

INSPECTION REPORT

PRIESTNALL SCHOOL

Stockport

LEA area: Stockport

Unique reference number: 106133

Headteacher: Dr Graham Nelmes

Lead inspector: Dr Kenneth C Thomas

Dates of inspection: 15 – 18 November 2004

Inspection number: 268439

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 to 16 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll;	1391
School address:	Priestnall Road Heaton Mersey Stockport Cheshire
Postcode:	SK4 3HP
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr M Young
Date of previous inspection:	8 February 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Priestnall is a comprehensive school for boys and girls aged 11 to 16. With 1391 students on roll, the school is larger than most other secondary schools. The school provides for students across the ability range. However, attainment on entry is average overall. The proportions of students with special educational needs and with formal statements are average. Students with the highest levels of need mostly have social and emotional difficulties, moderate learning difficulties or specific learning difficulties. Provision for students with special educational needs also includes designated provision for students with physical disability. Nineteen per cent of the students have minority ethnic backgrounds and there are around fifteen different ethnic groups represented in the school. Consequently there is no significantly large sub-group. The proportion of students with first languages other than English is above average, although very few are in the early stages of learning English. Students come from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds but, broadly, these backgrounds are above average. The school was awarded Beacon School status in 2002.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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10905	Alan Brewerton	Team inspector	Science
11838	Derek Cronin	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
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32340	Peter McKay	Team inspector	Geography
19152	Richard Merryfield	Team inspector	History
23308	John Morrell	Team inspector	Citizenship Music
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a very effective school which gives very good value for money. Standards are well above the average at the end of Years 9 and 11. The excellent leadership of headteacher receives exceptionally strong support from middle managers, Students achieve very well as the result of very good teaching and the very effective use of assessment information to set targets and monitor students' progress.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Very good teaching with excellent support for learning outside the school day lead to very good achievement.
- Standards in tests and examinations are well above national averages and those in similar schools.
- The school is very effectively led and managed, the leadership of the headteacher has very successfully created a climate of challenge, support and improvement.
- Not enough use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning in some subjects.
- Very good support and guidance promote very good attitudes and good behaviour. These contribute significantly to the positive ethos of the school.
- Some aspects of the accommodation are unsatisfactory and have an adverse impact on the daily life of the school.
- Effective partnerships with parents and the community contribute to the school's success.

The school has made very good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have risen and achievement is very good. There is now more very good and excellent teaching. Assessment procedures are very effective in tracking students' progress and setting relevant targets for students. Apart from the use of ICT to support teaching and learning, all of the main key issues identified in the last report have been tackled successfully.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2001	2002	2003	2003
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	-	A	A	D

*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.*

Standards are well above average and **achievement is very good**. National Curriculum test and GCSE examination results over time show continuing high standards and a rising trend. Standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are well above average at the end of Year 9. Standards at the end of Year 11 are also well above average and GCSE examination results have been maintained at this level for the last four years. The 2003 similar schools benchmarking grade in the table above is based on attainment at the end of Year 9 and does not accurately reflect the achievement of students from entry in Year 7, which is very good. The GCSE examination results in 2004 were above or well above the 2003 national averages in almost all subjects. These results exceeded the school's target for the year group. Although there is some variation in the achievement of boys and girls, it is not significant, and students of all backgrounds make very good progress.

Students' personal development including their cultural development is good. Their social and moral development is very good. Spiritual development is satisfactory. Students have very good attitudes and the vast majority behave well in lessons and around the school. This

makes for a generally harmonious learning environment. Attendance is very good. Most students are punctual to school, but some are late to lessons because of the difficulty in moving around the school.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. Teaching and learning are very good with some that is excellent. The quality of the curriculum is very good. Extra-curricular provision is very good and support for learning outside the school day is excellent. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship. Students are provided with very good support and guidance. Parents show a strong commitment and much involvement in their children's education. Very good links with other schools and the community enhance provision. Because the school is very popular and heavily oversubscribed the number of students on roll has increased steadily since the last inspection. As a result the school is very overcrowded and some aspects of the accommodation are unsatisfactory.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is very effectively led and managed. The leadership of the headteacher is excellent. Very good management is underpinned by rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. The leadership and management of key staff are very good, and in some areas outstanding. Governors carry out their responsibilities well and are very supportive and have a very good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very pleased with the school. They are particularly pleased that their children are happy at school, expectations are high and that their children are expected to work hard. A few parents expressed concerns about behaviour. Inspectors found that although a small number of students display immature behaviour, the behaviour of the overwhelming majority is good. Students are equally positive. The questionnaire responses indicated a significant level of disquiet about bullying. Inspectors found that while there have been instances of bullying, all instances are treated very seriously and appropriate action is taken.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that ICT is used to support teaching and learning in all subjects.
- Continue to press forcefully for improvements to the accommodation.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Provide a daily act of collective worship.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Achievement is very good at the end of Year 9 and Year 11, and from a well above average baseline, test and examination results have risen faster than results nationally over the last four years. At the end of Year 9, standards in English, mathematics and science are well above average. The 2004 GCSE results were above those obtained in 2003 and well above the 2003 national average.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is very good because of very good teaching, high expectations and the very effective use of assessment information.
- Very effective monitoring helps to ensure that students of all backgrounds achieve equally well.

Commentary

1. The standards of attainment of students' on entry to the school, although covering the full attainment range, are average overall. Students make very good progress in Years 7 to 9 and the trend in the school's National Curriculum test results was above the rate at which the national results rose from 1999 to 2003. In 2003, the results were well above average in comparison with all schools and with similar schools. Similar schools are schools in which students attained similar standards at the end of Year 6 (prior attainment) and schools in similar socio-economic circumstances.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	35.1 (36.8)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	39.0 (37.4)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	35.7 (34.8)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 265 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

2. The 2003 results in English and science were above average in comparison both with all schools and with schools in similar socio-economic circumstances. In comparison with similar schools based on prior attainment, the English results were average, while those in science were below average. The 2003 results in English and science do not reflect the standard of work seen during the inspection, which is above that indicated by the test results. This is reflected in the 2004 test results in English, which were well above the 2003 average. Standards in science are well above average, rather than above average as indicated by the 2004 test results. The 2003 results in mathematics were well above average in comparison both with all and with similar schools. The 2004 mathematics results were similar to those obtained in 2003. The results in all three subjects represent very good achievement. Although girls outperform boys in English, the difference in performance is less than that observed nationally. There are no consistent differences in the performance of boys and girls in mathematics and science. Analyses of performance show that there are no significant differences in the performance of students from different ethnic backgrounds. The challenging targets set for 2004 were exceeded in English and mathematics, but not achieved in science. This was because the target set for science was unrealistically high.

3. Achievement is very good in Years 7 to 9 because the national Key Stage 3 strategy is being implemented effectively and there is much good and better teaching that inspires students to do well. The vast majority of students are highly committed to their studies. They attend very well and are given carefully focused support and guidance. The use by the school of assessment information to track the students' performance and identify potential underachievement is very sophisticated. These analyses are used particularly effectively to plan individual intervention, whether this is for those who are falling behind, for students with particular learning needs or for potentially high achievers who may need to be challenged more by their work. These strengths in provision are also seen in Years 10 and 11 where students are in addition provided with well focused individual support as they prepare for the GCSE examinations. As a result, achievement is also very good at the end of Year 11.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	66 (62)	52 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	94 (93)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (97)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	40.2 (39.3)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 247 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. The school is maintaining well above average standards in Years 10 and 11 and results in the GCSE examination have been rising at a faster rate than the national trend. The 2004 results show continued improvement and are well above the 2003 average when compared to all schools and similar schools. The school achieved the challenging 2004 target set for the proportion of students obtaining five or more A* to C grades and the average points score target. As at Year 9, a considerable number of students attain high standards as shown by around a quarter of grades being A* or A. Girls achieved better results than boys, although by a smaller margin than nationally. Analyses of performance show that students from minority ethnic backgrounds are among the school's highest attainers at the end of Year 11.
5. The GCSE examination results in English, mathematics and science were well above average in 2003. The 2004 results were similar to those obtained in 2003. The 2003 results were also well above average in English literature, statistics, business studies, art, design and technology, drama, French and history. The proportions of students gaining higher grades were above national averages all other subjects apart from economics, where results were below. In 2004, the proportions of students gaining A* to C grades rose in English, science, drama, media studies and physical education. Although in 2004, there was a slight fall in the proportions of students gaining these grades in English literature, statistics, business studies, art and geography, the results remained above the 2003 averages in these subjects.
6. Standards seen in lessons and in the samples of students' work match the test and examination results closely. By the end of Year 9, overall standards are well above average, being particularly good in English, mathematics and science. Given that students' attainment on entry is average, their achievement by the end of Year 9 is very good. Teachers have high expectations and challenge students to think for themselves. The pace and challenge of

lessons continue in Years 10 and 11. Overall standards continue to be well above average. Students build very successfully on secure foundations established in their earlier years in the school. Generally, they continue to achieve standards that are well above national expectations.

