

INSPECTION REPORT

ST THOMAS MORE RC COLLEGE

Denton, Manchester

LEA area: Tameside

Unique reference number: 106271

Headteacher: Miss J Burns

Lead inspector: Mrs J Straw

Dates of inspection: 18 – 21 October 2004

Inspection number: 268467

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

© Crown copyright 2004

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Type of school: Comprehensive
School category: Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils: 11 – 16
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 752

School address: Town Lane
Denton
Manchester
Postcode: M34 6AF

Telephone number: 0161 336 2743
Fax number: 0161 337 9701

Appropriate authority: Governing body
Name of chair of governors: Fr. V Cavey

Date of previous inspection: 24 May 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This smaller than average Roman Catholic comprehensive school is situated in the centre of Denton 8 miles from the city of Manchester. There are slightly more girls than boys in the school overall. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. There are very few pupils from ethnic minority groups or for whom English is not their first language. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is above the national average, as is the percentage of pupils with statements of special educational needs. The majority of the special needs are related to moderate learning or behavioural difficulties. The school has a special unit for autistic children. At present there are 7 children educated within this unit. Attainment on entry is broadly average. Very few pupils join or leave the school other than at the usual time. The school has recently been awarded specialist college status for mathematics and computing and also gained a careers partnership award in 2004.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
32122	J Straw	Lead inspector	
11457	J Beattie	Lay inspector	
32113	J Byrom	Team inspector	Mathematics
23462	M Comer	Team inspector	English English as an additional language
21866	D Tracey	Team inspector	Science
14841	M Duffey	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Vocational subjects
32329	A Stafford	Team inspector	Art and design
10308	J Paddick	Team inspector	Design and technology
32147	A Wallis	Team inspector	Geography Work Related Learning
19452	A Pearson	Team inspector	History
3793	J Ratcliffe	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages
11975	T McIntosh-Clark	Team inspector	Music
31821	B McCann	Team inspector	Citizenship Physical education
7602	E Milroy	Team inspector	Special educational needs Special educational needs unit

The inspection contractor was:

Nord Anglia School Inspection Services
 Anglia House
 Carrs Road
 Cheadle
 Stockport
 SK8 2LA

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

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	8
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	12
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	18
AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDERS RESOURCE BASE	21
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	22
AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	40

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE INSPECTION REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **good school with many very good features** that provides **good value for money**. Driven by the dynamic and committed headteacher, the school is ambitious for further improvement. In response to good teaching pupils achieve well and overall standards are above average. The school provides a caring and supportive atmosphere in which pupils do well and develop into mature young people. The Christian ethos of the school underpins all that it seeks to achieve and informs every aspect of school life.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Teaching and learning are good in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory in Years 7 to 9.
- Standards are well above average in mathematics.
- This is a fully inclusive school in which every child and every employee really does matter.
- Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported in the Special (ASD) Resource Base.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is very good.
- The high quality of care, support and guidance which is offered to pupils ensures that the school is one in which pupils feel secure.
- New equipment gained as a result of the recent college status bid has greatly enhanced provision for information and communication technology skills (ICT) but the school has not yet ensured that all departments have equal access to the new technology.
- Pupils behave well, have positive attitudes to learning and maintain very high levels of attendance.
- A low time allocation in Years 10 and 11 means that pupils are not able to complete the programmes of study in citizenship in sufficient detail.

Overall the school has made good improvements since the time of the last inspection in 1999 and has dealt fully with all key issues. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is now a strength of the school. All the issues highlighted, including matters of health and safety, have been dealt with. The recommendations regarding information and communication technology (ICT) have been put into place, the only exception being the teaching of ICT within other subjects. However, the school is now well-equipped to address this issue.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Achievement is good overall. Pupils join the school with broadly average levels of attainment, though a high proportion of them have special educational needs (SEN). Standards remain average, at the end of Year 9, except in mathematics in which they are above average. National test results in 2003 showed English slightly below average, mathematics above average and science in line with the average. In 2004 all these results improved which shows that standards at the end of Year 9 are rising. Achievement is satisfactory across all subjects and good in mathematics. GCSE results were in line with the national average overall in 2003 but were above average for grades A*-C and A*-G. Standards are currently above average overall at the end of Year 11 and achievement is good. In mathematics it is very good. Standards seen during the inspection in science were better than recent results and results at GCSE are improving in English and food studies. Girls and boys and pupils with special educational needs are achieving well during their five years in the school.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good overall. Pupils are keen to learn and their positive attitudes make a strong contribution to their achievements. Behaviour is good. Pupils show respect for each other, their teachers and the visitors they meet in school. Pupils' interest in school life is exemplified in their well above average levels of attendance.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The **quality of education** provided by the school is **good**. **Teaching and learning** are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, good in Years 10 and 11 and **good** overall. Teaching is very good in mathematics and physical education. In Years 7 to 9 pupils' learning is not yet sufficiently supported by access to ICT across a number of subjects and homework is used less effectively. Overall, teachers are hard-working and committed. Many are coming to grips with the new technologies provided by the successful college status bid and are using interactive white boards with growing confidence. The SEN unit ensures very good learning experiences for pupils with special educational needs. The curriculum is **good**, preparing pupils successfully for their future. It is enriched by a good range of out of school activities. The school's procedures for the care, guidance and support of pupils are **good**. Extensive links with the community and partner schools make a **very good** contribution to pupils' learning and achievement.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. Governance is good.

Leadership is very good. The school benefits from the passionate commitment of the headteacher who, although a relatively recent appointment, made an immediate impact on the school by overseeing the successful bid for specialist college status. She is well supported by her equally committed and able deputies, assistant headteachers and senior manager who, together, make an effective and successful team. The work of the governors is good. They provide support and guidance for the school and act as a critical friend. **Management is good.** The school is reflective, is well aware of its own strengths and weaknesses and committed to raising standards further. Management procedures for the monitoring and review of its work are systematic and thorough.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The school's partnership with parents is good. Parents are very supportive of the school and it has their confidence. In particular, they are pleased that their children are expected to work hard and that they make good progress. Parents also are very pleased with the support provided for lower achieving pupils. Pupils express considerable support for the school. They enjoy the challenge of the teaching and participate in many activities with enthusiasm. They feel trusted by their teachers. Pupils believe that there is some bullying within the school but they feel that it is dealt with effectively. They are satisfied that they are consulted on some issues.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Continue to raise the overall quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9.
- Increase the access of all departments to ICT and its use to enhance the teaching of ICT across the curriculum.
- Increase the time allocation for citizenship in Years 10 and 11.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Current academic standards are **average** in Year 9 and **above average** in Year 11. Pupils' achievement is **good** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve better in Years 10 and 11 than they do in Years 7 to 9.
- Standards are currently average but are rising in Years 7 to 9.
- Standards are well above average in mathematics and above average in English, modern foreign languages, science and physical education.
- Pupils with special educational needs achieve well because their work is well supported by teachers and learning support assistants.
- Higher-attaining pupils are not achieving as well as they should in some subjects.
- ICT skills are not yet being developed sufficiently in other subjects.

Commentary

1. Pupils enter the school with broadly average levels of attainment. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 show that pupils matched the national average in science, were slightly below average in English and were above average in mathematics. Compared with schools with similar prior attainment in Year 6 their results were above average in mathematics, but below average in English and science. Girls do slightly better than boys in English but the reverse is true in mathematics and science. Higher-attaining pupils attain less well in English than they do in science and mathematics. Because of the variations in results over the last 5 years the trend in the school's average national curriculum points for all three subjects together is below the national trend. Achievement, therefore, for this group of pupils is satisfactory overall but good in mathematics. In 2004, results for all three subjects rose. The school exceeded its challenging targets in mathematics and science but did not quite meet them in English. The school has a number of strategies to improve standards in Years 7 to 9 and the evidence suggests that they are beginning to work. These strategies include development of a new assessment for learning procedure and the application of a wide range of teaching methods tailored to suit the learning styles of different pupils. In the current Year 9 standards are above average in mathematics, science and physical education so that pupils' achievement in these subjects is good. Pupils' standards of work are average in all other subjects and their achievement is satisfactory.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	32.3 (33.3)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	36.7 (34.6)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	33.2 (32.3)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 137 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. In 2003, pupils' results at GCSE were the best results ever achieved by the school. The overall points score is graded average in national comparisons but this conceals the fact that results both for 5 or more A*-C grades and 5 or more A*-G grades were well above average when compared nationally. Results fell in 2004 but the pass rate for Grades A*-C was still 61.5% and well above the school's target. Results for 5 or more A*-G grades did not meet the

school's target. Standards at GCSE have been rising steadily for the past three years but because of a dip in results in 2001 and the dip in 2004, the school's trend is below the national trend. In the current Year 11, standards are well above average in mathematics and above average in English, modern foreign languages, science, history and physical education because of focussed and effective teaching and learning. Standards are average in ICT, design and technology, geography, art, music and citizenship. Standards seen during the inspection in science were better than recent results because of consistently good teaching, a focus on key words and improved assessment procedures. Pupils achieve very well in mathematics. They achieve well in English, modern foreign languages, science, history, music and physical education. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in all other subjects.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	68 (58)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	93 (98)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	35.9 (37.1)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 136 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. The school has only recently been able to invest in better equipment for information and communication technology (ICT) as a result of the successful bid for specialist college status. Much new equipment was installed during the summer of 2004. Provision for teaching ICT as a subject in its own right is now very good. However, many other departments, for example, modern foreign languages, geography, history and design and technology do not yet have sufficient access to new equipment to raise standards further. The school will address this issue during the rest of this school year.
4. Many pupils with special educational needs enter school with below and sometimes well below average standards of literacy and numeracy which hamper a sound start to their secondary education. The school makes very good provision to identify pupils' needs quickly in order to support them effectively. By the end of Year 9, these pupils have made significant progress. Standards of speaking and listening are better than writing for most. Teachers work hard to improve mathematical competence and pupils show that they take pride in their success even in simple operations such as subtracting simple numbers. Pupils with emotional social and behavioural difficulties are generally managed effectively by teachers, sometimes with the help of learning support assistants so that barriers to learning are reduced. The inclusion unit also gives very good support to those who are not coping well with secondary routines, experiencing personal or social difficulties, prolonged absence or falling behind with coursework. These measures help to raise standards.
5. Intensive teaching of pupils with literacy and numeracy difficulties either as individuals or small groups increases achievement. The positive attitudes to learning of most pupils take them forward very well. Generally pupils achieve well because their individual education plans give good direction to teachers so that they are aware of pupils' needs and how to help them achieve their targets. In some subjects such as physical education teachers modify the plans successfully to meet the needs of the pupils in specific skills. However, in modern foreign languages pupils with SEN are less well served because the teaching does not focus sufficiently on the communication aspects of the language. Boys and girls achieve at about the same rate.

