

INSPECTION REPORT

WOODCHURCH HIGH SCHOOL ENGINEERING COLLEGE

Woodchurch

LEA area: Wirral

Unique reference number: 105095

Headteacher: Mrs B Holt OBE

Lead inspector: Mr R Drew

Dates of inspection: 23rd - 26th May 2005

Inspection number: 268524

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1341
School address:	Carr Bridge Road Woodchurch Wirral Merseyside
Postcode:	CH49 7NG
Telephone number:	(0151) 677 5257
Fax number:	(0151) 678 1906
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr R Jordan
Date of previous inspection:	March 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This is a larger-than-average 11-16 school with 1341 pupils on roll. It serves an area dominated by local authority housing and 98 per cent of its pupils are white (British) in origin. Very small numbers of pupils come from each of 11 ethnic minority backgrounds. No pupil uses English as an additional language. Few pupils enter or leave school other than at the beginning or end of the academic year. Overall, pupils are socially and economically disadvantaged, with twice the national proportion entitled to free school meals. Prior attainment is well below average, particularly in the key area of pupils' reading skills. About 18 per cent of pupils, just over the national proportion, are on the special educational needs (SEN) register, but more than twice the national average have statements of SEN. This partly reflects the fact that the school houses a designated unit for pupils with autism and makes specialist provision for pupils with physical impairment. Amongst the other pupils with SEN, the predominant needs are for social, emotional or behavioural support or for help with dyslexia. The school gained Engineering College status in 2002 and has been a Beacon School for inclusion since 2000.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
7281	Mr R Drew	Lead inspector	
19720	Mrs D Granville-Hastings	Lay inspector	
30899	Mr K Boden	Team inspector	Design and technology
31218	Dr T Allen	Team inspector	Geography
19586	Mrs W Easterby	Team inspector	English English as an additional language
18447	Mr R Cohen	Team inspector	History Religious education
11975	Mrs T McIntosh-Clark	Team inspector	Music
3100	Mr G Hunter	Team inspector	Mathematics
6432	Mr M Sewter	Team inspector	Science
31963	Mr M Padmore	Team inspector	Special educational needs Information and communication technology
19404	Mr L Schubeler	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages Work-related learning
12972	Mr A Weaden	Team inspector	Citizenship Physical education
31680	Mr P Redican	Team inspector	Art and design

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Woodchurch High School is an **outstanding** school. Its **overall effectiveness is excellent**. In reaching national average standards from a strongly disadvantaged starting point, pupils are achieving very well overall. In many subjects, standards are above or well above average, and achievement is excellent. Very good behaviour and highly constructive attitudes are indicative of the excellent personal development made by pupils. All this is possible because of the extremely positive climate for learning created by the headteacher and staff, both support personnel and teachers. The quality of leadership and management is exceptional, and teaching and learning are very good. Value for money is excellent.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards are well above average, compared with those in similar schools.
- Pupils make very good overall achievement or 'value-added'.
- The headteacher provides leadership and management of the highest quality.
- Pupils display excellent attitudes and very good behaviour.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- The quality of support, advice and guidance for pupils is excellent.
- The school has outstanding arrangements for promoting inclusion.
- Specialist Engineering College status makes a very good impact on the school's work as a whole.
- Provision in the humanities subjects and in art and design, physical education and design and technology is outstanding.
- Work-related learning provision is excellent.
- While no areas of its work are unsatisfactory by national standards, the school's plans rightly identify features of its accommodation which constrain learning and aspects of its work in assessment, ICT, English, music and drama which are capable of further improvement. Plans also recognise that pupils generally do less well on off-site vocational courses than on those run by the school.

By sustaining high-quality provision and developing existing strengths still further, the school has made **excellent improvement since the previous inspection of 1999**. All relative weaknesses from that time have been dealt with very well. In addition, teaching quality has risen from an already strong position to become very good overall, with many more high-quality lessons observed in this inspection and no unsatisfactory teaching. The curriculum has been broadened very effectively, and facilities for several subjects have been greatly enhanced. Further very substantial improvements have come from the successful acquisition of both Beacon School and Engineering College status.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils show **very good overall achievement by the time they leave school at the end of Year 11**. Achievement across Years 7 to 9 is very good: pupils start with well-below-average prior attainment, and reach standards close to the national averages for all schools at the end of Year 9. They build on this with further very good achievement in Years 10 and 11. GCSE/GNVQ results are in line with those for all schools nationally, but compared with results for schools with similar intakes, this school's results are well above average, both in Year 9 tests and in Year 11 examinations.

These very good rates of progress apply to all pupil groups: those with autism, physical impairment and other forms of special needs receive highly effective support that allows them to learn much more rapidly than in other schools. Gifted and talented pupils are clearly identified and given the additional challenges to ensure that they make very good progress. While boys reach lower standards than girls at the end of Year 11, the gap is much narrower than nationally. Boys enter the school with lower attainment levels than girls, and show equally good achievement in relation to this

prior attainment. Standards reached in geography, physical education, art and design, citizenship, history and religious education are particularly good, being well above the averages for all schools. Equally high standards are found in Years 10 and 11 in media studies, in several of the design and technology courses and in work-related learning. Achievement is excellent in these areas. In English and ICT, value-added is very good, but pupils' standards are below national averages.

