to their studies on democracy in citizenship. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported by teaching assistants and this enables them to play a full part in the lessons. Because of weakness in assessment, teaching is not always matched closely to pupils' learning needs and different abilities, at both ends of the spectrum. There is a lack of precision in the use of chronology, for both dates and periods, to help make historical events manageable for study.
105. The head of department has maintained stability through difficult times. The history classrooms are small and cramped, especially with full-sized classes of older pupils, limiting the activities that could be used for teaching and learning.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Standards are below average in Years 7 to 9 and average in Years 10 and 11	Pupils achieve well
Teaching is good	Learning is good

Leadership is good	Management is good
Improvement since the last inspection has been good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils learn and achieve well because teachers plan lessons that interest them in religious and moral issues that are very relevant to their lives.
- A good improvement in the GCSE short course results in 2004 is evidence of the improvement in standards.
- Pupils are well taught to think and explain their ideas and to give examples to support their views.
- Pupils who are more able are not always given tasks that push them to achieve at the higher levels.

Commentary

106. Pupils enter the school with well below average levels of knowledge, skill and understanding in religious education. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a better understanding and knowledge of the major world faiths, although standards are below expectations for their age. Given their attainment on entry, they are achieving well. In 2004 nearly half of the pupils who took the GCSE short course gained A*-C grades. This was a significant improvement on the 2003 results. The majority of pupils in Years 10 and 11 analyse and explain their ideas well orally. They compare religious ideas on a variety of issues satisfactorily in written work, achieving well.
107. The knowledgeable team of teachers explain ideas and ask searching questions skilfully, about religious beliefs and moral issues. In the more effective lessons, it is not enough for pupils to say what they think. They have to build a case, explaining why and giving examples to support their ideas. This was a particular feature of a very good Year 11 lesson that led to a well-ordered, vibrant debate about what was most important - personal happiness, money or family. The teacher used the pupils' views very well to challenge them about what they valued most in life.
108. Good use is made of key words and oral work to build up pupils' religious vocabulary. This is particularly helpful to pupils with special educational needs. They achieve well because their needs are well known by their teachers, who give them good individual support. However, teaching is not always sufficiently well planned to meet the needs of higher-attaining pupils. Although they achieve as well as other pupils, their time is occasionally wasted when teachers instruct them exactly how they should tackle tasks. They do not get the chance to plan their own approach. Occasionally teachers spent too long telling pupils ideas, rather than helping them to explore and share their own thoughts.
109. Teachers mark written work well, showing pupils how they can improve their work, rewarding effort and giving encouragement and praise – clearly evident from the stamps in books and oral feedback in lessons. This clearly helps pupils' progress as they understand how well they are doing and how to improve their work. The monitoring of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning is developing well. Good links with the local community through Wirral Youth for Christ and the Christian Drug Action group are used to support work in religious education. Good charity work and involvement in remembrance of the victims of the Holocaust and the school siege in Russia also support the pupils' learning about religious teachings and practices. The improvements in standards, teaching and learning have been good. The development of a good programme for Years 10 and 11, that meets the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus, has successfully addressed a key issue raised in the last inspection.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Standards are above average	Pupils achieve well
Teaching is good	Learning is good
Leadership is very good	Management is good
Improvement since the last inspection has been very good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A high proportion of lively and engaging teaching ensures that all pupils achieve well.
- Strong leadership has resulted in significant improvements since the last inspection.
- Pupils attained above average GCSE results in 2004, despite the disruptions caused by the building programme.
- Limited monitoring of teaching takes place - to share good ideas and best practice.