7. This is an inclusive school and one that is very successful in its aim that all should benefit from the opportunities that it provides. As a result, there are no significant variations in the achievement of students from different ethnic backgrounds. Girls generally outperform boys, but the differences in performance tend to be less than the national differences. The school carefully analyses progress against prior attainment and takes steps successfully to tackle any patterns emerging in each year group. Students with English as an additional language achieve as well as others in their classes. They are given effective support and an analysis of assessment information shows that their progress is comparable to others. Although the school does not provide a coordinated programme of activities for gifted and talented students, there is a wide range of extension activities. Gifted and talented students achieve very well in their academic subjects and this achievement is enhanced through their participation in the extension activities. The achievement of students with special educational needs is comparable to that of their peers. These students benefit from a rigorous assessment system through which their progress can be carefully monitored as they move through the school. Because of effective support, students in the 'Renaissance Centre', who might otherwise not be in full-time education, also make very good progress.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students behave well and their attitudes to school are very good; there are few exclusions. Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good overall. Attendance is well above the national average and punctuality is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have high expectations of behaviour and the majority of students willingly comply.
- Students arrive in good time for morning registration but some lessons start late because students and teachers are delayed by overcrowding in the corridors.
- Students enjoy coming to school; they work hard and are quick to use their initiative.
- Attendance is well above the national average and there are few unauthorised absences.
- Students' moral and social development is very good and their cultural development is good.
- Opportunities to enhance students' spiritual development are not fully taken.

Commentary

8. The school is very popular and students, and parents overwhelmingly agree that this is a good school to be at. Students understand that teachers' academic and personal expectations are high. They respond by being well behaved and students quickly develop into confident and enthusiastic young people. Students' very good attitudes have a significant impact on their academic achievement and personal development. However, some students display thoughtless attitudes towards the general school environment and the work of the school cleaning staff by carelessly discarding litter in the corridors and open spaces. Working relationships are friendly and the vast majority of students are polite to each other and to visitors. In lessons, the vast majority of students behave well and are able to concentrate on their learning. Occasionally, a few are slow to settle and reluctant to listen to their teacher. When this occurs the immature behaviour of these students monopolises the teacher's attention and impedes the progress made by the rest of the class. However, teachers, usually manage students' behaviour well and there are very few exclusions compared to schools locally and nationally.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1123	38	0
White – Irish	6	0	0
White – any other White background	25	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	4	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	11	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	13	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	34	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	60	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	6	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	9	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	4	0	0
Black or Black British – African	2	1	0
Chinese	9	2	0
Any other ethnic group	16	1	0
No ethnic group recorded	64	0	0

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

9. Students who have particular difficulties may spend some time in the 'Renaissance Centre'. This is a very important part of the school's successful inclusion strategy. In the centre, students receive sensitive individual support that is carefully matched to their needs with the aim of helping them to rejoin their regular lessons as soon as they are able.

10. The overwhelming majority of students are punctual at the start of morning and afternoon sessions. The few students who arrive after the start of registration usually have a good reason and teachers always challenge latecomers. The school, however, is severely overcrowded and, in between lessons, the narrow corridors and stairs become very congested. Although most of the students behave impeccably, many find the crush very unpleasant and all say that this is the one aspect of school life that they would like to change. At times, the corridors and stairways come to a complete halt and some students say that their work can be damaged as they try to find a way through. Some students delay moving between lessons in order to avoid the congestion, but this can mean they arrive late at their next lesson. Teachers are also caught up in the congestion and teaching time is lost as lessons start five or sometimes ten minutes late. The governing body is working very hard to resolve these difficulties and has alerted the local authority to the potential dangers.

11. Students' out-going and confident approach makes a significant contribution to the school's lively and vibrant atmosphere. Students with special educational needs also have very positive attitudes to school. They enjoy their lessons and extra-curricular activities are very popular, especially those involving music and sport. Students' desire to do their very best is reflected in the high standard of work seen and in their very good progress. Analysis of the students' questionnaire, however, shows that well over half have concerns about the standard of behaviour and bullying. During discussions students agreed that bullying does occur but that teachers work hard to resolve such issues. Inspectors agree with their positive views, procedures for managing behaviour and all forms of harassment are good. Racist incidents have occurred but these are rare and taken extremely seriously by the school.

Attendance

Attendance in 2002/03 the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	4.7	School data	0.7
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.

12. Attendance has been well above the national average for at least the last four years. Absences are closely monitored and unexplained absences are always followed up on the first day. The school strongly discourages parents from booking term time holiday and students' consistently high attendance helps them to make very good progress in their learning.
13. Good provision for students' cultural development and very good provision for their moral and social development makes a significant contribution to their all-round personal development. Most subjects promote students' moral development well. Expectations of classroom behaviour are high and support those evident in the general life of the school. Students explore moral issues in geography, history, science and ICT. Fair play and respect for others is very strongly encouraged in physical education and the focus of learning in Years 10 and 11 in religious education is 'thinking about moral issues'. The school's life education programme deals effectively with a range of relevant moral issues including racism, attitudes to disability and responsibilities in adult life. Provision for students' social development is very good and this contributes well to their progress. The school provides many opportunities for students to take responsibility and to contribute to the life of the school. Through the school and year councils, for example, and through older students taking on roles as school ambassadors and mentors, they are able to express their views and develop an understanding of what it means to be responsible members of the school community. In lessons students relate well to their peers, work confidently in pairs and groups, and most are keen to contribute to class discussion.
14. Students' cultural development is good. Students have a good appreciation of their own and others' cultural traditions, which is fostered through visits and outside speakers as well as in many lessons. Students' spiritual development is satisfactory. Planning for assemblies is good, ensuring that the chosen themes deal with a broad range of mainly moral and social issues that are relevant to students' lives, and allow for reflection in the light of their own beliefs and experiences. However, the quality of these occasions varies, the best contributing very well to students' personal development. Although assemblies invariably offer some opportunity for reflection, they fail to do so in a way that meets the requirement for all students to take part in a daily act of collective worship. Most subjects encourage students to respect the feeling and beliefs of others. Religious education makes a strong contribution to

this aspect of students' personal development and contributions are also made through art, music and English. However, not enough use is made of the opportunities that arise in other subjects to contribute to this aspect of students' personal development.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. Teaching and learning are very good with some that is excellent. The quality of the curriculum is very good. Extra-curricular provision is very good and support for learning outside the school day is excellent. The school is very overcrowded and some aspects of the accommodation are unsatisfactory. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship. Students are provided with very good support and guidance. Parents show a strong commitment and much involvement in their children's education. Very good links with other schools and the community enhance provision.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are very good. Very good use is made of assessment information to help to maintain and further raise standards.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Positive relationships and teachers' high expectations help students of all abilities to work hard and make very good progress.
- The principles of the national Key Stage 3 strategy are used to good effect in all years.
- Assessment is used very effectively to reinforce learning and show students how to progress further.
- Teachers' command of their subject and their high expectations are major factors in students' and students' enthusiasm for learning.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 125 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7 (6%)	45 (36%)	54 (43%)	18 (14%)	1 (1%)	0 (%)	0 (%)

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

15. There is little difference in the quality of teaching between different year groups. Teaching has improved since the last inspection. At the time of the last inspection the quality of teaching was good or better in about two-thirds of all lessons; it is now good or better in just over eight out of ten lessons and the amount of very good or excellent teaching has doubled. Students and parents value the sense of purpose conveyed by well taught lessons and thorough assessment.
16. The school's commitment to identifying and promoting teaching strategies that encourage active learning is a policy that is rigorously pursued at all levels. A school focus on learning is maintained through regular review within departments. The sharing of ideas to improve teaching and learning is well established. This constructive approach to teaching complements teachers' knowledge and enthusiasm for their subjects and creates a very positive atmosphere for learning.
17. An interest in the business of learning is communicated well to students. Teachers often refer to the ways in which learning takes place as well as the content of learning itself. Teachers

plan their lessons very well and explicit learning objectives are prominently displayed so that students can see where they are headed. This, together with other approaches originating in the Key Stage 3 strategy, makes a significant impact on students' motivation and does much to promote equality. As a result, students of all ethnic backgrounds achieve equally well. Lessons have a clear structure, get off to a brisk start and involve students through good quality oral work. In lessons where discussion is regularly encouraged students are articulate about what they are learning, not just what they are doing. Independent learning is well developed in modern foreign languages and geography, and provides a very good foundation for further study. However, because of difficulties in access to the computer rooms, not enough use is made of ICT to support teaching and learning in many subjects.

18. There is much lively and stimulating teaching. Teachers use their subject expertise well to provide clear explanations. Learning activities are well matched to students' needs and the students are fully engaged in most lessons. In the vast majority of lessons good progress is made because students rise well to learning tasks that extend them. Teaching of this quality was seen in all subjects and particularly in English, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, history and citizenship. Examples of outstanding teaching were seen in drama, mathematics, science, ICT and modern foreign languages. Gifted and talented students benefit from the enthusiasm and generally high level of expectations available to all students and are also offered a good range of extension activities.
19. The teaching of students with special educational needs is very good. Teachers and teaching assistants know the students well and provide work at an appropriate level to ensure that they make the same progress as other students. Annual reviews of students' progress are held in accordance with the Code of Practice. Individual education plans are very good and provide well-focused targets for students. However, not all subject teachers are currently extending these to provide targets that are more specific to their lessons. Students are regularly assessed and monitored. They are included well in the lessons and in most subjects the very good support of teaching assistants, particularly for those with physical disabilities, helps them to learn very effectively. Teachers of students in the basic skills literacy and numeracy groups have a clear structure to lessons and match their methods to individual needs. Most of the few students with English as an additional language are fluent English language speakers and do not need any additional support. A small number of students who are in the early stages of learning English have recently joined the school. These students are provided with appropriate support and taught in mainstream lessons.
20. Assessment is used very effectively to diagnose individual students' needs and to guide teaching and learning strategies. In English, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages, for example, students' work is assessed thoroughly. Strengths and weaknesses are noted and targets for improvement are set. This contributes significantly to the very good progress students make. One of the strengths of the school assessment policy is that National Curriculum level and GCSE examination grade criteria are fully explained to students so they know exactly what they have to do in order to raise the standard of their work. However, assessment procedures in art do not conform to the school policy and students are not given enough information on the standard of their work and how they can improve. In drama, dance and citizenship, teachers are guiding students very effectively in the use of self and peer assessment. The effective use of homework to consolidate and extend students' learning also makes a significant contribution to students' progress and achievement.
21. Faculty and curriculum leaders have made a significant impact on the quality of teaching. Training and opportunities for shared good practice have contributed greatly to the wider range of teaching and learning strategies now seen in the school.