The school provides such consistently effective guidance and support to pupils that the development of their **personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, is excellent**. This development is demonstrated by excellent attitudes, very good behaviour, good levels of attendance and excellent punctuality to lessons. It also has a crucial beneficial impact on pupils' learning in all lessons.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. Teaching and learning are very effective. Teachers offer great encouragement, set high expectations, promote equality and insist on high standards of behaviour. Support staff contribute very effectively to the progress of pupils to whom they are attached and, often, to the work of the class as a whole. A very good curriculum is provided, offering a much wider range of courses than usual, which enables the school to match courses to the full range of pupils' needs very effectively. Care, guidance and support are very good, and partnership with parents is excellent; links with the wider community are very good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of **leadership and management in the school is excellent**, with the headteacher providing outstanding leadership. She gives an extremely clear and strong sense of direction to school life and, while leading by example most successfully, also ensures that highly effective management systems underpin the care given to promoting pupils' academic and personal progress. Other key staff lead and manage very well, providing remarkable consistency in their approach to pupils. The governing body is very effective. Financial management is still excellent.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Far more parents and pupils responded to the inspection questionnaires and expressed greater levels of satisfaction than is usual. Their support for the school is exceedingly strong; highly positive views are held by parents and pupils on virtually all aspects of the school's work, and inspectors fully endorse such views. A significant proportion of pupils are dissatisfied with anything but the best behaviour from their peers; inspectors commend this intolerance, but find that, compared with schools nationally, behaviour is very good and attitudes excellent.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

In order to improve its already excellent provision still further, the school should implement its existing plans for:

- Sustaining the rising trend in English and ICT attainment where, despite very good value-added, levels are still just below national averages.
- Extending to all departments the excellent practice seen in some in the use of ICT and of assessment for learning.
- Enhancing provision in music, drama and dance to match the depth and quality seen across the rest of the school.
- Providing additional vocational courses, with a higher proportion based in school.
- Expanding the well-run but small library into a much larger facility.
- Improving accommodation for science, music, drama and physical education.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Pupils achieve very well. They reach the national average standards for all school from a much lower-than-average starting point and attain at levels well above the norm for similar schools. This process is begun very well in Years 7 to 9 and is successfully sustained in Years 10 and 11.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall achievement by pupils is very good.
- Standards are well above the average for schools with a similar intake.
- All groups of pupils make very good progress.
- Achievement is excellent in geography, history, religious education and art and design.
- At the end of Year 11, standards, while rising, are below average in ICT and English.
- Achievement is good in music, modern languages, drama and ICT but is not as strong as in other subjects.

Commentary

1. By the end of Year 9, pupils have achieved very well. Starting with well-below-average prior attainment in Year 7, they make very good progress overall and gain results in the core subjects – English, mathematics and science – which broadly match the national levels for all schools. Compared with schools with a similar pupil intake, the collective standards for these three subjects are well above average. In 2004, results in English and mathematics were well above the average for similar schools. In science, they were below average, though those same pupils, now in Year 10, are currently achieving very well.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.5 (32.1)	33.5 (33.4)
mathematics	34.5 (35.0)	35.7 (35.4)
science	30.9 (33.5)	33.2 (33.6)

There were 280 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

2. In the other subjects, standards at the end of Year 9 are impressive. They are well above average compared with all schools in history and above average in geography, physical education, art and design, citizenship, design and technology and religious education. Given the pupils' starting point in Year 7, this represents very good achievement overall, with excellent achievement in history, geography and religious education.
3. During Years 10 and 11, pupils continue to achieve very well. Their results in GCSE/GNVQ and equivalent examinations at the end of Year 11 match the national averages for all schools. In many subjects, results exceed these averages. Compared with results for similar schools, overall standards are well above average. While the trend of GCSE results is not continuously upward, attainment each year indicates very creditable results for pupils starting with low reading ages and generally well-below-average standards on entry to the school. The same national statistics indicate that very good gains are being made between Years 9 and 11 every year. These measures of value-added show that, for their prior attainment and disadvantageous background, pupils in this school gain knowledge and skills at a rate that places them in the top 10 per cent of schools most years. This success is fully supported by observations made by inspectors.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	46 (55)	52 (52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	93 (93)	89 (88)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	268.3 (n/a)	282.8 (n/a)

There were 268 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. Attainment at the end of Year 11 is above the national average in many subjects and well above average in some subjects. In geography, for example, 84 per cent of candidates from a large entry gained A* to C passes in 2004, compared with 59 per cent nationally. Recent results and standards seen during the inspection indicate similarly high standards in most recent years in religious education, history, media studies, art and design, some design and technology courses, physical education and citizenship. These subjects are amongst those with excellent leadership and management and consistently impressive teaching. The use of assessment for planning lessons is at least very good in all of these subjects and excellent in some; its use by pupils to understand in detail how to improve is stronger than in the school as a whole, and in geography, this feature is outstanding.
5. Achievement at the end of Year 11 is good by national norms in music and drama, but this leaves some scope for raising rates of progress to match those across the school as a whole. Better use of National Curriculum levels and GCSE/GNVQ grades to guide pupils' progress is possible and exemplary practice exists in the school. While standards are below average in English and ICT, this reflects particularly disadvantaged prior attainment in these subjects, and in both subjects, the value-added or achievement made by pupils across Years 7 to 11 is very good.
6. The gap between girls' and boys' attainment in this school is narrower than usual. In Year 9 national tests, girls reach higher standards than boys, but by a narrow margin, while boys' performance exceeds that of girls in both mathematics and science tests. In examinations at the end of Year 11, boys reach lower standards than girls, but by only half the national margin. With girls making very good overall achievement, these results indicate a better-than-expected performance by boys. Boys here have a much more positive attitude to study than is commonly found and learn very effectively in the well-ordered, highly constructive atmosphere created by staff. The school is outstandingly successful in promoting the achievement of pupils with special educational needs. It does so by following excellent procedures that identify barriers to learning at the earliest possible stage and then planning exceptionally well to meet needs. The individual educational plans that are generated by the school are excellent. Because more boys than girls have special needs, this further closes the gap in attainment between the genders.
7. Gifted and talented pupils achieve very well, as do their peers. Individual tracking shows many making gains of three curriculum levels between entry to the school and the end of Year 9. The proportion of pupils gaining A* in Spanish for GCSE is relatively high, but inspectors rated the achievement of gifted and talented pupils as very good or better in all subjects, except art, in which it was still nevertheless good.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' overall personal development is excellent, and pupils have excellent attitudes to school and to their learning. Behaviour around school and in lessons is very good. Attendance is good, and pupils' punctuality is excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils thoroughly enjoy being at this school, and tackle the lessons and activities prepared for them with interest and enthusiasm.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent, because of the school's clear communication of its values, beliefs and high expectations of attitudes and behaviour.
- Relationships throughout the school are excellent, creating a happy and productive atmosphere in which pupils learn well and are confident and relaxed.
- Pupils move around school quickly and lessons always begin promptly.