Commentary

110. In 2003 GCSE results were well above average, comparing very favourably with pupils' performance in other subjects. Despite a drop in 2004, results were still above average with an increase in the percentage of A*/A grades. Food technology and resistant materials results were well above average, graphics results were above and textiles results were below average. The department did well to achieve such GCSE results in the light of the difficulties experienced during the building work.
111. Most pupils enter the school with limited knowledge and skills in design and technology. From the outset, challenging projects, like planning a healthy packed lunch, quickly build pupils' confidence in essential skills and techniques, providing a strong foundation on which they then design and make more complex products. Textiles skills and techniques are less well developed than those in other areas. By Year 9 pupils produce jewellery boxes, cook-chill products, and animal print bags of a good quality, applying skills and knowledge from across the different materials. Although they use ICT effectively in both designing and making, their progress is hindered because the computers in the specialist rooms are not up to date. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress as teachers give them high quality support and well-planned resources. They complete challenging activities like evaluating others' products and making presentations to the class.
112. By the end of Year 11 most pupils achieve well in comparison to their prior attainment and in relation to their target grades. Teachers help them to develop practical skills to make products of a high standard in most areas, guided by expert tutoring. Most pupils plan and use time very productively and meet the regularly reinforced coursework deadlines. High ability pupils are routinely challenged by teachers' high expectations that they will achieve the highest grades. When progress is less good, pupils have missed lessons and have not chosen the most motivating products – particularly noted in textiles - and their analysis and evaluation skills are less well developed.
113. A significant proportion of teaching is very good. Teachers deliver interesting and well-planned lessons usually involving a starter, several different activities and good reviews of learning at the end. Pupils listen attentively, frequently ask questions, take part with enthusiasm and complete homework. During lunchtime and after school, the technology rooms are regularly full of pupils wanting to work on their projects. In resistant materials and graphics teachers clearly demonstrate different ways of how finished work - for example, jewellery boxes or promotional materials - can be evaluated. They provide a range of prompt sheets and

methods from which pupils choose their preferred type; thus pupils understand and can apply these skills in other situations. In the satisfactory textiles lessons there is not enough variety of activities, pupils work more at their own pace, and not enough is expected of them.

114. The department is very well led and management is good. There is a culture of enterprise within the team, which regularly reviews its priorities and enthusiastically takes on new ideas like the KS3 Strategy. Very good use is made of extra funding to enrich pupils' experiences, such as the impressive Italian food experience. Monitoring of teaching and learning still needs to be formalised as a tool to further raise standards. There has been very good progress since the last inspection: standards have risen, new schemes of work and GCSE examinations have been introduced, successful appointments have been made, and the quality of teaching has improved. Weaknesses in assessment have been tackled; pupils now use ICT regularly and work in specialist rooms where attractive displays create a rich and stimulating environment for learning.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

115. **Drama** is an increasingly popular GCSE subject with two groups in Year 10. In 2004, over 60 per cent of pupils attained A*-C grades, one-third with A*/A grades. Teaching is very good. The teacher prepares lessons very well, encourages and supports pupils and has very good knowledge of the subject, which she uses effectively in demonstrations. She selects assignments wisely as they motivate pupils. Year 10 pupils are working on a piece of Theatre in Education to perform to Year 7 pupils, on issues they have chosen. Year 10 drama pupils will practise key scenes from Macbeth to perform to Year 9 pupils who will be preparing for their national tests on this play. The teacher regularly encourages pupils to evaluate their own and others' work, guiding them with very good questions. Pupils feel confident and make good progress.
116. Last year drama pupils performed as part of the Shakespeare Festival in Liverpool and also attended workshops at the Globe Theatre in London. This is valuable experience. Lessons are held in a large mobile classroom with poor facilities. The teacher and pupils make very good use of the space and manage to focus on the work in spite of noise from heavy machinery. Many resources, including costumes and texts, have been lost in the course of the building works.
117. With one Year 11 group and two Year 10 groups it is clear that **media studies** is an increasingly popular GCSE choice. Results in 2004 were outstanding - 96 per cent of pupils attained A*-C grades, including one quarter with A*/A grades. Teaching is very good. Pupils respond with interest to the well-chosen and carefully planned assignments. In addition to very good preparation, the teacher explains technical terms well and pupils use them correctly. The teacher encourages pupils to learn independently. Year 11 pupils invited speakers into a lesson to give them background information for their present project - creating a magazine for a chosen audience. Pupils worked hard to prepare interview questions and learned how to take part in discussions and take notes. The teacher supported this by showing pupils how to phrase questions and giving them ideas about different ways to take notes. Pupils take great pride in their coursework and present it very attractively. They do not have easy access to an interactive whiteboard, computers and colour printers. At present they use the computer room just once a week.