6. The school has compiled a register of the most competent pupils. It also contains the names of pupils who are talented in specific subjects. In physical education the highest attainers are entered for GCSE before Year 11. A special course is offered to the most competent in ICT. In addition to the normal provision, opportunities exist for the most able pupils in science and mathematics to study these subjects for an enhancement day each year. The senior leadership team has recognised that some higher-attaining pupils are not achieving the highest A* and A grades, for example, in history, and so this is an area for development. There has been insufficient monitoring of their progress matched to their targets.
7. The school monitors the results of girls and boys as well as pupils from ethnic minorities. Such monitoring shows that there is little difference in their relative achievement.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The attendance level in school is **very good**. Pupils have **good attitudes** to school. Behaviour is **good** throughout the school day. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **very good** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are keen to attend school and the attendance level is high.
- Attitudes to learning are good and pupils consider that they are taught well.
- Pupils behave well throughout the day and their good behaviour in lessons contributes to their good achievement.
- Pupils who have special educational needs learn well and make good progress in response to the school's good provision for them.
- The school promotes a strong sense of community and pays very good attention to developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.
- Pupils are very willing to take on responsibilities within school.
- Relationships are good and bullying is not tolerated.

Commentary

8. Pupils, their parents and the school all co-operate very well to achieve a level of attendance which is well above the national average. Pupils are almost unanimous in saying that they like coming to school. The school has very good procedures to monitor attendance and responds immediately to any unexplained absence. The form tutors and heads of year work closely to monitor pupils' absence and the education welfare service provides good support for families when a pupil's absence record gives cause for concern. If necessary, pupils returning to school after an absence have very good extra support. The school insists on punctuality. The school day starts promptly and pupils respond very well to the expectations and demands of a busy community.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (94.7 %)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.9	School data	0.2
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.

9. Pupils have good attitudes to learning. They listen well and work well individually, in pairs and in groups. They make good progress because they are willing to persevere, concentrate and learn without being distracted from their work. Pupils who have special educational needs make good progress both in class and when they are working in smaller groups.
10. The large majority of pupils respond well to the school's very high expectations of good behaviour. As a result lessons are disrupted rarely. Occasional incidents of unacceptable behaviour are taken seriously and the school has very good procedures to support pupils who are temporarily unable to learn in class or who might hinder the learning of others. Serious incidents of misbehaviour result in exclusion. During the last school year, 22 pupils were excluded temporarily on one or more occasions and one pupil was excluded permanently. The school has a good policy and procedures to identify and eliminate bullying and racism. Incidents are taken very seriously and the majority of pupils say that bullying is not a problem and that they feel confident and secure. Incidents of racism are rare but are always taken very seriously. A few pupils and their parents have concerns about bullying. The school is always alert to any such concern and support is available for any pupil who feels harassed. The small number of pupils from ethnic minority groups are well integrated into school.

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	629	34	1
White – Irish	6	1	0
White – any other White background	12	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	5	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	9	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	89	0	0

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

11. Pupils take on a good range of responsibilities within school. They develop good leadership and communication skills, secure in the knowledge that they are supported very well by their form tutors, heads of year and the senior management. Some Year 9 pupils train as “buddies” so that they can support other pupils, when needed, and can help pupils who are new to the school. Pupils who are elected to the school council and the sports council are developing confidence in their roles and their contribution to the school community. Prefects from Year 11 help to control movement about the school efficiently and effectively.
12. Relationships in school are good. The school promotes a harmonious atmosphere in which every member of the school community has the right to respect and the responsibility to respect others. Teachers set very good examples of team spirit, taking part in sports events and organising a wide range of activities outside the classrooms as well as providing pupils with extra academic and pastoral support when needed. Many pupils take a very active part in extra-curricular activities.

13. The school's sense of mission shines through all that it seeks to achieve. The spiritual dimension is embedded in the school's Mission Statement which in turn underpins the ethos of the school and the teaching and learning on a day-to-day basis. Pupils are given frequent opportunities for reflection in daily assemblies and form time, and "Reflection Days" are organised annually for pupils in Years 7 to 9. Teachers, who are well supported by effective in-service training, encourage wonder and reflection in lessons in most subjects when the occasion presents itself. The capacity of pupils to reflect on their surroundings is evident when, for example, they are taken on field trips to the Lake District. As a result, pupils' spiritual development is very good.
14. Pupils' moral development is firmly founded on Gospel principles. The school community operates in a culture of mutual respect, coupled with a strong sense of justice. In subjects such as physical education they learn the importance of living by rules. Individually and collectively, pupils are prepared to denounce instances of injustice they witness, and they learn to value one another's different abilities and talents. Each year, pupils raise significant sums for local and world-wide charities such as Oxfam and CAFOD.
15. There are good opportunities for pupils' social development within lessons in most subjects, in which, by working in groups they learn to co-operate, to listen to one another, and to make collective decisions. A number of clubs take place in the lunch hour in physical education, music, art and drama, and large numbers of pupils are involved in Christmas events, and in the "Summer Extravaganza". Visits to the theatre are organised regularly, and an exchange with a French school takes place annually.
16. Pupils' cultural development is good. Principles of tolerance are reinforced in religious education, where they learn about other faiths, in citizenship, and in PHSE lessons which, for Years 10 and 11, include anti-racist education. Lessons in English, music, art, drama and dance provide pupils with opportunities to explore and understand the traditions of other cultures.
17. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development was a strength at the time of the last inspection and this has been well maintained.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is **good**. Teaching and learning are **good** overall. The assessment of pupils is **good** overall. The curriculum is good in meeting the needs of all pupils and especially those with special educational needs. Resources for learning are good. The accommodation is clean and bright but cramped because of the growth of the school. The care system support pupils very well.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is **good** overall. Assessment procedures are **good** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good overall but better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9.
- Teaching through *pupils'* use of ICT is under-developed in many subjects.
- Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported and achieve well.
- Assessment is very good in English, physical education and for pupils with special educational needs.
- Elsewhere, assessment is used effectively to raise standards but not enough use is made of data to target underachievement in higher-attaining pupils.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 98 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (1 %)	23 (23 %)	50 (51 %)	21 (21 %)	3 (3 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)

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

18. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are not as good as in Years 10 and 11. The school agrees with this evaluation and is taking steps to improve teaching at all levels. Although a high percentage of the lessons seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 9 were good or better (72%) teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are not yet sufficiently supported and enhanced by access to ICT which develops pupils' independent learning skills. Homework is not used as effectively in Years 7 to 9 as it is in Years 10 and 11. Some teaching in Years 7 to 9 is less demanding and time is used less effectively, for example in design and technology, geography, history and art and design. Teaching and learning overall in Years 7 to 9 are satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11 teaching, learning and achievement are all good.
19. Characteristics of good and very good teaching include expert subject knowledge particularly in English, mathematics and science, stimulating; enthusiastic teaching, particularly in physical education and mathematics; high expectations, for example in modern foreign languages, and the very willing response of pupils to learn. The new interactive whiteboards are having a significant impact, bringing variety and challenge to lessons. The best lessons are well planned so that pupils know what is expected of them and are productive. Lessons move at a brisk pace, with very good relationships. This is particularly the case again in mathematics and physical education. The national strategy to improve teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is being used effectively to raise standards to match those in Years 10 and 11. Time is used effectively. Examples of very good teaching were seen in English, drama, mathematics, science, ICT, design and technology, modern foreign languages, music, business studies and physical education. There was one outstanding lesson in physical education in which pupils' learning was excellent because all pupils exerted considerable effort, both mental and physical, in response to challenging enthusiastic teaching. The result of this good teaching is that pupils learn well and standards are rising. There is good achievement in many lessons and pupils make good progress.
20. Only three unsatisfactory lessons were seen during the inspection. These lessons were not sufficiently challenging for the pupils concerned. Time was wasted as pupils queued up for the teacher's attention in some elements of design and technology and art. Behaviour was unsatisfactory as a result. The pace was slower in some art and music lessons. Knowledge was not consolidated and some lessons lacked focus and direction in ICT. Too narrow a range of teaching and learning styles was used in some geography lessons.
21. The teaching of ICT in specialist lessons is good, but there is insufficient application of ICT in other areas of the curriculum. The current lack of access to sufficient use of ICT in many subjects means that some pupils are not developing independent learning skills. Too little learning takes place through the medium of ICT. The application of pupils' ICT skills is under-developed in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages, geography, art and design, music and citizenship. However, the recent investment in ICT equipment following the successful specialist college status bid means the school is well placed to address this issue.
22. For pupils with special educational needs teaching and learning are very good when pupils receive one-to-one tuition. Lessons are very well planned with appropriate activities to keep pupils interested. Because of their good attitudes most pupils are ready to learn as much as

they can. They show curiosity and raise their own questions readily with the assurance that their answers will be treated with respect. Abstract and formal thinking are encouraged very well especially for those pupils who find it hard to appreciate idiom and metaphor. The organisation of pupils into sets, and work closely matched to their needs in many subjects, enhances learning. However, for those pupils with special educational needs in large groups the setting arrangements are not sufficiently fine-tuned to ensure good learning and achievement. Learning assistants working under the guidance of teachers promote learning effectively. Professional development is good and keeps pace with changing need.