Commentary

8. The school has successfully maintained the very high standards reported in the previous inspection, and the pupils continue to be a real strength of the school. Their personal development is central to everything the school does, and there is a supportive yet vibrant atmosphere in which pupils grow and flourish. Through its extremely well-established ethos and climate of honesty, trust and respect, the school has an impressive sense of community, in which all pupils and adults play an equal and important role. Pupils are valued for their contribution to school life, and there is a genuine sense of belonging to the 'Woodchurch family'. Everyone enjoys being part of the school, including visitors.
9. Pupils' moral development is excellent. They acknowledge and understand the moral code on which their school life is based, and are always involved in reflecting upon and developing it. Very high expectations from staff, assemblies, form time and teaching styles in lessons all reinforce the values of right and wrong and respect for others. Because of this, the behaviour of most pupils is very good. They are polite, friendly, interested in people and quick to talk to visitors. There have been only two permanent exclusions in recent years, and although the number of fixed-term exclusions is high, this is as a result of the school's zero-tolerance approach. Pupils say that there is very little bullying in school, and when it does occur, it is dealt with quickly and sensitively.
10. Pupils' social development is also excellent, because the school's expectations are clear, consistent and supportive. Most lessons provide opportunities for pupils to work in pairs and groups for discussion and collaborative work. Pupils listen, co-operate and work independently very well, and are involved fully in their own learning. As a result, their attitudes to school and to their learning are excellent. They enjoy being at school, and wear their uniform with pride. Relationships between pupils and staff and among pupils are excellent, and make a great difference to pupils' confidence, self-belief and willingness to learn. Staff and pupils interact very well and enjoy each other's company, humour and interest. The school is outstandingly inclusive. Pupils with special educational needs are fully part of the school. Because of this acceptance, pupils with special educational needs are very positive about school and work with enthusiasm and commitment.
11. Pupils' spiritual and cultural development are both excellent. The school deliberately and successfully promotes a strong sense of identity and self-worth, which enables pupils to value themselves and others. These values contribute to their ability to learn and their very good achievement. Their acceptance of and respect for each other is excellent. They are very quick to help, and show a sensitive and mature care for those who need it, within school and beyond. Assemblies and form time play a very important part of the school day, as pupils and teachers take time to reflect, talk, pray and think together, strengthening relationships and contributing to the trust that exists in the school. In many lessons, particularly in religious education, geography, history and art, pupils have the opportunity to reflect on the wonders of life and learning, and gain a great understanding of cultures different from their own. The school works exceptionally hard to foster acceptance and tolerance of the customs and traditions of others, and to promote a genuine abhorrence of prejudiced behaviour.
12. Attendance is good, being consistently above the national average, as a result of the school's high expectations and active approach to monitoring and promoting good attendance,

supported well by parents. There are no bells to mark the beginning and ends of lessons and breaks, and pupils ensure that they get to their lessons promptly with very little intervention from staff.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.1	School data	1.2
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	Number of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1313	192	0
White – Irish	1	0	0
White – any other White background	4	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	4	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2	0	0
Black or Black British – African	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	5	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	2	7	0

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education is very good, with very effective teaching and learning and a curriculum of similar quality.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are very good across the school. The quality of both was at least satisfactory in every lesson seen during the inspection, but with good and very good quality predominating. Examples of excellent teaching and learning were found in many subjects.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are extremely positive in their dealings with pupils.
- Expectations are very high.
- The consistency with which staff manage pupils is very beneficial to learning.
- Pupils are particularly highly motivated.
- Teaching and learning serve all groups of pupils very well.

- While very good overall, aspects of assessment are rightly identified by the school as capable of further improvement.

Commentary

13. Teaching and learning in the school show great consistency and are very effective. The teaching and support staff help pupils learn at a much better than average rate, a major reason for their very good achievement. The manner in which staff teach not only assists good learning but also promotes pupils' personal development very successfully.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 166 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
19 (12%)	75 (45 %)	60 (36 %)	12 (7%)	0 (0%)	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.