Art and design

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

Standards are above average	Pupils achieve very well in Years 7 to 9 and
-----------------------------	--

	well in Years 10 and 11
Teaching is good	Learning is good
Leadership is good	Management is good
Improvement since the last inspection has been good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results have risen rapidly in the last three years.
- Good teaching has resulted in improved standards for all pupils and better achievement.
- Good leadership and management have established a vibrant and worthwhile artistic experience for pupils.
- ICT is not sufficiently well developed for pupils to use it as an additional tool during lessons.

Commentary

118. Teachers' assessment, that Year 9 pupils' work was well above average in 2004, was generous but it correctly confirmed the rise in standards brought about by a thorough revision of the Years 7 to 9 curriculum. Under the good leadership of the present head of department, GCSE results have risen from well below average in 2002 to above average in 2004. The fact that one quarter of pupils attained A*/A grades represents good achievement for pupils in 2004.
119. Because pupils begin the course with below average ability and are taught well, they make rapid progress in Years 7 to 9. Teachers show pupils how to use sketchbooks well, so these form a valuable record of emerging ideas and developing techniques. Pupils have a good understanding of how to link their own work with that of established artists, resulting in pupils' interesting and creative developmental work. Higher-attaining pupils, for example, combine good observational drawing techniques with Robert Delauney's more radical, fragmented images for architectural studies. Whilst lower-attaining pupils do not apply these techniques skilfully, they can follow a theme, referring to a variety of media; they produce worthwhile three-dimensional interpretations.
120. Some pupils in Years 10 and 11 produce work of a well above average standard. Pupils annotate their work effectively and often present these notes in an imaginative way, capturing the essence of the artist they are studying. For example, one higher-attaining pupil captured the three-dimensional qualities of Frank Stella's work in her sketchbook presentation of his life and work. Pupils see three-dimensional work as a natural progression after preliminary studies and produce some very imaginative relief work, using a variety of techniques and media. Pupils develop a good understanding of artistic styles and movements as well as technical skills.
121. Teachers plan lessons thoroughly and consider well how the subject can contribute to pupils' wider development. A well-taught lesson exploring architectural themes contributed to pupils' understanding of the social, historical and technological context surrounding the construction of the Eiffel Tower. The link with Delauney's apparently chaotic views of the building resulted in a genuine *eureka* moment for one Year 8 pupil when she realised the objectives of his work. Teachers' clear explanations and emphasis on accuracy and care help pupils to value their work. Recently revised assessment procedures now guide pupils' learning and how they can evaluate their own and others' work. 'Homework of the week' and 'sketchbook of the week' most effectively celebrate good work. They contribute to pupils' high levels of interest in art and corresponding good behaviour.
122. The head of department is very aware of the value of teaching pupils through art as well as about art, so this subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' personal and social

development. This is supported by a good range of enrichment activities for all pupils, which are particularly valuable for talented pupils. The department has used a neighbouring college's resources to provide some pupils with the chance to use ICT but until recently, lack of computers has limited their use in lessons. Good accommodation and resources have emerged from the disruption caused by the recent building works. High quality displays provide inspiration and information. The incorrect installation of a kiln has delayed the development of ceramic work.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Standards are average	Pupils achieve well
Teaching is good	Learning is good
Leadership is very good	Management is very good
Improvement since the last inspection has been good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are enthusiastic about music lessons and the extra-curricular activities.
- Good, often imaginative, teaching leads to good learning.
- Storage facilities for instruments are not good enough to avoid damage.
- Teachers and pupils use ICT effectively, for example for composition.