23. The Senior Leadership Team has a very good understanding of assessment as an essential tool for raising standards. In-service training has been well used to work towards consistency across the school. A clear assessment policy provides a good structure and framework, a strength of which is to allow subject departments some flexibility, leading to pupil involvement in recording their own marks and setting their own targets. It is thorough and responsive to individual needs. Attention has been given across the school to marking and to the use of national curriculum levels in subjects, so that pupils know which stage they have reached and what they need to do to improve. The resulting information goes to subject leaders, to year tutors and to parents, who are involved most closely in an Individual Action Day early in Year 10. A weakness is that some of the data is not easily used by a non-specialist. Some heads of department are not sufficiently adept in using the large amount of data available to them to precisely compare what more able pupils *have* achieved with what they might have been expected to achieve on the basis of their prior attainment. The school intends to provide in-service training for the heads of department who are less adept in analysing data.
24. As a result of monitoring by senior staff, assessment is now very good in English, physical education, and for pupils with special needs. It is good in mathematics, science, modern languages and ICT, and satisfactory in geography, history, design and technology, and music, where it would be good were it not for the failure to use national curriculum levels. There is still a weakness in art and citizenship. The school has made good progress in refining its use of assessment since the last inspection.

The curriculum

The curriculum is **good**. Opportunities for enrichment and extra-curricular activities are **good**. The school's accommodation is **satisfactory** and the resources are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has an innovative curriculum enriched by a good range of vocational courses.
- The curriculum provided for pupils with special educational needs in the special unit is very good. (See Section 10)
- Some pupils face a relatively restricted choice of subjects in Years 10 and 11.
- Insufficient time is allocated to citizenship to enable pupils to cover the programmes of study in Years 10 and 11 in sufficient detail.
- There is a good programme of extra-curricular activities.
- Accommodation is cramped but the school makes the best use of the accommodation available and keeps it clean and well-maintained.
- Resources for learning are good overall but standards are restricted in resistant materials by the lack of CAM CAD facilities.

Commentary

25. Weaknesses identified at the time of the previous inspection have been addressed. Breaches in requirements have been eliminated and curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs is no longer unsatisfactory. In addition, the decision to shorten lesson times

and alter the pattern of the school day has contributed to an improvement in pupils' behaviour and attitudes to work in the afternoon session confirmed both by the inspection findings and the school's own monitoring procedures. Time allocation between subjects is now equitable other than in the case of the recently introduced national curriculum subject, citizenship, which is currently taught as part of the personal, social and health education programme. Pupils are not always clear about whether they are studying citizenship or personal, social and health education. The time allocated to citizenship prevents pupils from reaching higher levels of achievement.

26. Since the previous inspection, the school has embarked on a programme of innovative curriculum development after extensive consultation within the school and expert professional advice from outside. The developments have also been firmly based on the school's commitment to inclusion implicit in its mission statement. Subject leaders have taken advantage of the freedom they now have to choose means of grouping pupils in their curriculum areas in Years 7 to 9, which best suit their subject learning requirements. Most pupils are now able to study two modern foreign languages in Years 8 and 9. The school's monitoring of these relatively new arrangements indicates that it is beginning to have a positive effect on pupils' achievement.
27. In Years 10 and 11 learning pathways have been developed, aimed at allowing pupils to choose a range of courses best suited to their individual needs and career aspirations. This has been supported by empowering subject leaders to adopt different examination courses within their curriculum which best suit the needs of particular groups of pupils. In general this is working well, for example with the introduction of an applied science course for some lower attaining pupils in addition to the theoretical courses more usually found. A good range of vocational courses has been introduced including some which successfully meet the needs of pupils who have learning difficulties or have emotional and behavioural problems. These courses contribute significantly to the Work Related Learning programme for all students. However, within the optional element, the construction of the pathways means that some pupils face a relatively restricted choice, for example in aspects of the design and technology curriculum. In addition some lessons in modern foreign languages have to take place outside normal school hours. However, this was provided at the request of pupils who were thus able to have a greater choice. The adoption of a two-week timetable has helped facilitate innovation but in a few cases the length of time between lessons affects the continuity of learning.
28. Pupils benefit from a good programme of enrichment opportunities and extra-curricular activities. Homework and coursework clubs exist in a number of subjects and there is a very good programme of sport including opportunities for older pupils to work with younger members of the school community or with the partner primary schools. Opportunities in music are improving after a fallow period.
29. The school's accommodation is satisfactory but rather cramped. The buildings are clean and well maintained. Bright and up to date displays make the classrooms and corridors a pleasant and welcoming environment. All departments have subject rooms but some are shared with other departments. In art this limits the extent and quality of art displays. The school has improved its accommodation considerably. For example, a new sports hall and drainage of school fields has improved the provision in physical education. The learning resource area has been refurbished and presents an attractive learning environment. It is, however, small for the number of pupils in the school. Although science accommodation has improved a number of science lessons are taught in ordinary classrooms.
30. Overall the match of teachers to the needs of the curriculum is good. There is a sufficient number of well qualified and committed teachers to teach all subjects of the national curriculum. The provision of support staff is good overall. The school has been able to increase the number of its support staff as a result of its newly acquired special status. The attachment of learning support assistants to the core subjects is helping to improve standards.

31. Resources are good. Provision for ICT has improved considerably. However, there is a lack of computers in modern foreign languages and art. Standards in resistant materials are restricted by the current lack of computer-aided manufacturing and computer-aided design facilities (CAMCAD).

Care, guidance and support

The school provides very well for all pupils' care, welfare, health and safety. Procedures to monitor and promote pupils' personal and academic development are **good**. The school has satisfactory arrangements to seek pupils' views about issues affecting the whole school and in setting and reviewing personal targets.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Procedures to care for the health, safety and individual needs of every member of the school community are very good.
- Personal support, advice and guidance are very good.
- Procedures to welcome pupils and settle them into the school community are very good.
- The programme of careers education is very good.

Commentary

32. Pupils' pastoral care is very good and is a strength of the school. Child protection procedures are in place and all staff know what to do if they have any concerns. Very good health and safety procedures include careful risk assessments throughout the school, during curriculum activities and when pupils are on visits. Internet access policies are in place and followed closely. Regular monitoring of premises and immediate attention to any reported hazards provide a safe environment. Provision of breakfast, break and lunchtime facilities are good, well organised and promote healthy living. The school has very good procedures to meet any pupil's specific care and medical needs and works effectively with outside agencies. Toilet facilities are well maintained but are not available in every building.
33. Form tutors, heads of year and the senior management team monitor pupils' personal and academic progress and are aware if pupils are not achieving their best. Following assessment of pupils' progress in each subject the school has good procedures to provide advice, guidance and extra help for pupils who may be having difficulties with their academic work. However, in some subjects assessment is not always sufficiently precise to make sure that every pupil is achieving as well as they possibly can. The school's clear policy, that any form of bullying is never tolerated or taken for granted, is known to all pupils. Nevertheless, a minority of pupils say that they do not feel that they have an adult they can talk to. However, inspectors found that the school has very good procedures to monitor pupils' behaviour and well-being which enable the school to help individual pupils through any difficulties, working closely with their parents and, if necessary, with outside agencies. Procedures to support pupils who have behaviour difficulties are excellent.
34. The school provides very good careers education. From Year 7 onwards pupils are encouraged to develop skills such as team work and relating their learning to life and work experiences outside school. The Connexions adviser makes a valuable contribution to pastoral care in school, knows the pupils well and is always ready to give careers advice and help pupils and their parents with important choices of courses studied in Years 10 and 11 and post 16.
35. Procedures to introduce pupils to secondary school are very good. Very close links with the primary schools make sure that every individual pupil's needs are known by their new form tutor. All Year 6 pupils have good opportunities to visit the school during the year. They take

part in sports events and festivals so that when they arrive into Year 7 they are eager and ready to take part in the many curricular and extra-curricular opportunities open to them. Year 9 pupils train as “buddies” for any of the new pupils who need help and support. Pupils quickly make friends during a day visit early on in the Autumn term and they settle into school very well.

36. Procedures to involve pupils in the work and development of the school are satisfactory and the majority of pupils say that the school is interested in their views. Members of the school council have introduced changes in school and represent pupils' views to the senior management and they are given reasons if their ideas are not acted on. The 16 pupils who form the sports council have discussed a fair play charter and made decisions about extra-curricular sport, festivals and coaching. All pupils are involved in setting personal and learning targets and in evaluating their achievements.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has good procedures to work in partnership with parents and this has had a significant effect on the school's achievement of specialist college status. Partnership with the community, including the church and parishes, the business community and community links in France are very good. Links with other schools and colleges are very good with some outstanding features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The Parent Teacher Association makes a very good contribution to the school.
- Parents have good information and guidance on making decisions about their children's education but annual records of achievement do not always identify individual strengths and weaknesses in each subject.
- The educational support programmes are outstanding.
- Community links and partnerships with other schools and colleges are very good.

Commentary

37. From the time their children first arrive in school parents have good opportunities to meet and consult with staff. They receive regular newsletters about school events and information about their children's progress. The records of achievement, completed every year, give parents an indication of their children's attainment and effort but do not always give a clear picture of their strengths and weaknesses in each subject. In design and technology, reports do not give an evaluation of pupils' achievement in each area of the subject.
38. Parents are given good guidance and information to make important decisions about choices which will affect their children's future education and careers. The school has very good procedures to involve parents in efforts to help their children through any difficulties and to meet any specific needs. Every two years parents are invited to complete a questionnaire giving their views on the school. Following the questionnaire the school has taken steps to improve the amount of information for parents and meet any concerns about homework.
39. A few parents have expressed concerns about bullying. Teachers talk to parents by telephone and in person whenever necessary and are keen to meet any parent who has concerns about their child's education or well-being. Pupils' log books include good opportunities for dialogue between parent and form tutor and the school has a good policy to write letters home praising pupils' good achievements.
40. The Parent Teacher Association is very active and has made an outstanding contribution to the school including a significant contribution to the funding of the bid for specialist college status. Parents are well represented on the governing body. The school has good plans to use information and communication technology to further increase parents' involvement in their children's education.

41. Links with the community are very good. The school works very closely with the Catholic Church and all the local parishes are represented on the governing body. These links contribute very well to pupils' care and spiritual development. Governors bring a range of expertise and experience to the school and very good links with the local business partnership and with individual businesses enhance pupils' learning from Year 7 onwards. Pupils benefit from support from local business and other personnel to learn about teamwork, leadership, care for others and the world of work. The careers education curriculum includes very good use of local partnerships. Very good links with the Twin Town in France have enriched and extended the experience of pupils who visited the town and hosted French pupils in their homes.
42. Links with other schools and colleges are very good with some outstandingly good features. Procedures to provide pupils with a smooth transfer from primary schools are very good. Very good links with local colleges widen and enrich the curriculum to include courses which are not offered in school and provide opportunities for work based learning. Links with post 16 colleges help pupils' learning in business studies and extend the provision of science and mathematics for high attaining pupils.