The curriculum

The school provides a very good curriculum. Enrichment through extra-curricular activities is very good. Learning is supported by good resources, including a very good match of teaching and support staff to the curriculum. Although the overall quality of the accommodation is satisfactory, the school is overcrowded and this has an adverse impact on the life of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The range of subjects provides well for the aspirations of students and their parents, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- Very good arrangements for review underpin innovative curricular provision.
- The curriculum provides very good learning opportunities for students with special educational needs.

- The school offers a very good range of extra-curricular activities to enrich learning.
- The accommodation is generally adequate for teaching, but is inadequate in size for the number of students now in the school.

Commentary

22. In providing a largely academic curriculum, the school is responsive to the needs and aspirations of students and parents. Nevertheless, the leadership team and the governing body have very effective arrangements for evaluating provision, and for taking account of new requirements. For example, the National Strategy for Key Stage 3 has been implemented effectively in most subjects and is helping to further raise standards. Rapid improvement in some subjects reflects very good staffing appointments. Good progress has been made in tackling the issues raised in the last inspection report. The length of the teaching week has been increased and now meets government recommendations and the number of computers has been increased to now match the national average. However, many subjects still have difficulties in accessing ICT resources and the school is still unable to comply with the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship. Although there is a planned programme of activities to be carried out during the daily tutor time, this time is not used effectively by many tutors.
23. Curricular provision in Years 7 to 9 is very good. All National Curriculum subjects are taught. In addition, drama and dance are timetabled for all students, and higher attaining students are able to begin either German or Spanish in Year 9. Arrangements for supporting students as they enter Year 7 are very good. Innovative arrangements provide students with three different pathways through Years 10 and 11, with an increase in the range of vocational and work-related courses reflecting the school's response to new requirements. In this respect a recently introduced GCSE course in engineering has proved to be very successful and popular with students. Effective provision is made, through links with local colleges, for some lower attaining and less academically orientated students to participate in extended work placements. The wide range of GCSE courses is supplemented by Entry Level Certificate courses in a variety of subjects. Students benefit from very good guidance prior to choosing their courses. Connexions, the school's careers partner, provides further good guidance. The school is in the process of responding to new requirements for the provision of careers guidance in Years 7 and 8. Overall, there is a strong commitment to answering individual needs and providing equal access to the curriculum.
24. There are very good learning opportunities for students with special educational needs. All students, including those with physical disabilities, have access to all areas of the curriculum, including enrichment activities. Students in Years 7 to 9 who need support with literacy are disapplied from modern foreign languages and instead follow a course in basic skills, which is primarily literacy but includes some numeracy. There is flexibility in the arrangement to allow students to be reintegrated back into taking a modern foreign language where appropriate. The basic skills course continues in Years 10 and 11. The special educational needs co-ordinator ensures that all teachers are aware of the targets in students' individual education plans and that they are used in lesson planning.
25. A wide range of enrichment activities supports learning and personal development very well. Almost all subjects provide extra tuition for students in Years 9 and 11 prior to National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations, both as after school activities and through Easter revision sessions. There is a very good range of competitive team and individual sports, with external coaches supporting activities such as trampolining. The music department provides opportunities to participate in a variety of bands and choirs and there is an annual musical production. Although provision for gifted and talented students is not, as yet, co-ordinated across the school, several subjects provide extra activities specifically for these students.

There is a very good range of residential visits, for example to France, Austria, Holland and visits to local universities, theatres and museums.

26. Resources for teaching are good overall and support the teaching of the curriculum well. The library has been refurbished and is well stocked. It now provides a very good resource for research and independent learning and is a hive of activity before school, during breaks and at the end of the school day. The match of teachers to the demands of the curriculum is generally very good. However, because of timetabling difficulties there is a relatively small amount of non-specialist teaching in religious education and geography. The school does not experience any significant difficulties in attracting high quality applicants for vacant posts. However, the headteacher and governors place a high priority on recruiting very competent staff and for this reason are, on occasion, prepared to leave posts vacant until suitable appointments can be made. There are no indications that this policy has an adverse impact on standards. Teaching and learning are well supported by good technician and other support staff. The full-time librarian makes an excellent contribution to students' learning and the life of the school. Special needs support staff are effectively deployed and make a good contribution to students' learning. Administrative and school cleaning staff make important contributions to the day-to-day functioning of the school.
27. The accommodation is satisfactory for teaching the curriculum. In some subjects accommodation is very good. The large refurbished rooms in design and technology, for example, provide very good accommodation and most subjects occupy a suite of adjacent teaching rooms. However, the school is overcrowded and there is serious overcrowding in corridors and on stairs at lesson changeover times. Only the sensible behaviour of the vast majority of students and the vigilance of teachers make these areas safe at these times. Nevertheless, the congestion on the corridors causes delay at the start of some lessons. Students in wheelchairs also lose some teaching time as they have to leave lessons early in order to get to their next classroom without causing further congestion on the corridors. The music rooms are too small for large classes and there are not enough practice rooms. The accommodation for drama is unsatisfactory, because of poor acoustics and the need to prepare for or clear up after assemblies. There is a shortage of hard play areas and uneven paving in the open spaces is potentially hazardous.

Care, guidance and support

Provision for students' care, welfare, health and safety is good. The school provides students with very good support, advice and guidance and involves them well in its work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The academic monitoring and tracking of students' progress plays a strong part in improving the achievement of students.
- Very well planned induction procedures help incoming students to settle quickly.
- Procedures for seeking students' views are effective and the school acts upon them whenever it can.
- Students receive good support when making option choices at the end of Years 9 and 11.
- The guidance and support for students with special education needs are very good.

Commentary

28. Procedures for ensuring students' care, welfare, health and safety, including arrangements for child protection, are good. This is a caring school where tutors and pastoral leaders know students well and are quick to recognise their needs. Students are very positive about the school because they feel well supported and cared for. The pastoral leaders work closely with tutors, the special educational needs co-ordinator and parents to ensure that good help and

support is provided to all students who are having particular difficulties. The 'Renaissance Centre' provides a calm and supportive environment and effective support for vulnerable students.

29. Procedures for monitoring students' academic achievements and personal development are thorough and help teachers to provide very good support, advice and guidance. Teachers mark students' work very carefully and provide students with clear guidance on how they can improve their work. Assessment information is used very well to set individual targets and to identify and tackle any difficulties at an early stage. Close monitoring gives students confidence for the future and contributes well towards their very positive attitudes towards learning. Intervention may also take the form of additional academic support or personal guidance from learning mentors or the school therapist. The effectiveness of this support is reflected in students' very good achievement. Close liaison with a wide range of external agencies also ensures that students receive very good individual advice and guidance. Students receive very good support from the ethnic diversity service. Specialist teachers provide well-targeted support for students who are in the very early stages of learning English. The service is planning to provide training for all staff and this will help them to develop strategies to support these students further.
30. Arrangements for the induction of students who are transferring from primary schools are very good. The Year 7 pastoral leader and the special needs co-ordinator visit the main contributing primary schools in order to meet the incoming students and to obtain pastoral and academic information. Some of the students who left the previous year also go along and they are able to answer questions posed by the current Year 6 students. During discussions, Year 7 students say that these visits allayed many of their fears about their impending move. In addition, science and mathematics teachers lead some lessons during Year 6 and students at the main contributing schools undertake a science project that involves an investigation of the River Mersey. During the autumn term, there is a meeting with parents during which they can discuss how well their children are settling into school.
31. Students are pleased with the way in which the school seeks and responds to their opinions and suggestions. Although there are no formal questionnaires, students can express their views through the year and school councils. Students chair and minute school council meetings and they are also responsible for issuing memos and requesting items for the agenda. Members of the school council are also involved in the recruitment of senior members of staff and meet local town councillors in order to discuss issues such as the provision of litterbins in the streets and lighting in the park.
32. Teachers provide students with very good information about the courses they can follow in Years 10 and 11. In addition, students attend a further education fair in Year 10 and representatives from several colleges come in to speak to the students. Links with Stockport College are strong and a good number of students undertake vocational courses. Work experience placements during Year 10 also give students a very good insight into the world of work.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents, the community and other schools and colleges are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school is very popular and parents support their children's learning very well.
- Parents are very well informed about the school and their children's progress.
- Strong links with other schools and the community enrich the curriculum and enhance students' personal development well.