14. No features of teaching or learning are weak by national standards and many are outstanding. For example, teachers are excellent in their encouragement of pupils. Lessons are typified by language and tasks that motivate pupils and allow them to participate easily. There is a steady flow of constructive comment and praise from staff: teachers and support personnel are quick to show belief in the capabilities of their pupils and they provide opportunities for them to make concrete progress throughout each lesson and thus feel confident in their own abilities.
15. Staff consistently pitch lessons at the highest realistic levels and expect pupils to respond to the challenge. In several subjects, for instance, pupils who entered the school with low reading age scores and below-average National Curriculum results are being taught with the expectation that they will exceed 80 per cent grade A* to C GCSE results; national averages for the same subjects are in the 50 or 60 per cent range. However, these expectations are based on good data about prior attainment and show confidence in the pupils themselves and in the high calibre of support staff attached to any pupils with special needs. Liaison with support staff is extremely good, involving very effective joint planning before lessons and a highly collaborative approach during them.
16. Teachers are highly effective in their implementation of the school's rewards and sanctions policy. They are remarkably consistent in awarding merits or other commendation for good work or attitudes; they are equally quick to identify unacceptable behaviour and deal decisively with it. They move on from any incident swiftly so that the lesson continues to focus on learning rather than behaviour. Pupils report a strong sense of being valued and treated fairly, which matches the consistency with which staff dealt with pupils in lessons observed by inspectors.
17. Teachers are excellent at planning. The clear structure of their lessons helps pupils to recall previous knowledge and build on it systematically; pupils can see where the lesson is leading and how they play their part in meeting the rigorous time deadlines used so effectively by staff. The range and quality of tasks used are excellent; there is more than sufficient variety in lessons and well-timed changes of activity for interest levels to remain high throughout. The preparation done by teachers for the needs of different groups of pupils is also exceptional: gifted and talented pupils, low and middle attainers and those with a range of specific learning requirements are in teachers' minds when planning and are equally well served during lessons. In supporting gifted and talented pupils, for instance, teachers show very good awareness of which pupils are thus identified and ensure that they are provided with challenging work. In English, the teachers make particularly good use of extended tasks; in design and technology, pupils are enabled to use ICT very effectively to improve the quality of their work.
18. The overall impact of teaching and learning is excellent in history, geography and religious education. These subjects share the strengths found in all others, but in addition, there is

outstanding leadership, cumulative experience in preparing pupils for public examination and many innovative strategies, such as the use of self-assessment by pupils and the extensive use of resources specially designed to promote independent learning. Although the quality of teaching in music and drama is not as high as for the school as a whole, it is nevertheless good. Use of assessment and leadership and management are very good or excellent in other subjects and good in these two areas.

19. Pupils make a major contribution to their own success. Their highly positive attitude to school is crucial to the rapid academic progress they make in lessons and to their excellent personal development. They arrive prepared to learn; they listen well, participate actively and respect the contributions made by others. Recall from previous lessons is very much better than usual because attention levels were high at the time and pupils look ahead to subsequent lessons, partly through their very systematic use of planners. They show much more enjoyment than is common in their learning and are refreshingly lacking in cynicism. Teachers are freed up in such circumstances to focus their efforts on communicating well, sustaining the pace and interest of the lesson at high levels and supporting individuals or groups as required. Above-average attendance in an area of social and economic disadvantage is unusual and ensures that more of the opportunities for learning are maximised. For pupils liable to disaffection, this has a major benefit and owes much to the work of the learning support unit.
20. Pupils with specific needs both benefit from this positive environment and contribute to it. They are supported and encouraged by other pupils, following the example of staff, when they find conventional communication difficult, or when mobility problems could make movement around the classroom or access to resources hard. They help others because their presence leads other pupils to listen more acutely than they might. Pupils are led to understand the distinctive gifts and needs of pupils with autism or physical impairment, for instance. Group work is taken very seriously, partly because it often involves some responsibility for helping fellow pupils understand resources and tasks. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well in all areas of the curriculum. Classroom teachers are fully involved in the writing of individual educational plans. These plans are very good and clearly set out ways in which the curriculum should be modified to meet individual needs. Teaching assistants make an outstanding contribution to the progress of individual pupils.

The curriculum

The curriculum provided for pupils in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11 is very good and has many strengths. It is broad, balanced and innovative, caters very well for pupils' different needs and abilities, and meets all statutory requirements, including for a daily act of collective worship.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is excellent provision for pupils with special educational needs, and for pupils who are gifted and talented.
- Opportunities for equality of access are excellent.
- The range of vocational qualifications for pupils in Year 11 is narrow.
- Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is very good.
- There is a very good programme of enrichment activities.

Commentary

21. The school's approach to curricular planning is firmly rooted in its determination to provide a personal education programme for each pupil. Careful analysis of information relating to pupils' attainment on entry to the school and regular reviews in consultation with members of staff ensure that, as far as possible, pupils are receiving courses that are appropriate to their abilities and aspirations. The school's status as an Engineering College reinforces the school's commitment to the work-related learning curriculum in preparing pupils for their future

employment, both in the range of academic subjects and in skills of personal presentation, communication and teamwork.

22. In addition to the standard subjects of the National Curriculum, pupils follow a course in personal and social education and citizenship, and in Years 8 and 9 take two foreign languages. Lower-attaining pupils, who take just one foreign language, have extra literacy classes, and their mathematical skills are supported by strategies such as WHAM, an extra course run during registration time. There are extension classes in English for higher-attaining pupils. A wide range of choices is available for pupils as they go into Year 10. An information day and a programme of interviews with form tutors ensure that pupils and their parents are fully informed about the most appropriate option choices. In English in Year 10, boys and girls are taught in separate groups. The 'Pathways' approach to choices in science includes opportunities to take three separate sciences, a dual science course, a single science course or applied science. GCSE courses are available in physical education and dance. All pupils at this stage take ICT. In response to pupils' needs, changes to courses offered in design and technology are under way, introducing GCSE in catering to replace food technology. For pupils for whom traditional qualifications are not appropriate, there are vocational skills courses in plumbing and motor vehicle maintenance, leading to AQA and ASDAN certificates.
23. All pupils have two weeks' work experience in Year 10. The school is currently engaged in developing vocational courses on site for pupils who are not able to undertake traditional work placements. It is also looking to expand the range of qualifications and accreditations offered as at present, most examination courses lead to GCSE, which does not meet in full the needs and abilities of some pupils.
24. The school is exceptionally successful in adapting its curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs. They have full access to all areas of the curriculum, including extra-curricular activities. There are very effective individual education plans. Very good planning and the careful allocation of resources enable pupils to work most purposefully towards the targets set.
25. Curricular arrangements for gifted and talented pupils are very good. Opportunities for challenging themselves in competition nationally are provided in mathematics and in engineering, where they have won regional and national awards in the Jaguar F1 model racing car production competition for three consecutive years. In science, pupils are given the chance to help primary school pupils produce graphic presentations of their work, using laptop computers. In art, large canvases are supplied, enabling talented pupils to produce high quality work on a grander scale. Across the curriculum, there is a wide range of out-of-school activities and trips enhancing pupils' experience, such as those arranged by the humanities department to Llangollen and Birkenhead Priory. In physical education, the impact of the Junior Athlete Education on the fitness and lifestyle of the best athletes is particularly beneficial. The dance component of physical education has been less prominent than others but provision is now expanding.
26. The provision for pupils with Asperger's Syndrome is excellent. Many pupils are developing a fine awareness of their condition and how they can work to understand and overcome the barriers it sometimes puts in the way of social interaction. The learning programmes that are developed for each pupil are very well designed to promote individual progress. The assessment procedures and the individual education plans are excellent, and are models of good practice. Teaching and learning are excellent. The school has developed an excellent team of teaching assistants and teachers who have the specialist knowledge and expertise to deal with the children in their care. Where additional help is needed, the school has developed excellent support systems, drawing on the expertise of health service and local authority professionals. Relationships are excellent, and there is a highly inclusive ethos that drives the team on and that delivers the excellent outcomes. The leadership and management of the base are excellent and an example of best practice in team work.
27. The school provides very good opportunities overall to support learning outside the school day. There is excellent provision for participation in activities other than sports and the arts.