Example of outstanding practice

The School Sports Co-ordinator scheme provides excellent links with primary schools. A large number of pupils from Year 10 take the Junior Sports Leadership award organising sports festivals for the three junior feeder schools. The festivals have included a wide range of events including football, netball, dance, volleyball and health and fitness. A member of staff has visited the primary schools to teach the Junior Play Leader award to pupils in Years 5 and 6. Primary lunch-time supervisors have attended a workshop of ideas on how to plan and organise lunch-time activities. As a result all three schools now have trained adults who supervise and help with lunchtime play. Members of the PE department have trained teaching staff of the feeder schools in the delivery and content of PE lessons including schemes of work and assessment materials. Consequently the primary school pupils have a "flying start" to their PE at St Thomas More school.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. The work of the governors is **good**. The headteacher gives very good leadership. Leadership of other senior and middle managers is good. The school is well managed and runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher inspires the whole school community to strive for their best. She is well supported by a committed and highly competent senior leadership team.
- There is an on-going determination to improve teaching and learning and to raise standards.
- The school is committed to staff development at all levels.
- The school's financial management is good.
- Systems for the induction of new staff and for the on-going support of newly qualified teachers are particularly effective.
- Some heads of department are not sufficiently adept in using the data that the school provides to monitor and measure progress.

Commentary

43. Although the headteacher has been in post for only 18 months she made an immediate impact on the school by overseeing the successful bid for mathematics and computing status. She is held in high regard by the governors, staff, parents and pupils because of her total commitment to the school. She has a powerful vision of how the school can develop and grow and is concerned with all aspects of the importance of every individual. She began her term of office by holding a 2 day session in which the staff and governors reappraised the school's mission statement and considered how it must lie at the heart of every action taken by the school.

44. The headteacher is supported by two able and committed deputies, two assistant headteachers and the senior manager. Together they make a robust and effective team with a good balance of talent and qualities. They share the same vision and sense of purpose. They are open to change and constantly seek ways of improving the school. They set good role models as leaders of teaching and learning and in the example they set as life-long learners. They have made a focus on teaching and learning one of their key priorities and the results of this are already seen in the improving standards in the last national tests in Years 7 to 9.
45. This is an outstandingly inclusive school where every pupil and every employee is valued, encouraged and respected. Pupils achieve well in their five years in the school. The school improvement plan identifies all the key areas where the school wants to improve and links these in with its overall mission. Some staff are given curriculum time to work on the school improvement plan throughout the year. They conduct research, develop new ideas and seek to enhance the learning experience for pupils. As a result many staff feel they have ownership of the progress and development of their school.
46. Management of the school is good. A well-proven system of performance management is in place and is closely linked to a very effective programme of professional development. For example, seven subject leaders have taken part, or are in the process of taking part, in the 'Leading from the Middle' initiative. A strong focus of this is on self-evaluation. Managers are encouraged to become more aware of leadership styles and to understand better their own strengths and weaknesses. The recent re-structuring of the pastoral system has enabled the school to create more opportunities for professional development within the school. Newly qualified teachers are given very good support and the opportunity to meet together regularly as a group with a deputy head to share their experiences and discuss good practice. Systems for introducing staff new to the school are very good and all recently appointed teachers say they felt very well informed and supported. Performance management for support staff will begin in the second half of this term. Some learning assistants already have additional responsibilities such as visiting pupils during work experience. (Provision for) the management of SEN is very good, despite recent staff changes. The assigned and very capable governor is extremely supportive and knowledgeable so there has been little interruption to development.
47. The use of data by the school is extensive but not all heads of department use it with equal effectiveness and some need training and support in order to develop better expertise in this area. Management is aware of inconsistencies in the use of data and is tackling this by creating opportunities for departments to share good practice, and make the data more 'user-friendly' so as to build up staff confidence in using it. The school monitors the performance of different groups and will use its new assessment tracker system to monitor the effectiveness of their actions to improve teaching and learning and raise standards.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	2,502,555
Total expenditure	2,576,602
Expenditure per pupil	2,789

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	188,655
Balance carried forward to the next	114,608

48. Financial management is good. The school has clear and consistent procedures that meet the audit requirements and are effectively managed. The school has recently received additional funding as a result of gaining specialist college status. This funding is being well used. The school always seeks best value in investments and expenditure, is cost effective and gives good value for money. The school has allocated the recent outstanding balance to capital expenditure on two new classrooms.

49. The governance of the school is good. Governors are fully involved in setting targets, debating key issues, formulating and monitoring the school development plan, and reviewing policies. They understand the main strengths and weaknesses of the school well, and challenge and probe carefully when standards appear to be too low. They firmly believe that low standards take over when good performance is not recognised. The school meets all statutory requirements.

WORK RELATED LEARNING

The school's provision for work related learning (WRL) is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All pupils are well-prepared for participation in work experience.
- A good range of vocational course is offered which contributes to pupils' understanding of the work-place.
- Very good careers advice is available in school.
- Work related learning is not yet fully co-ordinated across all subjects.

Commentary

50. Provision for WRL meets statutory requirements. A good range of work related activities takes place which enable pupils to learn for work and through work. However, these activities are not yet co-ordinated into a planned programme which allows pupils' WRL to be fully assessed and monitored. All pupils in Year 11 take part in work experience that is well-planned and gives them a good understanding of the skills, attitudes and qualities that are valued in the workplace. Pupils have access to very good quality careers advice from teachers and the Connexions service. Teaching and learning in a range of vocational courses, for example, in business studies, applied science and ICT also make a valuable contribution to pupils' knowledge of the world of work. Through all of these activities pupils gain a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of WRL.
51. The leadership and management of WRL are satisfactory. A co-ordinator for the subject has recently been appointed and areas, such as work experience, where relevant learning is taking place have been identified. Appropriate priorities have been identified for development, which include introducing more rigorous systems to monitor pupils' standards and achievement. Planning for WRL is inconsistent across subject departments and staff have yet to receive training in the area.

AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDERS RESOURCE BASE

Provision within the ASD resource base unit is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff have a coherent philosophy of promoting pupils' independence.
- Teaching and learning are very good overall, with some outstanding practice.
- Assessment and the day to day monitoring of progress are very good.
- Pupils have access to a good, broad curriculum.
- Leadership and management of the ASD resource base are very good.

Commentary

52. For every pupil in the resource base achievement is good. The teachers identify barriers to learning and endeavour to remove them by precise attention to pupils' social and curriculum learning needs. The very good assessment made by special support assistants in mainstream lessons promotes independence and effective use of the base's facilities.
53. There is very good individual tuition for pupils in all year groups. In all lessons seen teaching was very good and occasionally outstanding. Accurate IEPs (Individual Education Plans) are regularly modified to help pupils shape their targets and take their learning forward. All lessons are very carefully planned. Informal assessment and feedback occur naturally and frequently. Such assessments help to ensure that work is pitched correctly to pupils' needs. Levels of challenge are raised as individual achievement grows. Social, behavioural and curricular targets are used so that full personal development is covered. Pupils are closely involved in the celebration of achievement and in learning to value and support their peers. Every two weeks a group meeting is held in which pupils show their responsibility and develop their concern for each other by asking agreed questions, 'What have you done well, and what have you found difficult?' On these occasions the valued speech and language therapist is able to observe and evaluate progress.
54. Lessons are structured so that pupils learn well from the step-by-step approaches with carefully sequenced learning. High standards of behaviour are expected and usually realised. When lapses occur they are dealt with un sentimentally by teachers through an appropriate, individualised range of sanctions and rewards. Pupils are taught strategies for personal control so that they become more self-aware. A key feature of the teaching and learning is the shared belief in the promotion of independence so that pupils can have full access to the whole curriculum. The staff inspire pupils with the sense that they have faith in them and in their capacity to succeed.
55. Pupils have full access to a wide curriculum. They are prepared sensitively for changes. For example, where pupils are to experience unfamiliar situations such as work placements or college experiences, a gentle and graduated introduction is made. A wide range of vocational programmes is offered. Under careful supervision, pupils in the base enjoy well-planned extra-curricular activities in the lunch hour. These include videos, computer games, music and physical activities using a trampette or free-dancing. Some pupils from the mainstream share this provision.
56. The resource base is very well led and managed by a well-qualified staff of teachers and special support assistants. All receive regular professional development and contribute to mainstream training. The positive relationships between staff ensure good professional support and provide good role models for pupils on. The very good accommodation serves as a base for the LEA's outreach provision and as a well-resourced area for specialist tuition. A library is being built up to help support parents and teachers to learn more about their children and pupils. Parental support is very good.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The National Literacy Strategy is well embedded in English and is helping to raise standards in Years 7 to 11.
- Further improvements in pupils' writing skills are needed so that their National Test results continue to rise by Year 9.
- Improved teaching and learning are leading to pupils' good achievement by Year 11.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to English, meeting the teachers' high expectations of them.
- The use of ICT to encourage independent learning is uneven across Years 7 to 11.