Commentary

33. As part of the inspection process, parents completed a questionnaire that requested their views on numerous areas of school life. Although only around ten per cent of the forms were returned, analysis of parents' responses shows that they are pleased with almost every area of the school's work. This reflects the fact that this school has a very good reputation and is heavily over-subscribed. One quarter of those who responded, however, are dissatisfied with the extent to which the school seeks their views and responds to their suggestions and concerns. Inspectors disagree with these concerns; the school takes reasonable steps to ascertain parents' views. A recent on-line questionnaire confirms that parents have few concerns and they are always encouraged to bring any issues to the school's notice. Parents appreciate this openness and the overwhelming majority indicate that the school is very approachable. One fifth of parents have concerns over behaviour and the range of activities provided. Inspectors do not support either of these concerns. Most of the students behave very responsibly; this is particularly impressive, given the overcrowding and the additional stresses this places upon staff and students.
34. Parents encourage their children to work hard and to do their best. They ensure that their children attend regularly, arrive promptly and few parents book holidays during the school term. Students' planners are an effective form of communication and parents ensure that their children do their homework. They also provide generous financial support and the school association raises significant sums of money. These funds are used to improve the school environment and provide additional learning resources.
35. The quality of information the school provides is very good. Parents receive one full, detailed written report each year, along with a more concise interim report. There is also an annual opportunity to meet their children's tutor and attendance at these meetings is very good. In addition, senior members of staff are always willing to see parents if they want to discuss a specific issue. Parents receive comprehensive, on-going information through the school newsletter, the 'Priestnall Post' and through the headteacher's 'Headlines' bulletins.
36. During the week of the inspection, the inspection team were able to meet with a large number of representatives from other schools, colleges and community organisations. The views expressed to the inspection team were overwhelmingly positive. The school is seen as being very open and very willing to learn from and share its expertise with others. This is particularly apparent in the school's beacon activities. There are very good formal and informal contacts with parents of students who have special educational needs. They are fully involved in the review process and well informed as to their children's progress towards the targets set out in their individual education plans.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management of the school are very good. The leadership of the headteacher is excellent and that of other key staff very good. The management of the school is very good. The school makes very good use of evaluation information to identify strengths and tackle weaknesses. Governance of the school is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher provides a clear vision for the future of the school as a highly innovative and outward looking institution.
- Rigorous assessment and evaluative procedures give the school a very clear understanding of its strengths and where improvement is needed.

- Outstanding subject leadership in English, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages and citizenship is having a significant impact on standards and achievement.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are effective in shaping the development of the school.

Commentary

37. The headteacher's clear vision for the future development of the school allied to very effective procedures for monitoring and evaluating its work, is having a significant impact on the quality of education the school provides. This clear commitment to ensuring the highest possible standards in all areas of the school's work is shared by other senior managers. Performance and other management information is analysed systematically and used effectively as part of the procedures for reviewing the work of faculties and departments. Because of this the school has a very clear picture of its strengths and is able to plan efficiently to tackle weaknesses. At the time of the inspection the leadership group was in the process of being restructured following the promotion of two deputy heads to headships in other schools, and the career move of a third. Because of this, the leadership group was relatively inexperienced and temporarily under strength, with several members of the group holding acting senior positions. Nevertheless, members of the group are working well together. They provide good support for the headteacher and a strong commitment to the objectives of the school. Senior leadership has been strengthened by the appointment of a business manager and will be further strengthened when a recently appointed deputy headteacher joins the school at the start of the spring term.
38. Among the many strengths of the school are the support and encouragement given to the development of leadership within the school. Because of this, middle management is exceptionally strong and faculty heads and curriculum leaders are making a significant contribution to the stability of the school during the period of transition in senior management. Exemplary leadership in English, mathematics, science, history, modern foreign languages and citizenship ensures that strong teamwork underpins a consistent drive for improvement. Subject leadership is also very strong in design and technology, geography, music and special educational needs.
39. The management of the school is very good. All of the key issues identified in the last inspection report have been tackled vigorously. Line management is very good and roles and responsibilities, from the leadership group to the other levels of management, are well understood and very effective in achieving consistency in standards and practices across the school. Performance management is fully implemented. The school is making particularly efficient use of teaching assistants to free teachers from routine administration. This is enabling teachers to devote more time to the planning of lessons and making a significant contribution to the quality of education the school provides. A comprehensive assessment database has been established and very good use is made of this information to evaluate performance. This makes a significant contribution to standards and achievement. The school improvement plan is comprehensive, contains appropriate targets and is closely linked to other curriculum plans. Very good management of special educational needs enables staff to work very well together to ensure that provision is very good.
40. The school's financial management and planning are very effective. The school business manager provides senior managers and governors with detailed financial reports and the budget is monitored with great care. Best value for money is sought both in purchasing goods and services and in educational outcomes. All of the school's income is spent for the intended purposes and in accordance with the priorities identified in the school improvement plan. The school provides very good value for money.

41. Governors are very supportive of the school and their high level of expertise enables them to make a significant contribution to school improvement. A key issue from the previous inspection required the provision of a daily act of collective worship. Governors have felt unable to comply with this statutory requirement because limitations in the accommodation mean that the school is unable to assemble as a single group. Governors are now examining alternative ways of complying with the statutory requirement. Governors work very closely with the headteacher and senior managers. They are very well informed about all aspects of the school's performance and know what the school must do in order to improve further. The school has an appropriate race equality policy and all equality issues are carefully monitored. Governors monitor the budget with care and as a result expenditure is targeted according to priorities in the school improvement plan.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,199,594	Balance from previous year	45,563
Total expenditure	4,036,858	Balance carried forward to the next	208,299
Expenditure per student	2,898		

WORK RELATED LEARNING

What is the effectiveness of work related learning?

42. The school has made a good response to new requirements for work-related learning (WRL), and statutory requirements are met. Evidence gathered through discussions with the co-ordinator for WRL and through discussions with students about their work experiences indicates that the programme effectively covers the three specified aspects of learning: through, about and for work. The WRL co-ordinator has carried out a detailed audit of provision. This audit has identified the strengths in provision and the development of education-business links and entrepreneurial skills as areas for improvement. There are significant strengths in the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 where three different pathways have been introduced to offer a wide range of courses, including vocational ones. For example, in design and technology a vocational GCSE course in applied engineering for higher attaining students is run jointly with a local college, and is now into its second year. Some lower attaining students also attend the college to pursue vocational courses in a variety of areas, including hairdressing and motor vehicle maintenance. There are also strengths in those areas of the curriculum covered by life education and business and information studies. The quality of provision was commended in a recent Area Wide Inspection. All students benefit from a full careers programme in Years 10 and 11 with good access to careers information, via Connexions, careers interviews and a well appointed careers library. They also have an effective one-week work experience placement together with several lessons as part of a well-planned and appropriate preparatory programme. During and after the placement they complete diaries to record and reflect on their increased knowledge and understanding of the work place. The school has established a solid base for consolidating and extending WRL.

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**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Inspirational leadership has reversed the downward trend in the test results at the end of Year 9 and made significant improvements in GCSE English results.
- Attainment at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11 is well above average and students achieve very well because of very good teaching.
- Outstanding assessment procedures enable students to play a very strong part in making and recognising improvement in their work and are a major factor in the rise in standards.

Commentary

43. Students' attainment when they enter the school is broadly average. Standards in tests in 2003 at the end of Year 9 were above average in comparison with all schools and about the same when compared to similar schools. Results over the three years 2001 to 2003 showed a falling trend. A fall in results was also evident in the 2003 GCSE English examinations. Although significantly above average when compared to all schools, they were well below average when compared to similar schools. However, the standards in the 2004 Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations have both shown considerable improvement and the Year 9 results exceeded the school's target by a substantial margin. Both sets of results are well above the 2003 averages. This improvement has been brought about by very good teaching with a sharp focus on how to improve reading and writing skills. This was seen in action in a very effective Year 11 lesson when the whole focus was on how to raise a predicted grade A to an A* in the GCSE examination.
44. Students achieve very well in English. The English department has fully embedded the Key Stage 3 Strategy in its planning and students begin to make rapid progress as soon as they join the school. Standards of literacy are well above average and excellent marking of work draws students' attention to their errors and how to correct them. Students also show good understanding of a range of challenging texts and write about them with insight. Even in Year 7, most students are able to make connections between their reading and writing, being equipped to recognise the features of different types of text and how to use this knowledge to manipulate language in their own writing in the most effective way. By Year 10 and 11 higher attaining students are fluent and effective writers and even lower attaining students are achieving higher grades in their GCSE course work.
45. Teaching and learning are very good from Years 7 to 11. Teachers' subject expertise and enthusiasm, very high expectations and excellent oral and written feedback to students lead to productive and enjoyable learning. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and are firmly focused on giving students a clear knowledge of what they are to learn and the best ways in which to achieve success. This highly focused teaching is particularly effective with boys, who perform very strongly in the GCSE English examination.
46. Leadership and management of the English department are excellent. In the short time she has been in post, the head of faculty has developed a very strong team with a shared vision, purpose, direction and energy. This has been achieved through a combination of planned

lesson observations, very clear curriculum planning, and excellent assessment procedures and tracking of students' progress. The good improvement since the last inspection has taken place largely during the last year and the only weakness is the use made of ICT, which is a school issue, not just a faculty issue. Otherwise, the capacity for further improvement, based on the outstanding leadership and teamwork, is very good indeed.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

47. Students possess well above average literacy skills. The English department lays a very good foundation for the development of these skills from the start of Year 7 onwards. There is a very clear emphasis on giving students knowledge about the features of different types of texts, and an understanding of the ways in which writers use language to gain particular effects. Together with an insistence on good technical accuracy this enables students to use language effectively themselves.
48. Most other subject areas are aware of the role they can play in building on the good foundations laid in English. There is now greater breadth of reading in most subjects and there are more opportunities for students to experience a wider range of writing styles, both of which were highlighted as issues in the last inspection. However, the school has not yet addressed the ways in which the library and ICT can be fully used to support the further development of students' literacy skills.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in 2003 were well above average in French, and very high in German and Spanish. The 2004 results were similar.
- Students achieve very well because very good teaching stimulates active learning and encourages independent study skills.
- Excellent leadership and management underpin outstanding teamwork and shared commitment to raise standards further.
- Students' positive attitudes contribute significantly to their progress.
- Excellent assessment procedures give students clear information about their targets, progress and how to improve to the next level.