There are clubs and societies after school, at weekends and during the holidays. Collaborative activities with charitable organisations and the local education authority help to widen the pupils' horizons and contribute to citizenship education. Overseas visits support learning across the curriculum. The recent granting of the prestigious Sportsmark Award by Sport England is a testimony to the range and quality of provision for sport beyond the school day. The school has gained significant achievements in regional competitions. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities for participation in the arts. Trips to the theatre, to art exhibition centres and music clubs after school extend the opportunities available. Art exhibitions on parents' evenings and social functions including dance and musical performances help to raise pupils' interest in their education. Participation in these activities to support learning is high.

Care, guidance and support

The school provides excellent support for pupils' personal and academic development. Pupils' involvement in school life is excellent. Management of day-to-day care, welfare and health and safety across the school is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent relationships result in pupils having confidence and trust in their teachers.
- Excellent support for pupils' personal and academic development ensures that everyone gets the best out of their time in school.
- Teachers know the needs of their pupils very well, and are flexible in their approach to meeting them.
- The school's excellent awareness of and care for pupils with additional needs ensures that these pupils achieve very well.
- The use of form time is excellent, creating a purposeful start to the day.

Commentary

28. The school is an exceptionally caring place, where pupils feel safe, comfortable and valued. The 'Woodchurch family' is a genuine community that provides support and love for pupils, staff and parents. Parents are very appreciative of the commitment of the school to its pupils, and see this as a major strength and success. The pastoral system is very effective, and staff work together closely and have an excellent understanding of pupils' individual circumstances and needs. Because of this, pupils have trust and confidence in their teachers and find them approachable and responsive. Throughout the school, the excellent relationships result in teachers and pupils interacting very well, and there is a relaxed yet purposeful and stimulating atmosphere. Achievements in all walks of life are recognised and rewarded, and pupils genuinely acknowledge and enjoy each other's successes.
29. There are some excellent strategies to support learning, which contribute directly to the very good achievement made by most pupils. Wow, Wham, Sparks and Pepi are all used to motivate pupils and boost their achievement and success. The learning support unit and learning mentors are used very well to help individual pupils learn to manage their own difficulties and not disrupt the learning of others. Breakfast and homework clubs are attended by many pupils, and Year 11 pupils are very appreciative of the extra help and support they receive in preparation for the GCSE examinations. Most pupils are going on to study next year, and say they have had excellent information about the choices available for them. Many are already thinking further ahead to university.
30. The school provides excellent care for those pupils who have specific needs. Pupils with medical and physical impairments and with Asperger's syndrome have the highest quality attention and are fully integrated into the life of the school. Looked-after children and child protection issues are handled very effectively, and the school has excellent relationships with outside agencies, providing excellent support for pupils and parents. The management of

health and safety across the school is good, and high priority is given to risk assessments within departments. There are exceptionally effective systems in place to identify, assess and monitor the needs of pupils with special educational needs, whether these be physical, behavioural or learning difficulties. Appropriate support is given to all pupils and the school complies fully with the Code of Practice.

31. The use of morning form time is extremely effective, providing a time for pupils and teachers to prepare for the day ahead and to think and reflect together. Teachers consciously promote and live the school ethos, and are excellent role models for pupils.
32. Year 7 pupils settle into secondary school quickly and easily, because of the very good arrangements to help them. They are well prepared during Years 5 and 6, and have many opportunities to visit and become involved in activities in the school. Despite coming from many different primary schools, young pupils very quickly become absorbed into the school family, and their pride and loyalty is evident.
33. Pupils are involved very well in school life, through active participation in their learning and on-going consultation. Form reps, the school forum, the charity committee, prefects and monitors all play an important part in school life. Pupils feel their teachers are very accessible and will always listen to their point of view. In return, staff are appreciative of the pupils' work and commitment.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The partnership with parents is excellent and parents are very supportive of the school. The school has excellent links with other schools and colleges, and very good links with the community.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Communication between home and school is excellent, and parents have great confidence in the school.
- Parents are kept very well informed about the progress their children are making.
- Excellent links with schools and colleges prepare pupils well for life after Year 11.
- Excellent links with primary schools provide younger pupils and teachers with specialist teaching and resources.
- The school has a strong identity and enjoys high standing within the local community.