Commentary

57. In 2003, pupils' results in national tests were below the national average, and below average compared with those for schools with similar prior attainment in English in Year 6, and pupils, especially girls, were underachieving. However, in 2004, results for pupils at Levels 5 and 6 improved significantly and numbers of pupils are now reaching Level 7. Girls are no longer underachieving and are reaching the higher levels. Currently, pupils' standards are average by Year 9 and achievement is sound. This reflects the very substantial and effective work that has recently been done in driving forward the national literacy strategy, which is now well embedded, and in which the English department leads the school. The 2003 GCSE results were the best for five years. Results at grades A*-C in English were average and were also average at grades A-G. Results in English Literature at grades A*-C were above average and all pupils passed at grades A-G. In 2004, the school sustained its solid GCSE English results, again matching the national average, and at grades A-G results were equally strong. In GCSE English Literature, at grades A*-C, results dipped slightly as a result of an examination error, now rectified. Currently, standards of pupils by Year 11 are above average and pupils are achieving well. All pupils are entered for GCSE English and almost all leave school with a grade, which is a good achievement for the considerable number of pupils with special educational needs.
58. In all years, currently, pupils' speaking, listening and reading skills are above average, higher-attaining pupils offering lengthy, complex answers and giving well-delivered presentations using higher order skills, and lower-attaining pupils expressing fluently why certain poems appeal to them. This is because speaking, listening and reading are thoroughly incorporated into schemes of work and used as an assessment focus. Group discussion, questioning and brainstorming and reference to the printed text are planned features of all lessons and so pupils speak and read confidently (taking part in sponsored reading challenges in aid of charity), share ideas and experiences, learn from these and develop their own. Pupils' critical powers and skills of deduction and inference are average and improving by Year 9, and good by Year 11, though lower-attaining pupils' analytical writing is less good. As a result of a special focus on "improving writing", led by the department's leading skills teacher, who is also the school's literacy co-ordinator, writing skills by Year 9 are generally average, and assured by Year 11, when higher-attaining pupils write confidently and accurately, demonstrating appropriate choices of styles for different audiences. Lower-attaining pupils in Year 8,

however, still make errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar and, in some cases, are not yet constructing effective paragraphs. Substantial creative writing was seen amongst the work of higher-attaining pupils in both Years 10 and 11, who are being encouraged and fully stretched in English, which was outstanding in its use of words and skilful handling of plot, characterisation, and narrative technique. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs are well supported by the department's learning assistant in lessons, booster units, spelling and punctuation clubs, and in progress classes when groups of pupils are withdrawn for extra help. These pupils are making good progress.

59. Teaching and learning are good overall. Both are sound in Years 7 to 11, and they are good in Years 10 and 11, and during the inspection, some very good English lessons in Years 9 and 11, and a very good Year 10 drama lesson were seen, in which stimulating, enthusiastic and consistently challenging teaching produced correspondingly high quality oral and written responses. Teachers have high expectations and enjoy very good rapport with pupils, teach briskly, make lesson objectives and learning targets explicit, and plan well, adjusting teaching to meet the needs of pupils of all abilities, so that the available time is used productively and interestingly. Consequently, pupils have very good attitudes to the subject, know what they are meant to do, work hard, and enjoy their English lessons. Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9 because teachers set more extended writing tasks in the GCSE course. Although teachers are raising standards of writing in all years, they need to concentrate still more on improving extended writing in Years 7 to 9, for example, by placing less reliance on the use of writing frames. Assessment and marking are very good indeed. The pupils, who practise applying National Test and GCSE criteria, know their targets, and very systematic, detailed written comments help them to improve work and raise standards. Homework is set regularly and frequently, and is appropriately demanding so that it effectively reinforces and extends work done in class. However, though some work by Year 11 pupils was seen which was word-processed and nicely presented, and there has been some use of the Internet, for example, to research animal cruelty, not enough use is made of ICT in teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11; and pupils' ICT and independent learning skills are not as well developed, for example, as their skills in working with others and communicating in order to share experiences and solve problems.
60. English, staffed by a strong, dedicated team of teachers who meet weekly to develop provision and share good practice, is well led and effectively managed. The subject has improved well since the previous inspection and standards have risen. Rigorous monitoring is carried out of all aspects of the department's work, assessment is used astutely to direct improvements, and close support is given to the newly qualified teacher and the non-specialist teacher (a children's author). The school's caring Christian ethos is at the very centre of all that the teachers do.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

61. Throughout the school, pupils' English language and literacy skills are average for their age. Their skills are practised and applied consistently well throughout all subjects in the curriculum. However, pupils' speaking and listening skills are generally better than their writing skills and the school has recognised this and is making a particular focus of extended writing in order to bring about further improvements. Progress in embedding the national literacy strategy has been good in subjects across the curriculum, most notably in English, and the school is rightly proud of the resources it has allocated, particularly the amount of time it has given to leading skills teachers, learning assistants, and the learning mentor in order for them to do a good job.
62. Good opportunities are provided in subjects for speaking and listening, including question and answer sessions, brainstorming, discussion in groups and pairs, and oral presentations. Plenty of attention is paid to the understanding and use of key words and technical vocabulary, though teachers do not always highlight misspellings and model the correct

versions. Subjects like English, history, and geography regularly set tasks which involve extended writing. 'Readathons' encourage pupils to take an interest in reading, and some departments, for example, English, have a good stock of books which can be used in addition to those in the library. Pupils in Years 7, 8, and 9 tend to be the most prolific borrowers.

Modern foreign languages (French and German)

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Over half the pupils do both French and German in Years 8 and 9.
- Teaching is good and most students achieve well.
- Pupils have no contact with information and communications technology in their learning.
- A few pupils with special educational needs do not achieve as well as they should.
- Subject leadership and management are good.
- Three quarters of the students no longer take a foreign language after Year 9.

Commentary

French

63. All pupils take French as first foreign language in mixed ability classes in Year 7. From Year 8, the top two sets of three begin German in addition to French, a higher proportion than in most schools. Teachers can divide the time equally between the languages because they all teach both languages. In Years 10 and 11 languages are optional, with one group per language per year, class size ranging from 11 to 25.
64. Teacher Assessments for 2003 showed that an above average proportion of students reached Level 5 of the National Curriculum. In 2004 this proportion rose. In both years there were students at Level 6. Students make faster progress in Years 8 and 9 than in Year 7 because setting allows tasks to be better matched to prior learning. They achieve well in these years. The teachers encourage independent learning and pupils respond well. Pupils are able to ask questions using intonation, they understand, and use well, numbers and quantities in French and have a growing vocabulary. Pronunciation, however, is a weakness. Overall standards are above average. At the time of the previous inspection standards were said to be in line with national expectations. Standards are rising but some pupils with special educational needs do not learn as well as they should because their learning is interrupted for other work.
65. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average, albeit from one class. In 2004 they fell back slightly. Numbers were too small for full performance data to be available. Currently a group of 11 students in Year 10 lack the confidence to display their full potential. However, they take part regularly in reading, writing, listening to, and speaking French, and are slowly developing confidence and a sense of achievement. No Year 11 lessons took place during the inspection, but analysis of students' written work shows that their standards are now above average. Students continue to achieve well, and some are in line for the highest grades. Written work seen indicates above average fluency.
66. Teaching is consistently good, and there was one very good lesson with a Year 8 class, who were working at a level matching that of Year 9. Teachers encourage and engage their pupils very well, and in most classes there is a sense of enjoyment of learning. The use of French is key to this. This is not however possible in all groups. In one Year 8 class with multiple special needs, the learning related as much to English language literacy as to French, and some pupils could not learn properly because they lacked continuity in their learning. The use of ICT remains to be developed for all pupils who do not have enough access to computers for their work in modern languages.

67. The department is well led. An experienced head of department has created a cohesive team around her who share the school's values. Relationships are very good. Management is also good. A detailed handbook and scheme of work ensure consistent practice. Assessment is well used, involving pupils in setting their own targets. One teacher has successfully involved the school with local twinning arrangements which are now working to the benefit of students. Progress since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

German

68. German was sampled in Years 9, 10 and 11.
69. In Year 9, students are making progress as expected of second language beginners. As higher attainers they learn rapidly in response to focused, well planned, German language teaching, and they can be expected to reach above average standards in relation to a first language by the end of Year 9. This is very good achievement in two years.
70. In Year 10, a well motivated group has made a good start on GCSE work despite the drawback of a timetable which gives them one exhausting two hour lesson per week. Year 11 have one of their lessons out of hours but are nevertheless achieving well. Teaching is well focused on GCSE requirements. GCSE results have in recent years been well above average, albeit from higher-attaining students.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average in Years 7 to 9 and well above average in Years 10 and 11. This shows very good achievement.
- The leadership of the department is very good. The team of hardworking, specialist teachers work together very effectively as they strive for the highest possible standards.
- Teaching is very good, in Years 10 and 11, because lessons are planned very effectively and teachers have high expectations.
- The use of ICT in teaching and learning is underdeveloped at present, and homework is not always used effectively.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning across the department is not yet sufficiently rigorous.

Commentary

71. Attainment in mathematics on entry to the school is average. In 2003, pupils' results in statutory tests taken in Year 9 were above the national average overall and the results of higher-attaining pupils well above average. Results were also above average when compared with schools of similar prior attainment. Results have improved over the last four years at a rate above the national trend. Results in 2004 were very similar. Boys outperformed girls in 2003, but girls outperformed boys in 2004. Currently, overall standards in Year 9 are above average, and both boys and girls achieve well. Pupils with special educational needs make equally good progress.
72. Pupils' GCSE results in mathematics in 2003 were well above the national average overall. The proportion of pupils achieving higher (A*-C) grades was well above the national average, and also well above average when compared with schools of similar prior attainment. Almost all pupils achieve GCSE in the A*-G range. Results in 2004 were equally good. This indicates very good achievement. Significantly more boys than girls achieved higher grades in 2003, but the gap narrowed in 2004. Standards in the current Years 10 and 11 are also well above average and results are likely to be similar to last year, continuing the trend of very good achievement. Boys and girls achieve equally well.