Commentary

123. GCSE results in 2004 were above average for A* to G grades but below average for A* to C grades. Present standards are higher. Years 10 and 11 pupils have a good understanding of Indian, Caribbean and folk elements commonly used in 'fusion' music. Year 9 pupils understand chord sequencing and play the keyboard effectively, for example, accompanying their own singing of 'Stand By Me'. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated in lessons and achieve as well as others, and teachers make sure that pupils who have particular musical talents are encouraged to aim high.
124. Teachers and the visiting vocalist and instrumentalists have a secure subject knowledge and are most competent, skilled performers. They successfully convey their enthusiasm to pupils, who respond by being keen to learn and concentrating hard. Teachers use a good range of teaching styles effectively, so that pupils are interested throughout lessons. Teaching in GCSE classes is very good and in Years 7 to 9 it is predominantly good. In a small, but significant, minority of lessons, there are too few times when pupils perform their own compositions to the class.
125. Year 8 pupils effectively broaden their understanding of African music when singing songs such as 'O Ye Narimbo' and 'Babethandazo' in a *cappella* style, building up from unison to harmony using call and response. Teachers assess pupils' work effectively as lessons proceed. Teaching is best when pupils are given a wide range of activities related to listening, composing, performing and appraising. There is good pace when such elements of a lesson have to be completed in a set amount of time. Teaching is less effective when lessons lack substance, objectives are not accomplished and teachers hold forth for too long, with only a few pupils making contributions.
126. An impressive number of pupils, 120, participate in the school instrumental group, harmony group, choir and additional GCSE classes, all of which significantly develop pupils' confidence

in performing. These, together with a carol concert and visits from specialist composers and performers, all make an important contribution to the development of the pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development. Sixty pupils benefit from instrumental and vocal tuition from six visiting specialists. It is unfortunate that assemblies rarely include musical performances. Accommodation is now good but there is a lack of storage space for large instruments. Teachers and pupils use ICT and music technology effectively, for example composition software and recording equipment. The school choir, with 80 girls, regularly produces CDs of its performances.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Standards are average	Pupils achieve well
Teaching is good	Learning is good
Leadership is very good	Management is very good
Improvement since the last inspection has been good	

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Inspiring leadership has developed a real team spirit and shared vision for the future.
- GCSE results are above average. GCSE dance results have been low, but are improving.
- Adaptable and well-organised management has seen the department through a long period with inadequate facilities, although the major disruption to the curriculum has had a negative impact on standards.
- Consistently well-planned and enthusiastic teaching results in good learning.
- The wide range of relevant extra-curricular activities is very popular.

Commentary

127. GCSE results have been above or well above average in recent years and are expected to remain at this level. GCSE dance results have declined but are improving; predicted grades suggest further improvement next year and the following year. The decline occurred partly because the building programme, and other school events, greatly limited teaching time in the hall. The low ability and poor attendance of many pupils who chose this course also contributed. Following a departmental review, strategies were put in place to improve this situation and, along with the opening of the new sports hall, standards have improved recently.
128. Overall, pupils attain average standards; they have a good understanding of body tension, rhythm and timing in gymnastics and dance, with a few beginning to perform above expectations by developing finesse and grace. The GCSE physical education group have good volleying and serving skills and very good tactical awareness in volleyball. Pupils know how to improve because in all lessons they evaluate their own and others' performances. A teacher planned one Year 7 lesson based on pupils' observations the previous week, when they decided they needed to improve their balances and body tension. This demonstrates pupils' good evaluation skills, which teachers develop further by using a digital camera to capture performances for immediate analysis. This is most effective and very good practice.
129. All pupils achieve well in a range of sporting activities because lessons are well planned by very knowledgeable, enthusiastic, caring teachers. Relationships are good and pupils are very positive about their work. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve well, as teachers adapt tasks and equipment, and provide individual lesson plans to meet their specific needs. Leadership is a real strength, as there is a strong team spirit with a clear, shared vision of how

the department needs to develop, and plans have been made to push this forward. Management is very good, as effective monitoring procedures are in place and the very good self-review programme has highlighted good practice to be embedded and developed.