Commentary

34. The partnership between school and home is excellent, and parents are very quick to share their support for the school. The level of response to the pre-inspection questionnaire was very high, and comments were uniformly positive. Communication between home and school is excellent, and parents are comfortable in approaching teachers with questions or problems. All staff are quick to contact parents personally to explain problems and how they intend to deal with them, and to share in pupils' successes.
35. Parents are kept very well informed about their children's progress. The progress reports give parents a good snapshot of progress through the year, and the full written reports contain detailed and personal comments. Targets are frequently specific and practical, which helps pupils and parents understand how improvement can be made. Two parents evenings each year give parents the chance to talk to tutors and subject teachers formally, and the informal opportunities are many. Excellent quality newsletters and brochures keep parents up to date with activities, events and developments, and the school's vision and philosophy are clearly understood and appreciated. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are exceptionally well informed about the progress their children make and are involved as and when appropriate in the review process.

36. The school has developed excellent relationships with other schools in the area, to the benefit of pupils and teachers alike. Many pupils and teachers in primary schools are benefiting from specialist teaching, knowledge and resources in a variety of ways, particularly in design and technology, mathematics, science and physical education. Excellent relationships with local colleges and schools mean that Year 11 pupils are well prepared and looking forward to the next stage of their education. The school is very aware of its strengths, and its highly effective inclusion policy and work has rightly earned Beacon School status. The school actively works towards improving education locally, through sharing knowledge and professional learning of such strengths with other schools.
37. The school uses its local and wider community very well. There is a varied and well planned range of trips, activities, speakers and specialists for all year groups and in all subjects, adding an important extra dimension to pupils' learning, helping them see the relevance of their studies and giving them first-hand experience of life outside school. The school has a strong sense of commitment to its local area, and is highly thought of by families, neighbours and residents. The school is a very active part of the Woodchurch Regeneration Partnership, which provides many opportunities for people of all ages to be involved in projects to improve their environment. As part of its Engineering College status, the school is trying to encourage local and business people to make use of the specialist staff and resources in school, and this aspect is slowly improving. The school has excellent relationships with many businesses and industries, and uses them very effectively to support pupils' studies. Currently, the school has few international links.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of **leadership and management** is excellent. Central to this is the outstanding leadership provided by the headteacher and the very good quality of leadership from other key staff. Management is excellent and governance very effective.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher is extremely effective in leading by example, strategic thinking and winning the support of others.
- Other key staff give very good, sometimes excellent, leadership, and teamwork is of high quality.
- Management is highly efficient and provides a rare level of consistency across all the school's work.
- Self-evaluation is excellent and leads to beneficial change.
- Inclusion is exceptionally good.

Commentary

38. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership for the school. Her vision for pupils is extremely clear and strong. She has great drive and energy. She has succeeded in uniting staff, pupils and parents in a collaborative effort to make the school the best it can be, creating an ethos in which pupils consider it normal and enjoyable to work hard, to respect one another and pursue personal development in tandem with academic progress. This is a major achievement: it is partly the product of a very high level of consistency from all support and teaching staff in the way they interact with pupils; it also reflects the inspirational role-model the headteacher provides. On a daily basis, she demonstrates how to motivate, support or correct pupils, how to create and run teams and how to show that other people are valued and trusted. She and her senior colleagues are highly visible about the school and her personal style is reflected in her dealings with pupils, staff and parents, in which she is unfailingly positive, lively and strongly supportive or challenging as circumstances require. Backing up these qualities is a highly professional approach to dealing with issues and people. As a result, she has immense respect and support from all those observed or interviewed by inspectors. While the headteacher monitors the work of the school with great care, much of

its success comes from staff and pupils simply being predisposed to follow her lead: they respect her judgement and share the values and policies she espouses.

39. Supporting all of this is highly efficient management: the personal commitment and energy of the headteacher and her staff is always well directed because she has put in place excellent planning arrangements and comprehensive monitoring and reviewing procedures in ways that involve and engage staff around her. Self-evaluation in the school is of high quality. School-improvement planning identifies areas capably laid out to provide convincing ways of turning hopes into reality. The excellent improvement since the last inspection demonstrates a first-rate track record in thinking ambitiously, for instance, in seeking two forms of specialist status, and an impressive ability to monitor progress towards these objectives with real determination and persistence. The improvements in teaching quality reflect this resolution to establish agreed expectations of pupils and ensure that policies and procedures are followed to the letter. Improvement also reflects the clarity with which senior managers communicate their expectations of colleagues and the good will of staff, derived from their confidence in the supportive role of the headteacher and her senior colleagues.
40. Delegation is highly effective and the need to work collaboratively is promoted very well. Senior staff are given extensive independence in, for instance, carrying out improvements to the curriculum, support arrangements for pupils with special needs and aspects of assessment, as well as in planning professional development programmes or the implementation of government initiatives, such as the 'Key Stage 3 Strategy'. However, in all of these activities, there is very good teamwork, with extensive consultation, respect for existing good practice and a willingness to explore alternative approaches suggested by others. As a result, the school is characterised by many areas of excellence, such as the provision for inclusion, and the humanities, where strong leadership and shared ideas have speeded up change and ensured that it is understood and valued by all. The headteacher has encouraged individuals or teams of staff to contribute extensively to LEA training in these and other areas of strength.
41. Staff at every level show a very strong sense of responsibility and are very well supported and monitored by senior colleagues. As a result, no subject or year group has less than good leadership and management and, overall, the quality is very good. In history, geography, religious education, design and technology, art and design and physical education, leadership and management are excellent. The common features leading to their strong academic success are: very effective teamwork, especially in terms of helping each other acquire consistency; extremely high; detailed knowledge of examination board requirements; and remarkable efficiency in managing pupils' progress through successive topics, and in preparing for coursework or examination deadlines.
42. The success in providing well for pupils of every type owes much to good leadership and management. Whole-school awareness and commitment are strong because of first-rate policy making and very good consultation with pupils, staff and parents. Everyone knows why and how inclusion matters and how it is best served. The running of distinct areas is effective. For instance, the management of provision for pupils with special educational needs is excellent. The procedures to identify, assess and monitor special educational needs are outstanding. Individual education plans are excellent, and the targets agreed for pupils are highly appropriate. The majority of support for pupils with special educational needs is provided in the classroom, but pupils are withdrawn on occasion to work in small groups to develop skills. The contribution made by these sessions is very good, and promotes pupils' progress very well. Support assistants are an integral part of the teaching team, and their contribution is often excellent. The leadership and management of the provision for gifted and talented pupils are very good. Clear and effective communication and good in-service training mean that the school's policy is fully implemented by departments, so that the pupils are very well provided for in every curricular area.