Commentary

49. Teachers' assessments for French in 2003 showed that standards at the end of Year 9 were well above expectations. There was further improvement in 2004, because of a sharp improvement by boys. At the end of Year 11, the GCSE examination results in French were well above average, with girls doing better than boys by more than the national rate. These results were most commendable because the school enters a much higher percentage of its students than most others. All students entered for German or Spanish achieved at least grade C. In all languages the numbers achieving the highest grades, A* and A, were well above average. In 2004, all candidates obtained grades in the A* to C range in Spanish and although the results in German were slightly below those obtained in 2003, they remained well above the 2003 national average. The 2004 results in French were almost identical to those obtained in 2003.
50. Inspection evidence confirms that standards are well above expectations in French by the end of Year 9. Higher attaining students begin German or Spanish in Year 9 and do very well to reach expected standards on a very limited time allocation. Students achieve very well

because the rate of acquisition of vocabulary and structure is impressive from the start of Year 7. This underpins rapid progress in all skills, so that even lower attaining students and those with special educational needs, approach expectations by Year 9. In Year 11, standards remain well above expectations and students continue to achieve very well. Higher attaining students speak confidently, with good pronunciation, and write accurately in extended written assignments, for example to advertise their school or to recount a past holiday or exchange. Many others speak and write well, but more briefly. Structured support enables lower attainers to convey information successfully. In all three languages higher attainers convey information imaginatively because of the many opportunities provided for them to work independently and to experiment with language.

51. The quality of teaching and learning is very good across the department, which includes two newly qualified teachers. Teachers have excellent knowledge of National Curriculum and GCSE requirements, which underpins very good planning and resourcing. They all offer two languages and these are used consistently to conduct lessons, setting high expectations. Excellent assessment procedures give teachers information to help them plan lessons to cater for the different needs of individual students. Students understand their targets and how to attain them. Consequently the pace of learning is very good. Because teachers provide tasks that promote both progress and enjoyment, and give students some control over their own learning, attitudes to languages are generally very positive. Very good relationships and well-managed behaviour contribute significantly to students' progress. They collaborate and support each other very well. All students are included in the variety of individual, pair and group tasks which occur in most lessons, and which encourage independent thinking. Homework is generally well used to provide further opportunities for students to extend the range and complexity of their language. Difficulties in accessing ICT facilities hinder computer assisted language learning.
52. Leadership and management are excellent. High quality analyses of test and examination results enable weaknesses to be tackled quickly. Arrangements for monitoring work and progress are very thorough, and involve all staff. Outstanding teamwork is evident from the sharing of good practice and the way that new staff are supported. Above all, enthusiasm for the subject is transmitted to all staff and, through them, to students. This supports a very good range of enrichment activities, including residential visits to France and Austria, now being augmented by a link with a school in the twin town of Béziers. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection, especially in standards and teaching, with a clear capacity to sustain improvement.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Outstanding leadership and management are helping to drive up standards.
- Assessment procedures are used effectively to support the raising standards.
- Very good teaching and high expectations promote very good attitudes to learning.
- The vast majority of students are prepared to work hard to achieve success.

Commentary

53. The 2003 end of Year 9 National Curriculum test results were well above average in comparison to all schools and similar schools. There was no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. These results represented very good achievement by students of all ethnic backgrounds and continued the trend of rising results over recent years. The 2004 test results were similar to those obtained in 2003. The proportion of students gaining

A* to C grades in the 2003 GCSE examination was well above average in comparison with all schools and with similar schools. Again there was no significant difference in the results of boys and girls. These results represent continuing very good achievement from the end of Year 9. Analyses of performance show that students of all ethnic backgrounds achieved equally well. The 2004 results were very close to those obtained in 2004, again with no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. Achievement opportunities are extended in Year 11 by giving all students the opportunity to enter statistics as an additional GCSE examination. Seventy-eight students entered the examination in 2003 and the proportion of students gaining A* to C grades was well above average. Ninety-three students, with roughly equal numbers of boys and girls, entered the examination in 2004 and although the proportion gaining A* to C grades fell slightly, the results remained well above the 2003 national average.

54. Inspection evidence indicates that current standards in Years 9 and 11 are well above national expectations. These standards represent very good achievement in relation to attainment on entry. Students are very quickly adept with algebraic notation, the solution of equations and problem solving. Students of all ethnic backgrounds and attainment levels are making equally very good progress. The highest attaining students are provided with appropriate challenges and given the opportunity to take part in mathematical challenge competitions. Lower attaining students are provided with extra sessions to boost their numeracy skills. Because students with special educational needs are provided with very good support their achievement is similar to that of their peers.
55. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. Underpinning the very good teaching is the effective implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy. Lessons are very well planned and teachers are enthusiastic and imaginative. They use a range of teaching strategies to engage students. Lesson starter activities are brisk and then proceed at a very good pace with all students being provided with appropriate levels of challenge. Lessons conclude with a plenary session in which the learning objectives are reviewed and consolidated. Teachers' very good subject knowledge, high expectations, learning activities that are well matched to individual needs and the effective use of praise raises students' confidence and lead to very good achievement. Students have very positive attitudes to the subject and this is reflected in the high quality work in their exercise books and the very good relationships in lessons. Effective use is made of homework to consolidate and extend classroom learning.
56. Assessment procedures are very good and seen as being central to the further raising of standards. Targets are set to include an element of challenge and the progress of all students is carefully monitored. Students know what their targets are through regular reviews and systematic marking they are given clear guidance on what they have to do to improve. These procedures are making a significant contribution to the very good progress that students are making.
57. The leadership and management of the subject are excellent. The faculty head provides very strong support to a team of conscientious teachers. There is a shared commitment to creating the best possible learning environment so that every student can achieve his or her full potential. Rigorous monitoring of work in the subject ensures that strengths are identified and shared and weaknesses tackled very quickly. Because of this there has been significant improvement since the last inspection. Test and examination results show a rising trend. The department has embraced the ideas outlined in the National Numeracy Strategy with enthusiasm and the impact is seen in all years. Assessment is highly focused and used effectively to guide planning. Achievement opportunities have been enhanced by the inclusion of statistics as an additional GCSE examination. More effective use is being made of ICT to support teaching and learning but there are some restrictions because of difficulties in access to the computer rooms. The potential for further improvement is very good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

58. Students' mathematical skills are well above average and the work done in mathematics gives students confidence to apply their knowledge in other subjects. Students have a very good command of number facts and are able to tackle numerical calculations in different situations. There is, for example, very good practice in history where students analyse timelines. In design and technology students work to scale, measure and weigh accurately. They use co-ordinates correctly and have good graph-making techniques in geography and ICT. The implementation of the school numeracy policy is well co-ordinated by the mathematics curriculum leader and supported by the work of numeracy co-ordinators in each faculty. The application of students' numeracy skills is included in the schemes of work of all subjects. This provides a firm basis for the further development of these skills.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are outstanding.
- Standards are well above average at the end of Year 11.
- Achievement is very good as a result of very good teaching.
- Assessment is used very well to follow the progress and achievement of students.
- Although teachers use ICT very well as a teaching tool, there are not enough opportunities for students to use it for investigative science.

Commentary

59. In 2003, the National Curriculum test results for students at the end of Year 9 were above average. Girls' results were better than boys. When compared with similar schools, results were average. Teachers accurately assessed the attainment of students in Year 9. Science results were better than those for English and similar to mathematics results. Achievement relative to attainment on entry to the school was better than expected. Although results in 2004 were not as good as those in 2003, when compared with these students' attainment on entry to the school, they represent very good achievement. Overall results have improved at a faster rate than those nationally.
60. Work seen during the inspection shows that, by the end of Year 9, standards are well above national expectations for both boys and girls. Higher-attaining students are able to represent chemical reactions by balanced chemical equations and have a good understanding of selective breeding. Lower-attaining students are less secure in their knowledge and understanding of science. They are unable to write balanced equations for reactions but can represent them in words. Whilst the quality of investigative science is very good, the evaluation of experiments is less well developed. Students, on the whole, make very good gains in their knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts in Years 7 to 9.
61. Whilst GCSE examination results, overall, were above average in 2003, results in the separate sciences were well above average. GCSE results in science were similar to those for English and mathematics. Boys' results were similar to those of girls. When compared with similar schools, results were well above average. Achievement relative to attainment at the end of Year 9 was much better than expected. Results generally improved in 2004, but those for double award fell. Nevertheless, these results reflect very good achievement in comparison with results at the end of Year 9.