73. Pupils in all year groups are articulate and confident in answering questions and explaining their answers. They are well motivated and set out their work neatly and logically. They draw graphs, measure and construct accurately. Numeracy skills are above average as a result of very good, focussed teaching to improve pupils' mental skills and number manipulation. Higher-attaining pupils apply their numerical and algebraic skills and their knowledge of trigonometry to more complex problems in two and three dimensions. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good, as a result of good teaching and effective in-class support.
74. Teaching and learning are very good overall, and better in Years 10 and 11 than Years 7 to 9. Lessons are always very well planned, with clear learning objectives which are shared with the pupils. The national strategy to improve teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is used well and lessons start with challenging, lively activities to develop numeracy skills. Teachers' insistence on high standards for pupils' behaviour and presentation of work is very effective and sets the climate for effective learning. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is characterised by very high teacher expectations together with carefully structured work which builds pupils' confidence and raises their aspirations. Homework is used very well in Years 10 and 11 to extend classroom learning, but less well in Years 7 to 9 where homework is set less regularly in some classes. At present there is insufficient use of ICT by pupils to enhance their learning in mathematics lessons. The department has recently received excellent resources for the use of ICT, and teachers have already made a very good start using interactive white boards as a teaching tool. The quality of marking is very good and teachers' detailed comments help pupils to improve their learning. Teachers use regular tests at the end of each half term to monitor pupils' progress and to address any weaknesses. Work is referenced to national curriculum levels or GCSE grades and this is shared with pupils so they have a clear understanding of how well they are doing. Relationships are good or very good in all lessons and pupils are attentive and diligent.
75. Leadership of the subject is very effective and management is good. There is a clear vision for not only raising pupils' attainment but also their enthusiasm and enjoyment of mathematics through a range of initiatives, including pupils' entry for the UK Mathematics Challenge and fantasy football. Teachers work together very effectively and regularly discuss and share good practice. They are committed and give their time generously to help pupils through revision lessons and homework clubs. The department's links with primary schools are very good and initiatives include the development of bridging units of work for pupils in Years 6 and 7, and a common numeracy policy to ensure good continuity of education between primary and secondary schools. The department is very aware of the need for pupils to use the new ICT resources to enhance their learning and this is planned as a priority for this academic year. The department sets appropriate individual targets for all pupils and the progress of individual pupils and of groups is monitored regularly. Test and examination results are analysed to monitor year on year performance but are not yet analysed for strengths and weaknesses by topic, so that weaknesses in pupils' learning are not systematically addressed. The monitoring of teaching and learning includes observing lessons and checking pupils' work and teachers' mark books. However, this is not yet rigorous enough to ensure consistent implementation of the department's policies and good practice.
76. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Standards have risen faster than the national trend. The effect of this is evident in the very significant improvement in GCSE results, which have improved from below average at the time of the last inspection to well above average in 2003. The marking of pupils' work is now very good and includes detailed comments to help pupils improve. The national strategy for improving teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is contributing to rising standards. Use of ICT has not yet improved sufficiently due to lack of resources until very recently.

Mathematics across the curriculum

77. Pupils' numeracy skills are good and they are able to apply their knowledge and understanding of mathematics in other subjects. For example, in science pupils analyse graphical data and use formulae effectively, but there is a tendency to use calculators when they are not necessary. They use co-ordinates and analyse data competently in geography and use proportion and scale in art. Mathematics skills are used for drawing and measurement in design and technology, although not always correctly, and when using spreadsheets in ICT. All staff have received training for the development of mathematics across the curriculum some time ago, but there has been little follow-up. As a result, use by different subjects is only satisfactory overall although good in science in all years and in geography and modern languages in Years 7 to 9. There is little evidence of planning for the teaching of mathematics in the majority of subjects of the curriculum.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is consistently good and pupils' learning is good as a result.
- Pupils' positive attitudes and good behaviour underpin their good achievement.
- Standards in Years 9 and 11 are steadily improving.
- Very good leadership of the subject is leading to more effective teaching and learning.
- Some science lessons are taught in ordinary classrooms rather than laboratories.

Commentary

78. National Curriculum test results in Year 9 in 2003 were broadly average compared to the country as a whole. They were slightly below average in terms of what might have been expected from pupils' prior attainment. Results in 2004 were similar but exceeded the school's targets. In 2003, pupils' results overall in GCSE science were broadly average for grades A*-C but above average for grades A*-G. Results in 2004 were better and represent good achievement.
79. Standards overall in Year 9 are above average for their age and are better than the most recent test results due to improved teaching in this age range. Pupils enter the school with attainment that is average. As the result of consistently good teaching, pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 make good progress so that by the time they are in Year 9 their knowledge and understanding of science is above what would be expected for their age. For example, average-attaining Year 9 pupils are able to work out the formula of simple compounds and then use these formulae to balance molecular equations, reaching higher standards than might have been expected of them from their starting point.
80. Standards of work in Year 11 are also above average. Their knowledge and understanding of biology, chemistry and physics continues to improve at a good rate. For example, in physics, higher and average attaining pupils have a good understanding of Newton's laws of motion. They can, for example, calculate the kinetic energy of an object from its mass and velocity. Lower attaining pupils can describe the transformation of potential to kinetic energy of an object as it falls under gravity. These pupils have maintained the good rate of progress seen with younger pupils and their achievement is also good. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and achieve as well as other pupils in the school because they receive good support from teachers and learning assistants in their lessons.

81. Teaching and learning are good overall with some very good features. Teachers have a very good command of their subject areas and as a consequence scientific theories and concepts are explained clearly and this improves pupils' learning. There are very effective strategies in place which are improving the quality of teaching. For example, most lessons focus clearly on keywords and the criteria by which the pupils' work will be assessed. This results in pupils having a much clearer picture of what is expected of them and improves the standard of their work. Lessons are well planned, often divided into three sections with a starter activity and plenary session. This uses time effectively, ensuring pupils maintain interest and learn well. Expectations of pupils are high and they respond positively to new and more exacting work. The very good relationships between pupils and teachers are an important factor in promoting a better learning environment. Although pupils use ICT in their science lessons they cannot at the moment, due to lack of resources, use data logging equipment in their enquiry science investigations. A small number of lessons are taught outside laboratories and this limits the development of these pupils' enquiry science skills.
82. Leadership is very good. There is a very good sense of vision for the future. Strategies for improvement are good. For example, the introduction of a GCSE applied science course is improving motivation and standards with middle and lower attaining pupils. Management of the department is good and beginning to bear fruit. There is an effective system of monitoring teaching and learning that is leading to common approaches to improving achievement. There is an effective team of teachers and support staff who work very well together ensuring that the department functions efficiently on a day-to-day basis.
83. Since the previous inspection improvement has been good. In particular the quality of teaching is much better. Strategies to raise achievement are working and are leading to better test and examination results. The department is in a very good position to move forward.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching, learning and achievement are good overall.
- Relationships are good and pupils behave well.
- Tasks and materials are not adapted sufficiently to match the needs of lower attaining pupils.
- Insufficient use is made of the available data to inform planning and set targets.
- The use of ICT across subjects is not monitored adequately.

Commentary

84. Pupils enter the school with varying experiences in using ICT but standards on entry are generally below average. Teacher assessments in 2003 for Year 9 show standards are just above average and these standards have been maintained in 2004 and match the standards seen in the inspection. For pupils entering the school with below average standards this represents good achievement. In Year 7 they are able to develop control sequences using appropriate software. In Year 8 they make good use of graphs and graphing in summarising the results of questionnaires. In Year 9 they design fairground rides which make use of sensors.
85. Currently all pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow the new CLAIT course. In addition, some pupils follow a short course GCSE and some choose ICT as a GNVQ subject. Standards for pupils taking the new CLAIT course are average and they are able to complete the requirements of the course successfully and achieve well. Standards for pupils taking the GCSE course are well below average. Their achievement is satisfactory given their below average ability and the unsuitability of the course for them. Standards and achievement for the GNVQ course will be found under the vocational subjects heading further in this report.

86. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7, 8 and 9. Teachers have good subject knowledge and maintain good relationships encouraging good behaviour and good attitudes in pupils. Lessons are well planned, in line with the national strategy. The tasks provide good challenge for higher-attaining pupils but often do not match the abilities of lower attaining pupils whose progress would improve with more skills-based tasks rather than extended projects. Teachers are beginning to make good use of exercise books and folders to enable pupils to make notes and consolidate their learning and pupils complete project diaries to record their progress. Use of headers and footers to title and date work would enable teachers to track pupils' progress more effectively.
87. Teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are good. All pupils take the new CLAIT course one period per fortnight and teachers focus on the requirements of the examination which demands attention to detail. This enables pupils whose experience of ICT in Years 7 and 8 was limited to consolidate basic skills which they are able to use in other subject areas.
88. Leadership of the department is good. There is a clear recognition of the weaknesses of the department at the time of the last inspection and an enthusiasm and vision to maintain improving standards. The good division of responsibilities is a factor in encouraging effective team-building. Management is satisfactory. Some weaknesses continue to exist in the monitoring of pupils' work and the evaluating of teaching and learning. Data is not yet used sufficiently effectively to identify strengths and weaknesses and to track pupils' progress and achievement in order to take any necessary remedial action.
89. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Resources and staffing have improved significantly. Control technology is now firmly in place. The use of ICT across subjects still remains to be developed.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

90. There has been satisfactory improvement in the use of ICT across the curriculum since the last inspection. Measures are in place to co-ordinate the use of ICT across subjects but these are not yet sufficiently monitored. Resources have been improved considerably. Teachers have had training in the use of ICT but this was before the resources were available and further training is needed in the use of laptops and inter-active whiteboards. The use of ICT in science is good and SEN pupils make good use of laptops. In other subjects ICT is currently underused to enhance teaching and learning and this is particularly so in geography, music and modern foreign languages. However, the very recent investment in ICT will allow the school to enhance provision across all subjects.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in 2003 were well below average.
- The range of teaching and learning methods used is too narrow to fully engage pupils' interest in the subject.
- Good strategies to improve pupils' standards and achievement are now beginning to take effect.
- The planning of lessons is good so pupils are productive.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to use fieldwork in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

91. GCSE results in 2003 were well below average and the small number of pupils who took the examination did not do as well in geography as in other subjects they took. However, school data indicates that results have improved slightly in 2004. Results in the 2003 teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were broadly average with some pupils gaining above average results. These results represent satisfactory achievement for all the pupils concerned compared to their attainment when they entered the school.
92. In work seen standards in geography are average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory in Year 9 and Year 11. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory because they are given constructive individual help by teachers. Pupils in Year 7 have satisfactory map work skills and can use symbols and grid references accurately to locate places. Year 11 pupils can collect and analyse data and reach balanced conclusions when studying, for example, the impact of tourism in the Lake District.
93. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. In some lessons teaching is good. Teachers are beginning to use a wider range of teaching and learning methods although these are still too narrow to fully engage pupils' interest. Some lessons are over-reliant on text books. Most lessons are well-planned and structured so that pupils move smoothly forward from one task to another and are productive. Pupils respond well to their teachers, have mature attitudes to learning and behave well. The use of ICT by pupils is underdeveloped and there are too few opportunities for them to develop their enquiry skills through fieldwork in Years 7 to 9. The result of this is that pupils have little opportunity to develop their independent learning skills.
94. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. Results have been below average for several years but senior managers have put clear strategies for improvement in place to remedy this. The implementation of these strategies, which has been delayed by prolonged staff absence, is now beginning to take effect. New schemes of work have been introduced and attractive new resources purchased in order to engage pupils' interest in geography and encourage more of them to study the subject in Years 10 and 11. Teaching and learning are now monitored effectively.
95. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 has risen and aspects of teaching and learning and assessment have been improved. The impact of the present strategies for improvement are now being seen and new teachers are bringing fresh and varied teaching approaches to the department.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning ensures that the majority of pupils achieve well but pupils' capacity to analyse their sources of information is not as well developed as their knowledge and understanding of events.
- Examination results are above average and have improved in recent years although some higher-attaining boys do not do as well as they should.
- Pupils are very well behaved and have very positive attitudes to learning.
- Assessment tasks in Years 7 to 9 are not sufficiently demanding.
- Examination results and other information on pupils' performance is not analysed well enough and used to inform development planning.
- The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development.