Financial information for the year April 2004 to March 2005

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	6,472,503
Total expenditure	6,198,209
Expenditure per pupil	4,574

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	523,000
Balance carried forward to the next year	389,000

43. Governance is very good. Governors share their knowledge of the school effectively and many have detailed, first-hand impressions, gained from visiting staff and classrooms during the school day. Written reports are discussed fully and presentations to the governing body by staff are regular events. As a result, governors collectively have a much more detailed and reliable picture of the school than is usual. They use this effectively to give the school very good support and strategic guidance. Governors hold senior leaders and managers to account well and they are particularly successful in meeting all of their statutory obligations. Financial management is excellent. Governors liaise well with the school's business manager who, with colleagues, monitors funding very closely. Bidding for additional funds has been highly successful and the school uses 'best value' principles extremely well, ensuring, for instance, that the most reliable and adaptable contractors, rather than the lowest-priced ones, win tenders. It has also chosen to continue to spend above-average amounts on support staff because this expenditure can be shown to bring direct benefits to pupils and teaching staff. These factors contribute to the school giving excellent value for money. The large brought-forward figures in the table above are indicative of wise planning, each representing agreed outgoing the school could see would become due in the next financial year. In 2004, the carry-forward supported high staffing levels no longer fully funded by the LEA, but shown to be very beneficial to pupils. The 2005 carry-forward is to cover known capital costs involved in the completion of the new sports complex and refurbishment of science laboratories.

Work-related learning

Provision in work-related learning is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' awareness of work-related learning is very well developed in the formal curriculum.
- Very good programmes of work experience and extended work experience enable pupils to take part in off-site learning.
- Pupils benefit from excellent links with a wide range of business organisations.
- Very well planned enrichment activities help pupils to develop a very good understanding of the workplace.

Commentary

44. A highly impressive range of links with business organisations contributes very effectively to pupils' understanding of the world of work. A very wide variety of contexts, including Enterprise Day and Engineering Fortnight, successfully broadens the experience of pupils.
45. All pupils take part in two weeks of work experience, and some in Years 10 and 11 take part in extended work experience, as part of the school's alternative curriculum. This programme is extremely well led and managed. Very careful attention is paid to the individual needs of pupils. More than 60 pupils in Years 10 and 11 attend the Laird Foundation one day per week, following vocational courses in engineering, joinery and welding. Another 32 pupils take part in extended work experience, in a wide range of placements that include joinery, hair and beauty, child care, bricklaying, floristry, engineering, retailing and office and administration skills. These pupils express very positive attitudes about their courses, and are very appreciative of the opportunities to learn new and useful skills.

46. The work-experience programme is extremely well prepared and carried out. Much of the preparation is done during careers education lessons, but is supported by work done in other areas of the curriculum. Pupils complete application forms, CVs and letters of application, and undergo mock interviews. Records of the experience are kept, and when pupils return to school they are thoroughly de-briefed and also write their own evaluations. Pupils speak very enthusiastically about the work and feel that they have gained valuable knowledge about the world of work. A large proportion of pupils successfully complete a unit of work on 'preparation for interview', which is accredited by the AQA examination board. The school has received from the Liverpool Education Business Partnership the Recognition of Quality Award for Work Experience.
47. An excellent careers programme is well established, and is taught as part of the personal, social and health education course. Pupils are well informed about post-16 options through an up-to-date careers library. Links with local colleges that provide an extensive range of courses are very strong. A wide range of companies send representatives to the school to give pupils information about modern apprenticeships. Pupils visit Wirral Boys' and Girls' Grammar Schools and Birkenhead Sixth Form College on taster days. The school recognises the specialisms of other institutions, and pupils benefit from very good links with Wirral Metropolitan College, Reaseheath College, Liverpool Community College and St Helen's College. The strong emphasis that the school places on the interests and needs of individuals or particular groups of pupils is well illustrated by the setting up of an accredited after-school plumbing course for pupils who were experiencing difficulty in finding places on such courses at local colleges. The school's course was voluntary: it was very successful and enabled pupils to receive a certificate from AQA.
48. All aspects of work-related learning are extremely well led and managed. A detailed audit of the areas of the curriculum that contribute to work-related learning has been completed. All subject departments have a policy, and identify in their schemes of work opportunities for developing work-related skills. A particularly strong feature of the school's approach is the way it involves a wide range of subjects that help pupils to develop both knowledge of the workplace and skills that will help them to become employable. The work experience and careers programmes are very effectively enhanced by a 'skills for work' programme that focuses each half-term on a work-related skill, such as teamwork, problem-solving, time management, communication or presentation, and promotes it through assemblies, form tutorial time and posters in corridors and classrooms, as well as through timetabled subjects.
49. Pupils are very well taught and their work, whether in portfolios, work-experience journals, role plays or lessons, is rigorously assessed, either by teachers or, where appropriate, by representatives from the many businesses with which the school has strong links.
50. The school is strongly committed to enterprise learning. All Year 10 pupils take part in an Enterprise Day. Following a theme of 'tomorrow's managers today' they work in groups to complete a challenge based on a business simulation, supported by visitors from 20 to 30 companies who are on hand to advise, guide and evaluate pupils' contributions. As with work-related learning, the school adopts a cross-curricular approach and involves all subjects. Plans for the future development of enterprise learning and for the training of staff are excellent, emphasising, as in work-related learning, the process of continuous review.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well during their five years at Woodchurch.
- Very good teaching motivates and inspires pupils.
- Pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour contribute to very good learning.
- Very good leadership and management promote strengths and identify and successfully tackle weaknesses.
- Computers are not used sufficiently to underpin learning.