62. Students currently in Years 10 and 11 are making very good gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding in science. Standards, overall, are well above course expectations for both boys and girls. Higher attaining students in Year 11, for example, understand that in exothermic reactions more heat is lost to the atmosphere by the formation of chemical bonds than is absorbed when bonds are broken. Lower attaining students, however, whilst often still achieving average standards, are less secure in their knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts. Standards of literacy and numeracy are very good.
63. Teaching and learning are very good. In Years 10 and 11 more excellent teaching was observed than in Years 7 to 9, although, in both, there were examples of very good and excellent teaching. The principal features of teaching are the very effective use of good subject knowledge by teachers and high expectations that are communicated very well to students. Well-focused planning and an appropriate range of methods stimulate students' interest and actively engage them in lessons. In the few less effective lessons, however, the pace of the lesson is slow and students are less effectively stimulated. Although teachers make very good use of ICT as a teaching tool, students do not have enough opportunity to use data-loggers or sensors in practical work or to use ICT as a research tool in lessons. Homework is set which extends or consolidates work done in lessons.
64. Assessment is used very effectively to monitor the progress of students, to identify underachievers, adjust teaching and guide curriculum planning. The marking of students' work is thorough and comments offer encouragement and guidance on how to improve. The identification of appropriate learning objectives coupled with good support for students' learning, enables students of all ethnic backgrounds, and those with special educational needs, to make very good progress. Students clearly enjoy their work in lessons. Because, in the great majority of lessons, they are fully engaged, students work hard and lessons proceed at a good pace.
65. Leadership and management in the science faculty are outstanding. The head of science provides a clear and very well focused direction for the subject. This is reflected in the department development plan, which provides a well considered guide for improvement. Teachers work very well together, and are given very good support by technicians. The very effective monitoring of teaching and learning ensures that high quality is maintained and that teachers are very well trained in new developments and technology. Resources, in terms of books and equipment, are good. However, there are too few dedicated computers within the department to support investigative work by students. Although there are sufficient laboratories of average size, some teaching groups are too large to be accommodated in them. This has a negative impact upon the effectiveness of teaching. Several laboratories are in urgent need of refurbishment. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection and the capacity for further improvement is also very good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are achieving well because teaching and learning are good.
- Improved staffing levels and technical support are helping to raise standards.
- Limitations in the accommodation and resources impede teaching and learning.
- Not enough use is made of National Curriculum levels in assessing students' work.

Commentary

66. Attainment on entry is generally in line with national expectations. Teachers' assessments show standards at the end of Year 9 are average, with no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. These standards represent satisfactory achievement. Students in Years 7 to 9 are benefiting from the revised schemes of work and planning to match their attainment levels. In Year 7 students are able to construct good screen presentations and use word processing effectively. By Year 9 they are competent in spreadsheet work and able to handle data to create graphs. Students are able to work independently and use the Internet for research. This is a result of good teaching and learning, combined with the effective implementation of the National Strategy for ICT.
67. In Years 10 and 11 students are offered a variety of courses. The majority of students follow the GCSE course in ICT. In 2004 the proportion of students gaining A* to C grades was well above the 2003 national average. The proportion of girls gaining these grades was slightly above that of boys. These results represent good achievement from the end of Year 9. Smaller numbers of students take business studies or business and communication studies. The proportion of students gaining A* to C grades in 2004 was well above the 2003 national average in both subjects. All students in all three courses obtained passes in the A* to G range. This indicates good achievement by all students, including those with special educational needs. A few students follow an ICT key skills course in Year 11 and although overall standards are below expectations achievement is generally good when standards on entry are taken into account. Inspection evidence indicates that students presently in Years 10 and 11 are making good progress and standards are generally above course expectations.
68. Teaching and learning are good. One of the features of teaching is the effective assessment of students' progress in lessons and the setting of individual targets for improvement. This was a particularly strong feature of an excellent lesson observed in Year 11. The effective use of teaching assistants helps students experiencing difficulties to make good progress. However, some students find aspects of the business and communication studies course too difficult, and when this occurs behaviour deteriorates. Very good use is made of ICT for marking and tutoring 'on line', but not enough use is National Curriculum levels to provide students with an accurate indication of the standard of their work.
69. Leadership and management are good. There are clear lines of responsibility and accountability and national strategies are well integrated into work in the subject. Teamwork is good and teaching and learning are well supported by an efficient team of technicians. Some teaching rooms have no natural light or ventilation and ventilation noise disturbs lessons. The layout of some rooms also restricts teaching and learning strategies. The work of ICT staff is impeded by a lack of laptop computers and some equipment is out of date. Nevertheless, satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection. Resources are now managed more effectively and productive links with other schools support the sharing of new ideas and initiatives. The potential for further improvement is good.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

70. In general, students are not provided with enough opportunities to apply their ICT skills in other subjects. Although ICT is used effectively to support teaching and learning in some subjects, for example in geography and applied engineering, in most other subjects opportunities are restricted by the lack of availability of computers or difficulties in accessing the computer rooms. This was identified as a weakness in the last inspection report. Although since that time the provision of ICT resources has increased, the ICT teaching team and the number of ICT teaching groups have also increased. This has reduced the availability of rooms for booking by subjects. The network manager and the school's business manager are in the process of reviewing provision in order that the school is better able to meet the growing demand. The training needs of staff have been identified as a priority. ICT is used

well for administrative purposes and to make the storage and retrieval of assessment information more efficient.

HUMANITIES

71. **Sociology** was sampled during the inspection. Sociology is offered as a GCSE option in Years 10 and 11. The 2004 results were above the 2003 average, with all of the students entered obtaining grades in the A* to C range. One Year 11 lesson was observed. Teaching and learning were very good and standards well above course expectations. Students demonstrated a very good understanding of sociological principles in evaluating aspects of socialisation as causes of criminal behaviour.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership and management have established geography as an increasingly popular and successful subject.
- Standards in Years 9 and 11 consistently exceed expectations.
- Well planned and managed lessons enable students of all attainment levels to achieve well.
- Good assessment procedures inform students of the progress they are making.
- Students in Years 8 and 9 do not have an opportunity for off-site fieldwork.
- A small number of lower attaining boys in Year 9 display negative attitudes in lessons.

Commentary

72. Teachers' assessments show that standards at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were well above average. The 2004 assessment were also well above the 2003 national average. Standards seen in the inspection were lower, though still above average. Students perform very well in tests but do not demonstrate a corresponding level of knowledge and understanding in their everyday classwork and homework. GCSE results for both boys and girls were above those expected in 2003, particularly in the proportion of students attaining A* and A grades. Although unconfirmed results for 2004 indicate a slight decline in A* to C grades there has been a trend of improvement in the last three years, with students consistently exceeding their target grades. Work seen in Year 11 indicates standards to be above average. Standards in Year 9 and Year 11 represent good achievement for students whose attainment in geography is average on entry. Students of all ethnic backgrounds and those with special educational needs achieve equally well.
73. In Year 7 to 9 students develop map reading and interpretive skills and a sound knowledge of places and features. By the end of Year 9 the oral and written work of the majority of students demonstrates a good understanding of geographical ideas. They use vocabulary confidently and accurately in explaining geographical patterns and processes, such as the occurrence and impact of natural hazards. In investigating issues such as the causes of poverty in the UK students collect and use evidence to support conclusions. The work of lower attaining students is less detailed and more descriptive, with less understanding of cause and effect. Students in Year 10 and 11 apply and extend their knowledge through case studies and show good enquiry and ICT skills in investigating processes in river valleys.
74. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes very good. Lessons cater for different learning styles with activities that provide increasing challenge for students at all levels. Teachers communicate clear objectives to ensure that students acquire geographical terms and ideas progressively over a series of lessons. Students with special educational needs are helped by a combination of individual attention from teachers and teaching assistants and materials well matched to their capabilities. Probing questioning extends students' knowledge, often by drawing on their own experience, though it is not always well targeted. Good assessment procedures ensure that students are well informed about their progress towards targets related to national standards. Teachers' explanations are not always supported visually. Almost all students respond with enthusiasm and hard work. The progress of a small number of lower-attaining boys in Year 9 is restricted by negative attitudes.
75. Under new leadership the subject has made significant progress in the last two years, with rising numbers of students opting for the GCSE course. Very good new schemes of work form the basis for effective lesson planning, with increased opportunities for ICT and independent enquiry. However, students in Years 8 and 9 do not have enough opportunities for off-site

fieldwork. Planning is well focused on strategies to raise achievement. Extensive analysis of assessment information supports the tracking and monitoring of students' performance and guides improvement planning. Effective monitoring together with the sharing of ideas and good practice provide a very good basis for continued improvement.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
- Excellent leadership and management underpin the subject's success.
- Students' understanding and use of subject specific terms are not well developed.
- Very good classroom relationships enable students to learn very well.

Commentary

76. Results in the GCSE examinations, in terms of the proportions of students achieving grades A* to C, have been well above national averages in recent years. There have been variations in the relative performance of boys and girls compared to national figures, but no clear trend is apparent. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are above expectations reflecting very good achievement as students enter the school with limited historical skills. Students assess sources well and justify their evaluations by reference to evidence. They construct well-reasoned arguments leading to logical conclusions on topics such as the nature and extent of changes in the Church during the Tudor period. Lower-attaining students tend not to answer questions in complete sentences so that their work provides a less secure basis for revision.
77. Standards in Year 11 are well above expectations and students achieve very well. Students have well-developed study skills and a very clear understanding of the requirements for examination success. They use computers confidently for research although the subject-specific terminology, with which their findings sometimes present them, occasionally causes difficulties. Lower-attaining students are less confident in evaluating evidence to reach conclusions, and are more likely to omit supporting detail from their answers.
78. Teaching and learning are very good; there is a clear focus on the early development of more difficult skills such as source analysis and evaluation, which are important for success at GCSE level. This approach is well supported by challenging learning objectives and the assessment for learning strand of the National Strategy, which ensure students are well informed about grade and level criteria, and are able to evaluate their own work. In many lessons, energetic teaching, keen questioning and varied activities ensure that all students are kept involved, their attention held and their concentration sustained. Lessons are characterised by very good classroom relationships and careful attention to supporting the learning of students with special educational needs and English as an additional language, thereby enabling all to achieve very well.
79. Leadership and management in history are excellent. The faculty co-ordinator has led progress in developing a wide range of teaching and learning styles, the ongoing revision of subject documentation such as schemes of work, and the adoption of an additional syllabus at GCSE level. Teachers are enthusiastic, innovative and work very well together and improvement since the last inspection in areas such as the above, and achievement has been good.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE examination results are above average and students achieve well in relation to their starting points at the beginning of Year 10.
- Attitudes to learning are good and students behave well in lessons.
- Learning in religious education makes a good contribution to students' personal development.
- A significant number of lessons is taught by teachers who lack a specialist qualification in religious education.
- Limited curriculum time in Years 10 and 11 restricts the depth and breadth of learning opportunities and the accredited course in religious studies followed by some average attaining students does not stretch them enough.