Commentary

96. GCSE results in 2003 were above average although relatively few pupils obtained the highest A* and A grades. Girls outperformed boys by a margin similar to that found nationally. Pupils' performance in history was better than in most of their other subjects. Results improved in 2004 although in both years some higher-attaining boys did not do as well as they should.
97. Standards seen in Year 9 are broadly average and pupils achieve well in relation to their generally below average standards in history on entry to the school. Knowledge and understanding of events such as the First World War is sound with higher attainers in particular writing to good length. Pupils' capacity to critically analyse their sources of information, for example, recruiting posters, is not so well developed. This results from the lack of subject expertise in the otherwise effective temporary teachers, employed in the absence through illness, of the subject leader. Good attention to the development of basic skills at the beginning of Year 7 ensures that pupils are well placed to make good progress through Years 7 to 9.
98. Standards in Year 11 are above average and the very highest attainers produce written work of exceptional quality, for example in evaluating the career of Earl Haig. The majority of pupils write well, making effective use of their detailed knowledge and understanding of events. Pupils achieve well and, at this stage, there is no significant difference between the work of girls and boys. However, the most recent written work indicates that their capacity to thoroughly analyse sources of information, for example on the impact of war on women's role in society, is not as highly developed as their knowledge and understanding of events.
99. Most work seen during the inspection came from lessons taught by temporary teachers and indicates that teaching and learning are currently satisfactory. Pupils behave very well and have positive attitudes towards the subject and this has contributed well to the fact that they have continued to make steady progress in the absence of their permanent teacher. Other evidence, from lessons taught by permanent teachers, examination course work, and from discussions with of pupils indicates that teaching and leaning over time is good. Lessons contain a good variety of interesting learning activities ensuring that a good pace is maintained. There is a good emphasis on the development of literacy skills. Good planning ensures that pupils are aware of their learning objectives although the teacher does not always thoroughly evaluate the extent to which these have been met. Effective liaison with learning support assistants together with the use of suitably adapted learning materials and one to one attention ensures that pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to other pupils. Marking is regular though more helpful in Years 10 and 11, than in Years 7 to 9 where it does not always show pupils what they need to do to improve. Through the programmes of study and the ethos in which it is taught, history makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development. For example, whilst studying the First World War, they are encouraged to reflect on the human cost to individuals and families.
100. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Issues raised have been resolved and examination results have improved. The subject is well led and its management is satisfactory. Assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 are good but the tasks selected do not stretch the highest attainers sufficiently by requiring them to explain their understanding of events and historical change at length. Information from teachers' assessments and examination results is not analysed rigorously enough and used in target setting and curriculum planning.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

The main focus in Years 10 and 11 was the GCSE course in product design. Other GCSE courses were also sampled. In a lesson in food studies in Year 10, standards were above average and pupils were achieving very well. In resistant materials in Year 11, a scrutiny of pupils' design portfolios revealed that standards were above average. In a graphics lesson in Year 10, standards of design and problem solving were above average and pupils were achieving well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results were above average in 2003 but declined in 2004.
- Standards are rising again in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils with Special educational needs are achieving well on the GCSE product design course.
- Pupils' work in graphics in Years 7 to 9 requires attention.
- Teaching and learning are good in GCSE product design.
- There is insufficient choice at GCSE for lower attaining pupils.
- There is no CAD/CAM equipment for resistant materials.

Commentary

101. GCSE results in design and technology subjects in 2003 were above average, as they were at the time of the previous inspection. Girls' results were well above average but boys' results were average. Pupils did not do as well in design and technology as they did in other subjects. In 2004, GCSE results declined considerably. However, results in food studies were very high.
102. Standards are rising in Years 10 and 11 now that staffing has stabilised again. In Year 11, attainment is highest in graphics and resistant materials. In product design, the focus of the inspection, standards are well below average but they represent good achievement for girls and boys. This is because the teaching groups are composed entirely of pupils of low attainment, many having special educational needs. Here, pupils are producing GCSE coursework in the grade range C to G. Higher-attaining pupils can work independently of the teacher. Their portfolios show a competent grasp of the design process and the items that they make indicate average levels of ingenuity and accuracy. However, many pupils lack confidence and require very regular and frequent support to enable them to make adequate progress with their work.
103. Current standards are broadly average in Year 9 and represent satisfactory achievement for boys and girls. Practical standards are better than design work. The use of tools and equipment to make products is average and results in finished items with quite reasonable accuracy. Technical vocabulary develops well because this aspect of the subject receives strong emphasis. Standards in food technology, resistant materials, and textiles are higher than in graphics, where there is some underachievement. A series of booklets is used well in food technology and textiles to support the development of pupils' work in the elements of the design process but in graphics, pupils' efforts are fragmentary, and drawing and illustration skills are weak.
104. In the GCSE product design course, teaching and learning are good. Teachers' grasp of GCSE requirements is strong and this enables them to support pupils well with their work. Approaches for the large proportion of pupils with special educational needs are good. Individual help and guidance are strong features. Assessment is good and linked well to GCSE grades. In Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. They are

stronger in food technology, textiles and resistant materials than in graphics, where one unsatisfactory lesson was observed. ICT is used well but the teaching of drawing and illustration skills requires attention. Teachers manage practical sessions well and pupils respond positively with good attitudes to their work. Pupils with special educational needs usually make good progress in practical sessions but their drawing and writing sometimes require more support. Marking is satisfactory overall but it is insufficiently frequent or detailed in graphics. Assessment is satisfactory but occasionally too generous.

105. The very recently appointed acting head of department is providing satisfactory leadership and management. She understands clearly what needs to be done and how to do it. However, there are several matters that require attention because they affect learning and motivation. Lower attaining pupils do not have enough choice of design and technology subjects for GCSE and some teaching groups are too large. There is no CAD/CAM equipment for resistant materials so inhibiting progress in these aspects of the subject. Improvement since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory because standards have declined.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design and music were inspected in depth and one lesson of drama was sampled. Drama is taught within the English department in Years 7 to 9 and is being offered as a GCSE course for the first time this year and so no results are available. In the lesson, which was very well taught, the pupils clearly enjoyed developing their dramatic skills, were reaching above average standards and achieving very well in this new course.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results were below average in 2003 and 2004.
- Good teaching in GCSE lessons incorporates a high level of challenge which is raising standards.
- Pupils progress well in lessons which put high demands on them.
- Assessment is inaccurate and does not tell pupils how well they are doing or how to improve.
- The analysis of data is a weakness in the management of the department.

Commentary

106. GCSE results in 2003 are below the national average. They declined after the previous inspection but have been consistent in the last two years.
107. At the end of Year 9 teachers' assessments show that the pupils are attaining well above the national average. However, the interpretation of the national curriculum level descriptors is too generous for the present level of attainment. Pupils enter the school with variable skills; overall they are below average with some pupils well below average. They make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 9 and reach average standards. This is because teaching develops pupils' understanding of the techniques used in creative art and design. Insufficient challenge in the work is a barrier to raising achievement.
108. The standard of a significant proportion of pupils' work when they choose the subject is below the national average. From the scrutiny of work standards at the end of Year 11 are below average. However, this represents satisfactory achievement for these pupils because indications are that their GCSE results will be in line with their capabilities. Girls do better than boys because the achievement of some boys is affected by poor motivation. Good teaching

enables pupils to construct convincing compositions using strong colour in a variety of different media. They are able to draw on their knowledge of the work of other artists to influence their own outcomes. Pupils' research work is satisfactory. It enables them to meet the examination assessment objectives. Pupils with special educational needs make the same progress as their peers.

109. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. On occasions, it is unsatisfactory but it is always good for pupils taking GCSE. This is because the coursework tasks challenge the pupils to produce individual outcomes. When the lesson objectives are spelt out at the start of the lesson, pupils know what they have to do to make progress. In all lessons, pupils benefit from individual tuition that gives them help, advice and support to make progress. When the pace of lessons is good it meets the needs of pupils with different capabilities. Occasionally there is insufficient variety to the work that is offered and too few opportunities exist for pupils to learn through the use of ICT. Pupils are willing to work at home but often, insufficient guidance is given which results in unsatisfactory learning. Single word comments in sketchbooks are both inaccurate and unhelpful. They do not tell pupils how to improve. Assessment includes standardisation of teachers' marking but, overall, the percentage of pupils aged 14 achieving Level 5 or above is too high and reflects weaknesses in assessment procedures. Teachers do not use effective seating plans to deal with behaviour that is unacceptable.
110. The leadership of the subject is satisfactory and is a good role model for raising standards in teaching. Recently the department has suffered from staffing difficulties. Management is unsatisfactory. Although it has halted the decline in standards it is unable to monitor the day-to-day running of the department. The department's self-evaluation and analysis of results lacks sufficient rigour to enable action to be taken. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory because both attainment and progress have declined and teaching is no longer good overall.

Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Younger pupils, and those in Years 10 and 11, achieve well.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Provision for ICT is not yet fully satisfactory.
- Unsatisfactory accommodation and inappropriate timetable arrangements hinder progress in Years 7 to 9.
- The range of enriching musical activities is steadily increasing.
- Too few pupils have instrumental lessons.
- The assessment system is not sufficiently linked to national criteria.

Commentary

111. GCSE results in 2003 were just below the national average. Pupils did less well in music than in other subjects. In 2004, the very small number entered was awarded grades in the A-C range. Teachers' assessments of work by pupils in Year 9 are that standards are above the nationally expected level. Standards seen during the inspection were average. The discrepancy is partly explained by recent discontinuity in staffing, and partly by the lack of a clear link between the department's assessment system and National Curriculum criteria.