130. The department offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities, which are well attended and open to all for recreation, and which provide high ability pupils with competitions, locally and nationally. School teams do well. With the commitment to the Schools Sports Co-ordinator scheme the department want to further develop its links with local secondary and primary schools, to help raise standards, participation and professional development.
131. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, as GCSE physical education results have remained strong. The uptake for this course and dance has doubled. Teaching is now good, and often very good. Girls now come well prepared for their lessons; for example, they remove jewellery and tie back their hair. Those who do not join in are fully involved in evaluating others. In dance there are more opportunities to perform and more guidance given for improvement. With the opening of the new sports hall, accommodation is now good, although courts and fields are still out of action. When all the work is complete accommodation will be very good.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal education, religious education and citizenship and are taught together. Citizenship is also taught through other subjects.

Personal education and citizenship

Provision in personal education and citizenship is **good**.

Standards are average in Years 7 to 9 and above average in Years 10 and 11	Pupils achieve well
Teaching is good	Learning is good
Leadership is good	Management is good

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well because the topics studied are very relevant to their lives as young citizens.
- The school provides many good opportunities for pupils to appreciate citizenship in school life - for example, charitable fund-raising or work experience.
- Teachers encourage pupils to think about their ideas and values and to listen carefully to others' ideas, without being judgemental.
- There is too little monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure the quality of provision and spread of good practice.

Commentary

132. Pupils enter the school with limited knowledge and understanding of citizenship issues. In Years 7 to 9 they develop their communication skills through speaking and writing. By the end of Year 11 pupils have a good knowledge and appreciation of citizenship and develop their understanding well through a wide range of activities and topics studied in other subjects. Statutory requirements for drugs and sex education are covered within the lessons.
133. Effective teaching in Years 7 and 8 develops pupils' self-confidence and their discussion skills. This was particularly evident in a Year 8 project on improving neighbourhood buildings and

facilities; after a visit from the Mayor, pupils wrote to local councillors. Very good work, based on a series of photographs taken during a local walk, helped pupils to draw up interesting plans about how to improve the area around their school.

134. Speakers from local community schemes, drama groups and drug education organisations contribute much to the quality of lessons. In a highly valuable Year 11 session on domestic violence, led by a speaker from a local drop-in centre, pupils responded with excellent attention and interest. The lesson got off to a really lively start when pupils had to choose a boyfriend from three possibilities. Everyone in the group chose the same boy. This showed that they were fully aware of the characteristics of individuals who are possessive and seek to control others. They clearly understood the danger signals that may lead to violent relationships. This was a good example of the way teachers and guests work together, to encourage the girls to think for themselves and make informed decisions about very important issues that could affect them as citizens.
135. The school provides many good opportunities for pupils to experience active citizenship, as buddies, mentors, form representatives and prefects. They are well involved in charitable projects raising money for cancer research and many other appeals. An assembly, very well led by pupils in Years 8 and 11, celebrated the contribution they had made to the Sudanese crisis fund. However, occasionally in lessons teachers talk too much and give pupils the answers to complex questions about life, rather than encouraging them to work out their own ideas independently and collaboratively.
136. Most pupils clearly have a good understanding of the standard of their work and know what they need to do to improve it. Teachers give them good feedback in lessons. The system developed for reporting to parents on pupils' progress in citizenship by the end of Year 9 is satisfactory. Development of the citizenship programme is well organised. The programmes of study are well developed and pupils' attitudes to work in citizenship are good. Nearly all teachers teach citizenship through the work they cover in other subjects.
137. Planning is thorough, but pupils' awareness of national and international politics is under-developed. However, there are clear plans to ensure that citizenship programmes cover the requirements of the National Curriculum. At present, the monitoring of the impact of teaching and planning upon pupils' learning is not rigorous enough to ensure that good practice is shared and the quality of provision is equally good for all pupils.

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 last inspection	3
Value for money provided by the school	3
Overall standards achieved	3
Pupils' achievement	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	3
Attendance	6
Attitudes	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The quality of education provided by the school	3
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	3
Accommodation and resources	5
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	4
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	4
The quality of the school's links with the community	4
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	3
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	3

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