Commentary

80. In recent years, no students have chosen to follow the full course GCSE in religious studies. In 2003, for the first time, a small proportion of students was entered for the short course examination. Results were above average in the A* to C range and represent good achievement relative to students' generally average starting points in Year 10. The number of entries increased in 2004 and results improved significantly. All candidates obtained a grade in the A* to G range with many obtaining graded in the A* to C range. The majority of students in Years 10 and 11 follow another nationally accredited, though less demanding, course. As yet no students have been assessed for accreditation.
81. Standards of work seen in Year 9 broadly meet the expectations of the Locally Agreed Syllabus for religious education. This represents satisfactory achievement in relation to students' starting points in religious education on entry to the school. Students have a generally sound knowledge and understanding of key features of belief and worship in Christianity, and the other major world faiths studied. They understand the way in which some beliefs, for example the Buddhist attitude to suffering, affect lifestyle. However, they seldom have opportunities to express their ideas or present the results of their investigations at length. Consequently, many students, particularly higher attainers are not stretched enough. In addition the depth and breadth of work vary between different groups of students. This is because timetable constraints make it necessary for some lessons to be taught by teachers who are not specialists in the subject.
82. As at the previous inspection, students in Years 10 and 11 are provided with less than the recommended amount of time to study religious education, although curriculum arrangements now make for better continuity in learning. Little evidence of work completed during the current academic year was available for scrutiny during the inspection. The available evidence, together with the assessment information, tentatively indicates that the majority of students are meeting course expectations. About a half of the current Year 11 are likely to be entered for the short course GCSE examination. These students are beginning to use their knowledge and understanding well, for example in evaluating the extent to which recent events in Iraq meet the 'Just War' criteria. However, some average attaining students who are not following the GCSE course are not stretched enough by the demands of the course they are following. Throughout the school, the content of the programmes of study and the ethos in which they are taught ensure that the subject makes a very good contribution to students' personal development.
83. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and better when taught by teachers with a specialist qualification. Strengths include the use of a good range of learning experiences and

good relationships, which encourages their full participation in lessons. Teachers capitalise on students' positive learning attitudes and good behaviour. In lessons taught by teachers with specialist knowledge, effective questioning and clear explanations encourage students to think more deeply about topics and this promotes more rapid progress. Teachers who are not specialists are well supported with course materials and their conscientious professional approach means that lessons are never less than satisfactory. However, opportunities for challenging and extending students' thinking are not always taken.

84. Subject leadership is good and management is satisfactory. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Standards have risen and although the allocated time in Years 10 and 11 remains below that recommended for the subject all statutory requirements are met. There is a good vision for subject development and an effective core team has been created. This provides a good basis for further improvement. However, not enough use is made of assessment information to guide curriculum planning.

TECHNOLOGY

85. **Applied engineering**, a double award GCSE course, was sampled during the inspection. It is taught in Years 10 and 11 as an optional subject on a linked basis with Stockport College. The present Year 11 is the first cohort of students to follow the course. Two lessons were observed, one in each year. In the Year 10 lesson, attainment was in line with course expectations. In Year 11 attainment was well above course expectations. Students have very good practical skills and very good understanding of engineering practices. Their design and technical drawing skills are well developed. They use a range of ICT software very effectively to record and develop their work. Teaching is very good. The teachers have very good subject knowledge. Lessons are very well planned and good quality resources are provided to support the learning. Students have very positive attitudes to the subject and this contributes to the very good progress being made on all aspects of the course.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in the GCSE textiles course are well above average.
- Students in Years 7 to 9 have very positive attitudes to the subject, which contribute to their very good achievement.
- Teaching is good and often very good.
- Leadership and management of the faculty are very good.
- Not enough attention is given to reviewing and revising student's targets for improvement as projects develop.
- Facilities for computer-aided manufacture are inadequate to support teaching and learning.

Commentary

86. Teachers' assessments show that standards at the end of Year 9 in 2004, as in 2003, were well above average. The standards achieved by the girls are slightly above those of the boys. In the 2003 GCSE examination, the overall proportion of students gaining A* to C grades was above average. In the separate subjects, results in textiles, electronic products and resistant materials were well above average, and results in food were above average. Results in graphic products were average. The results of the boys were well above the national average and the girls were above average. The 2004 results were similar to those obtained in 2003, although slightly lower overall.

87. Inspection evidence indicates that standards at the end of Year 9 are above national expectations. This represents very good achievement as the starting point in Year 7 for the majority of students is below average. Making and constructional skills in all materials are more highly developed than design skills, particularly those of lower-attaining students and students with special educational needs. In general, the girls have slightly better developed design skills than boys. Higher-attaining students have a more secure grasp of subject knowledge and vocabulary. Graphical skills for the middle and higher attaining students are at expected levels.
88. In Year 11, standards are above course expectations in textiles and graphic products, and consistent with expectations in resistant materials. Many of the higher attaining students do not choose to study the subject after Year 9 and so the achievement of those that do is good. The standards achieved by girls are generally above those of boys. Girls' design skills are better developed than those of boys, particularly in the middle to lower attainment band. The work of girls shows more rigorous research investigations when developing their designs. The strength of boys' work continues to be practical making skills.
89. Teaching and learning are at least good in all years, with many lessons that are very good. Teachers use challenging projects and tasks in a variety of materials. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and activities are well planned to make increasing demands on students of all abilities including those with special educational needs. Very good behaviour, high levels of concentration and the very positive attitudes add to the impact of teaching, and help to ensure that achievement is at least good. Questioning, explanations and demonstrations were particularly effective in developing students' knowledge, understanding and skills.
90. The leadership and management of the faculty are very good. The faculty offers a broad curriculum in all years and a wide choice of options in Years 10 and 11. However, students have very little experience of computer-aided manufacture because of the limited amount of equipment available. Teaching and learning are monitored to good effect and assessment information is used very effectively to set targets and review progress. However, students' targets do not have enough detailed intermediate targets for work in progress. Such targets would help to raise students' achievement and their rate of progress. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good with all identified weaknesses tackled effectively.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

91. Drama and media studies were sampled during the inspection. **Media studies** is offered as an additional GCSE option in Years 10 and 11 to higher attaining students, and results are very high with all students gaining a higher grade (A* to C) in the 2004 examinations. In the lesson observed groups of students were in the early stages of creating radio programmes. They demonstrated very positive attitudes and enjoyed the opportunity to think creatively and to plan and develop their own ideas.
92. All students in Years 7 to 9 follow a course in **drama** and it is also offered as an optional GCSE subject. The standards attained by the current Year 9 students are above those expected at this stage in the course, and in Year 11 standards are very high. This is confirmed by recent GCSE results. In 2003, 83 per cent of students gained A* to C grades and in 2004 this figure rose to 92 per cent with no student gaining less than grade D. In 2003 the proportion of students achieving a higher grade nationally was 65 per cent. As attainment is about as expected when students enter the school this represents very good achievement for Years 7 to 9 and excellent achievement for those who study the subject to GCSE level. Lower attaining students are enabled to achieve at the same level in a highly supportive and caring environment. The only barrier to further development of the subject is the accommodation. Neither of the two main spaces is suitable for drama. One is too large with

poor acoustics and used daily for assemblies, thus eating into the available time for afternoon classes. The other is too small and has no specialist facilities. Such committed teachers and students deserve better.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE examination results are above average.
- Assessment procedures do not comply with the school policy and so students are not provided with accurate information on the standard of their work.
- Students' research and practical work are restricted because of a lack of computer resources.
- The integration of the subject into the newly formed performing arts faculty is having a beneficial effect on provision.

Commentary

93. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 show standards to be in line with national expectations. Because students enter Year 7 with varied experiences of art, achievement at the end of Year 9 is satisfactory. The 2003 GCSE examination results, as in previous years, were well above average. These results represent good achievement when standards at the end of Year 9 are taken into account. However, in 2004 there was a dip in the art results, although they remained above average. The 2004 results were affected by a number of factors including some discontinuity in teaching caused by the absence of two teachers on study leave and the restricted time allocation of some students who attend courses at the college of further education. In addition, because the assessment procedures are not consistent with those used in other subjects, students are not provided with clear enough information on the standard of their work and what they must do in order to improve. This particularly affects the work of boys and middle and lower attaining students.
94. Inspection evidence shows that standards in Year 9 are in line with national expectations. Students are able to draw landscapes and silhouettes from observation. In Year 7 students explore artistic influences from other cultures. They develop their own designs from traditional source materials and enjoy the challenge of mixing colour to create authentic final designs. Sketchbooks are used effectively to record ideas for future reference. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above course expectations. Students show increased sophistication in the use of a wide range of techniques and materials such as lino, block and foil prints. The lack of ceramics work and access to ICT restricts the development of students' practical skills. Three-dimensional work in different scales illustrates that students have absorbed the influences of other artists. There are, however, weaknesses in students' ability to describe the similarities and differences between the work of different artists and this restricts the development of critical art awareness.
95. Teaching and learning is satisfactory overall with occasional examples of very good teaching. Teachers' very good personal skills and knowledge influence learning. The most effective teaching takes a range of starting points to challenge students to extend their creativity by examining the work of notable artists and to exchange ideas with their peers. In the best lessons teachers make very good use of praise to encourage the participation of students of all abilities, and good use of question and answer ensures that all students are actively involved. The majority of students work well to time scales and respond positively to the teachers' expectations of work and behaviour. While the majority of students display positive attitudes to the subject, the immature behaviour of a minority of boys disrupts a few lessons. This is most likely to happen when learning tasks are not sufficiently engaging or motivating. Not enough use is made of the National Curriculum levels of attainment to provide students with clear guidance on the standard of their work and what they must do in order to improve.

96. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The creation of a performing arts faculty has added a new dimension to the leadership and management of art. The art team are now part of a wider group, meetings are held regularly and the shared strengths of each department are starting to have a whole-school impact. There are, however, inconsistencies in the analysis and use of assessment information and this is having an adverse impact on achievement. The school has recognised this weakness and action is being taken to tackle it. Very limited technical support is available to the subject. Improvement from the previous inspection has been satisfactory and the potential for further improvement as part of the performing arts faculty is good.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The vision and determination of the new head of department to provide all students with an enjoyable music education are having a clear impact on standards.
- High quality instrumental tuition and many extra-curricular activities offer all student further achievement opportunities.
- Accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory and are having an adverse impact on standards.

Commentary

97. Teachers' assessments show that attainment at the end of Year 9 in 2003 was above average. The 2004 assessments show attainment at the end of Year 9 to be well above average. However, inspection evidence indicates that the end of Year 9 assessments were too high. This was because it was not possible to provide students with their ICT entitlement owing to a shortage of equipment. The proportion of students attaining A* to C grades in the 2003 GCSE examination was above average. The 2004 GCSE examination results were well above the 2003 national average. The GCSE results represent very good achievement.
98. Inspection evidence shows that standards in Year 9 are above national expectations. As students' standards in music on entry to Year 7 are below average overall, attainment at the end of Year 9 represents good achievement. Although the shortage of ICT equipment is still preventing full coverage of the curriculum, the situation will be resolved when the new computer suite is completed. Inspection evidence shows that standards in Year 10 are above course expectations and in line with course expectations in Year 11. Teachers' records show that students from previous years were at a similar level of expectation at this stage in their examination course and that students made more rapid progress in the second half of the school year. This is because extra sessions are held to compensate for the limited computer access and to give more experience with examination questions.
99. Teaching and learning are good overall. In Years 7 to 9 students enjoy the practical music aspect of the course. The majority of students including those with special educational needs make good progress because tasks are well suited to their attainment levels. However, more specific planning is required to extend the challenge offered to higher attaining students. Students' learning is enhanced by teachers' clear explanations and the appropriate allocation of time for the completion of tasks. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject, which they use very well to further students' learning. Some use is made of key words, but occasionally teachers are too easily satisfied with undeveloped answers to their questions. Not enough use is made of musical vocabulary and the time available for practical work is sometimes reduced by too lengthy introductions to lessons. Very good relationships between students and staff are a feature of lessons in the subject.

100. The leadership of the new curriculum leader is very good. Management is good and very good progress has been made since the last inspection. The issues covered in the last report have been tackled. The curriculum is broad and balanced and assessment procedures are being developed in line with the school assessment policy. Despite continued attempts to improve the accommodation, it is unsatisfactory. Noise from adjacent classrooms disturbs lessons and access through the school canteen is restricted. The classroom size is too small for many teaching groups and students have to collect instruments from a store in the main classroom. The shortage of computers is being tackled but there is a shortage of keyboards and non-western percussion instruments. Teachers and visiting instrumental teachers have successfully revitalised the instrumental teaching programme and there is a vibrant programme of extra-curricular activities. Further enrichment opportunities are provided by soloists from Opera North who run workshops in the school. There are important musical links with other schools, which are leading to a joint production of '*Noye's Fludde*'.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above the national expectations and GCSE examination results are improving.
- Teaching and learning are very good and lead to very good achievement.
- Provision for students with special education needs is very good.
- Changing accommodation is inadequate for the numbers of students and grassed teaching areas are in poor condition.
- Students have very positive attitudes to learning and enjoy lessons.
- The subject is very well led and managed.

Commentary

101. GCSE examination results in 2003 were above average and an impressive proportion of students obtained the higher A* to B grades. Although these results represent very good achievement overall, a significant proportion of boys did not achieve as well as expected in relation to their starting points at the beginning of the course. Results improved in 2004. Although girls outperformed boys by a significant margin, analysis of performance indicates that boys' achievement was raised and there was no underachievement.
102. Standards seen in Year 9 are above national expectations. Students generally achieve very well in relation to their average starting points in Year 7. The major strength lies in the students' capacity to work together to plan and evaluate their performance so that even the lower attainers, for example in aerobic dance, reach standards which meet expectations. Participation rates are high and students enjoy their lessons. Students with special education needs related to physical disability achieve particularly well because a teaching assistant is permanently attached to the physical education department. Consequently, a particular expertise exists which allows these students to be fully integrated in lessons and to take part in the challenging and interesting learning activities through which they develop their skills in the subject.
103. Standards in both core physical education lessons and in GCSE classes in Year 11 are well above expectations and students continue to achieve very well. In activities where expert coaches from the local community are used, for example in trampolining, standards are high. The use of video technology to analyse performance also contributes to their very rapid progress in this activity. Carefully planned improvements to teaching and learning in GCSE theory lessons ensure that students are now achieving well in this aspect of the course. A

good proportion of students take part in a very good programme of extra-curricular activities for boys and girls and teams and individuals achieve a very good level of success in competition at local level and beyond. Standards in extra-curricular activities and in the GCSE examination make a good contribution to the overall standards reached throughout the school.

104. Teaching and learning are very good. Most aspects of the teaching are strong. In particular, teachers use their specialist knowledge and understanding well in explanations, demonstrations and in analysing students' performance in order to enable them see how to improve. Expectations are high and teachers are effective role models for students. At the same time the learning is both interesting and enjoyable. Consequently, students are prepared to work hard even in unpleasant weather conditions. Occasionally learning activities do not ensure that students at all attainment levels are fully stretched and in some lessons the concluding evaluation of learning is not thorough enough. Arrangements for the assessment of students' performance are very good.
105. Leadership and management are very good. Subject performance is rigorously analysed and there is a very good vision for subject improvement, which has been translated into very effective action and has also resulted in the creation of a very positive learning ethos. Progress since the last inspection has been very good. Standards and examination results have improved. Most of the key issues identified in the report have been resolved well. However, the changing accommodation remains inadequate for the numbers of students and the grassed playing surfaces shared with the local community continue to suffer from problems of litter and dog fouling.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

106. **Personal, social, and health education** is taught alongside citizenship. Teachers develop strong and supportive relationships with the students in their classes. In the lessons observed during the inspection, teaching and learning were very good. All legal requirements to cover sex education and substance abuse are met. The successful fusion of the original PSHE curriculum with those of careers education and citizenship has produced a series of complementary and inter-related units that make up a very good programme of study. The PSHE curriculum supports students' personal development very well and encourages them to respect different national, religious and ethnic identities.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Outstanding faculty leadership is helping students to become better informed, thoughtful and responsible citizens.
- The dedicated team of teachers are highly committed to achieving the aims and objectives of the citizenship programme.
- Many departments do not identify their specific contributions to the citizenship curriculum and do not provide appropriate statements in students' end of year reports.

Commentary

107. The 2004 teachers' assessments show that by the end of Year 9 the attainment of the large majority of students was well above national expectations. As students do not start citizenship until Year 7 their attainment represents very good achievement. Citizenship is combined with PSHE and careers and taught by a small team of dedicated teachers. Citizenship is also included in schemes of work in most other subjects, but in lessons observed

the connections between the topics being studied and citizenship were not drawn to students' attention.

108. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons observed covered a wide range of topics including sex and relationships education, illegal drugs, the media, and memory and why we forget. Lessons are well prepared and resourced with a wide range of interesting activities to illustrate the concepts being taught. Because students are fully engaged, students of all attainment levels participate whole-heartedly and show much enjoyment in lessons. The supportive learning environment builds students' confidence and encourages them to discuss sensitive issues in a mature manner. Many subjects make valuable contributions to citizenship through the wide variety of visits they offer to places of educational interest. However specific citizenship visits, for example to the law courts, are not possible because of the numbers of students involved in any one year group. To compensate for this, effective use is made of visiting speakers from a wide range of agencies and the contributions that these speakers make considerably enrich students' learning.

109. The leadership and management of the subject are excellent. The head of faculty is the main inspiration behind the organisation and planning of the citizenship programme. With her team of teachers she has amalgamated a revised PSHE scheme with citizenship and careers. The curriculum is excellent and regular reviews ensure that the units are relevant to students' personal development. The scheme of work is imaginative and supported by comprehensive lesson plans and a suitable range of resources. An audit has been carried out to identify the specific contributions that other subjects make to the curriculum programme, but a lack of time is preventing any monitoring of this provision. Assessment procedures are very effective and include opportunities for self-assessment and peer assessment in addition to teacher assessment. However, the students' subject reports do not all contain specific reference to the citizenship element covered and the life education reports do not contain a statement of the Level attained. Nevertheless the subject has been very successfully established and is now a strength of the school. The potential for further improvement is very good.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

poor (6); very poor (7).