112. Achievement throughout the school is good. Pupils enter the school with below average attainment in music, and make good progress in Year 7. They quickly learn to use subject language which helps them to understand and discuss the elements of music they hear. They develop confidence in composing, and more able pupils begin to use ideas imaginatively. By building on this experience more able pupils in Year 9, particularly those who have instrumental lessons, create convincing compositions, and many develop fluent keyboard skills. Because of the cramped and noise-congested conditions, pupils of average musical ability do not develop fluency in either reading or keyboard skills, and are not able to exercise musical judgement. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported in lessons and make good progress. Boys achieve as well as girls. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are average. Pupils, of whom very few have experience in music-making outside lessons, make good progress. They enjoy performing, but the quality of performances lack polish. Most adopt a systematic approach to composing although their use of critical judgement to refine their work is not well developed.
113. The quality of teaching is good overall and results in good learning. Teaching is characterised by the promotion of a “can do” approach which ensures pupils are confident and positive. Very effective questioning techniques and imaginative strategies show that much consideration has been given to ways in which pupils will understand and make progress. Good examples were seen in a Year 7 lesson in which pupils quickly understood and could interpret a graphic score, and in a lesson on serialist techniques in Year 10, where pupils readily came to terms with the challenge of working in an unfamiliar idiom. Occasionally, time could be better used, and more varied activities introduced.
114. The head of department, who was appointed relatively recently, leads the department well. Department documentation is good, and shortfalls in resources, particularly in ICT, have begun to be redressed. The take-up of GCSE has returned to normal. Management is satisfactory. Teaching is monitored in accordance with the school’s strategies for improving teaching and learning. The assessment system needs closer linking with criteria for National Curriculum levels of attainment. Although much investment has gone into the provision of ICT, the lack of keyboards with midi systems prevents this from being a fully effective tool. There are very few ethnic percussion instruments to support the study of music from other cultures. Better recording facilities are needed urgently. The accommodation, unsatisfactory in two previous inspections, remains unsatisfactory in spite of some cosmetic improvements. There is an urgent need for acoustically separated spaces so that pupils’ listening and discrimination can develop satisfactorily. Some Year 7 classes are taught in non-specialist rooms in other parts of the school. Inappropriate timetabling hinders continuity of learning for some classes in Years 7 and 8, and current setting arrangements are not appropriate for music.
115. The department plans to improve liaison with feeder primary schools, and to extend secular activities to complement the extensive involvement in special events and masses throughout the school year. However, because so few pupils learn instruments, the variety of experience available in the department is narrow. Nevertheless, the department makes an effective contribution to pupils’ personal development, and enhances the school’s reputation. After a period of uncertainty in which standards dipped, the department is now in a stable situation. Improvement is satisfactory.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good across the department.
- Very good leadership and management has brought about significant improvements since the last inspection.
- Opportunities for involvement in extra-curricular activities are very good.
- Pupils work very hard and with a clear sense of purpose and enjoyment.
- There is no designated room for teaching the theoretical elements of the GCSE course.

Commentary

116. Teacher assessment indicates that in 2004 the attainment of pupils by the end of Year 9 was in line with the national average. Standards in the present Year 9 are above average overall, particularly in netball and dance. In the 2003 GCSE examination 69% of pupils entered gained A*-C grades, figures that are well above the national average. Boys attained at a higher level than girls. Although results in the most recent examination were not as good as in the previous year, they were in line with the teachers' predictions. Standards in the present Year 11 are above average, particularly in the practical elements of the GCSE syllabus. A number of pupils of all ages and in all year groups demonstrate well above average standards in netball, athletics, basketball, cross-country, football, girl's football, badminton and volleyball with very good achievement.
117. The achievement of pupils overall in Years 7 to 9 is good. Achievement is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 where pupils have only one period of physical education each week. Achievement is very good for those pupils following the examination course. Most pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Some achieve very well, including several who are studying for the GCSE examination.
118. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Based on very good relationships, a climate is created in which pupils want to learn. A key strength lies in the teachers' high expectations of work and behaviour. Pupils are taught good habits through a very consistent and structured approach in all lessons. This consistency has a positive impact on learning. Levels of participation are excellent throughout the school. Pupils work with interest and enjoyment. Their involvement in the extensive range of extra-curricular activities is high and pupils' interest is exemplified in the existence of a sports council as well as a school council.
119. There is no permanent base for teaching the theoretical elements of the course, making delivery of this part of the syllabus much more difficult for teachers and pupils alike and litter on the playing fields is both an eyesore and a potential safety hazard. Nevertheless, improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The provision of a new sports hall means that the curriculum is now much broader. Other significant improvements involve the introduction of the Junior Sports Leaders' Award and opportunities for all older pupils to gain some form of external accreditation. Dance is now included at GCSE level. Schemes of work have been extensively revised. A new and effective assessment system is in place. Links with the feeder primary schools have been improved through the School Sports Co-ordinator Programme.
120. Leadership and management are very good. There is a clear vision for the way forward and a strong emphasis on inclusion. The departmental staff are committed, hard working and enthusiastic. They clearly value the leadership that is shown by the head of department. The number of pupils choosing to study at GCSE level is consistently high. The department achieved the Sportsmark award in 2003.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

GNVQ ICT was inspected in depth and business studies was sampled. The school also provides a vocational GCSE in applied science. This course is improving standards and motivation with middle and lower attaining pupils. Results for GCSE business studies are broadly average. In 2003, 26 pupils were entered for the examination. Half of the pupils achieved grades in the range A*-C, and all passed the examination. A Year 11 lesson for a class of lower attaining pupils was sampled in which pupils initially reviewed the procedures involved in selection and recruitment and then went on to use computers to produce job advertisements. In this lesson, the pupils were reaching close to average standards and achieving very well as a result of very good teaching. In addition to the GCSE business studies course, this year, the school has introduced a new course in GCSE applied business. These courses make a significant contribution to developing pupils' experience of and understanding of work related learning.

Information and communication technology

Provision in GNVQ ICT is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good results in 2004 with 100% pass rate.
- Good teaching results in good learning leading to good achievement.
- The subject contributes well to pupils' experience of work related learning.

Commentary

121. GNVQ results in 2003 were in line with national expectations and with a 100% pass rate in 2004 represent very good achievement, particularly for boys of low ability. Results were far better than predictions. Standards seen in GNVQ lessons in the inspection are in line with national expectations and again this represents good achievement for pupils who enter the school with below average standards and whose experience of ICT has lacked continuity. Boys and girls achieve equally well.
122. Teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are good. Teachers are knowledgeable and focussed upon examination requirements. As a result of good teaching pupils are able to research the needs of businesses; design a range of documents including questionnaires, logos, and other business requirements; analyse and evaluate patterns of work overtime and present the outcomes of their research using Power Point.
123. Pupils are set clear objectives with appropriate time frames. Their work is continually monitored and targets for improvement clearly identified. Pupils gain confidence from being able to complete work successfully which matches their abilities. The majority of pupils are able to work independently and complete their coursework which adds considerably to their knowledge of the world of work and business.
124. Leadership and management of this aspect of ICT are good. The examination is better suited to the needs of the pupils than those taken previously at the school and have enabled pupils to achieve well. The teachers set high standards and work well together in a supportive environment.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Provision for personal, social and health education is **satisfactory**.

The programme embraces a wide range of relevant topics that are introduced at appropriate points in the pupils' overall development. Teaching is satisfactory overall and some lessons are good. Pupils receive discrete lessons in PSHE once a fortnight but the time is shared with citizenship and ICT. The school does not always draw a helpful distinction between what is encompassed by the PSHE programme and what should more properly be studied under citizenship. The school has rightly identified this area as one for immediate review and development.

Citizenship

Provision for citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 leading to satisfactory achievement.
- There is insufficient time to teach the programmes of study in detail in Years 10 and 11.
- There are good opportunities for pupils to become involved in school and community activities.
- There is no up-to-date audit of where citizenship is taught across the curriculum.
- There is no system in place to monitor the overall quality of teaching and assessment.

Commentary

125. Teacher assessment indicates that standards in Year 9 in 2004 were broadly average, with girls attaining at a higher level than boys. Standards seen in lessons during the inspection were average in Years 7 to 9. There is no significant difference in the attainment of girls and boys. Pupils are able to comment sensibly about aspects of human rights, the environment and other related issues. In Year 10 where standards are also average, pupils are able to build effectively on earlier work, for example by giving consideration to the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. No Year 11 lessons were seen during the inspection and there is insufficient evidence to make a judgement about standards in Year 11.
126. Given their starting point, pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. Evidence from lessons and written work shows that pupils are developing an increased awareness of the role of the law in our society. Most understand the need for mutual respect and the significance of the media. Pupils are generally attentive, they exchange ideas willingly and they work with interest. Some pupils speak very confidently during class discussions, whilst others are more reticent and inhibited. Whilst citizenship is included on the timetable for one lesson per fortnight, this time is shared with personal, social and health education and ICT. The additional emphasis placed on careers education for older pupils, means that there is less time for teachers to deliver the programmes of study in Years 10 and 11 and therefore little opportunity for standards to rise.
127. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, particularly in Years 7 to 9 and there are good features where citizenship is taught by a small group of committed teachers. Objectives are made clear to pupils and effective use is made of good quality resources including ICT where appropriate. Frequent opportunities are provided in lessons for pupils to express their views, either in small groups or whole-class discussions. Relationships are positive, pupils' opinions are respected and the approach adopted by teachers helps to encourage confidence. Teachers deal sensitively but firmly with a small number of pupils who are potentially disruptive in lessons. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to become involved in school and community activities outside normal lessons. There is both a school council and a sport's council; the JSPA in physical education allow pupils to develop leadership skills within the local primary schools. Pupils also take part in numerous charity and community events.
128. The subject leader has been in post for only a few weeks. A good start has been made towards revising schemes of work and specifying citizenship issues with greater clarity. Some pupils commented on the fact that they are not always able to distinguish between citizenship

and personal, social and health education. At present there is no up-to-date audit on the contribution that other subjects make towards the development of citizenship. The subject leader is aware of the need to establish a rigorous system for monitoring the effectiveness of assessment, the content of the curriculum and teaching and learning. Leadership and management at this stage are satisfactory with the potential for considerable improvement.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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