Commentary

51. Results in the end of Year 9 national tests in 2004 were above average compared to national standards. They were well above average compared to similar schools, and well above average when taking pupils' prior attainment into account. Standards are rising, though they dipped in 2003.
52. Standards seen during the inspection at the end of Year 9 are average, reflecting very good achievement from pupils' attainment on entry to the school. Girls attain more highly than boys, but by no more than is found nationally. Pupils attain more highly in reading, speaking and listening than they do in writing. Higher-attaining pupils produce accurate, well-paragraphed work, employing varied sentence structures and a reasonably wide vocabulary. They understand Shakespearian language and respond to the characters in *Macbeth* perceptively. They are less strong in analysis of language. Lower-attaining pupils produce neat, thoughtful work, using accurate spelling and punctuation, but with a limited range of vocabulary. The achievement of lower-attaining pupils is greatly enhanced by a raft of effective measures, such as extra literacy lessons, small classes and vibrant extra reading lessons. The progress of the gifted and talented pupils is also very good. A six-week period of small group work each year helps to develop their ability to study independently. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress. They are fully integrated into lessons and very well supported. Work is carefully tailored to their individual needs.
53. Results in the 2004 GCSE examinations were below average, but almost every pupil gained a qualification in English and English literature – a remarkable achievement. Pupils did less well in both English examinations than they did in their other examinations. Boys' performance was considerably below that of the girls.
54. Standards at the end of Year 11 are below average. Higher-attaining pupils' folders showed precise, high quality analysis of literature, using well chosen quotations to support their ideas, for example, in their comparisons of the poetry of Blake and Wordsworth. Lower-attaining pupils, the majority, showed good basic knowledge of their texts, but only occasionally used quotations. Their writing was not organised into effective paragraphs. Nationally approved value-added data confirms that pupils achieve very well by the end of Year 9 and well between Years 9 and Year 11. Achievement across all years is very good overall.
55. Teaching and learning are very good. Management has developed a dedicated team that works together to create an effective, lively and supportive environment in which all pupils are treated as individuals. Lessons are very well planned to ensure variety and keep all pupils interested. Pupils know the purpose of the lesson and what has been learned by the end of it. Pupils enjoy their English and respond very well, showing enthusiasm. Their very good behaviour helps to create an ethos where pupils can learn quickly and efficiently. Useful homework is regularly set, and pupils approach it positively. Teachers use questioning very

well to assess understanding and draw out pupils' responses. However, they do not always use specific criteria to help pupils understand exactly how they can improve. Computers are not used sufficiently to underpin learning. When a Year 10 group was told they were to be used next lesson, pupils showed better motivation to complete their tasks.

56. Leadership and management are very good. Management provides very good role models. Teaching and the curriculum are carefully monitored, and weaknesses identified and addressed. For example, deliberately introduced strategies, such as an all-boys group and more active learning methods, are having a beneficial effect on raising the achievement of boys.
57. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Standards and achievement have improved. Teaching and learning have improved and become much more consistent. All the weaknesses identified in the previous report have been eradicated.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

58. Standards of literacy are in line with those found nationally. Pupils speak confidently, both in small groups and to the class. They can access and understand texts in different subject areas. Writing is neat, and spelling and punctuation are reasonably accurate. Pupils have good awareness of purpose and audience in their writing.
59. Teachers are fully aware of the responsibility they have for developing pupils' literacy. Their contributions are very well co-ordinated and well monitored. Pupils have plenty of opportunities to explore ideas through discussion. In art, for instance, pupils give illustrated presentations. Important subject words are carefully introduced, so that pupils understand them in context. For example, pupils were made aware in a Year 7 athletics lesson of the precise meaning of 'momentum' and 'acceleration', so that they understood them in the context of the sprint start. Pupils are taught how to develop their writing and improve it. Through their empathetic writing about Zakah, pupils in a Year 9 religious education lesson came to understand the concept of charity.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above average in Spanish.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Pupils show very good attitudes and achieve very well.
- Very good leadership and management produce a continued commitment to improving standards.

Commentary

60. After a trend of steadily improving standards during the previous five years, GCSE results in 2004 showed a significant further improvement. The proportion of pupils who gained A* to C results in Spanish was well above the national average. Pupils spend much less time studying French than in most schools, and results matched the national average. The difference between the performances of boys and girls was much greater than that found nationally.
61. Standards seen in Years 7 to 9 are just below average, but represent good achievement, because reading skills are well below average when pupils enter the school. Pronunciation is generally good. Although pupils readily take part in oral activities that are carefully controlled by their teachers, they do not develop the ability to use the foreign language spontaneously in everyday exchanges. Listening skills are well developed, because teachers use the foreign

language extensively in lessons. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, and benefit from the very good support that is provided by teaching assistants and foreign language assistants.

62. Pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11. As a result of their teachers' high expectations and of their own application, they reach standards that are above average. They have a good understanding of both spoken and written language. Higher-attaining pupils cope well with complex language, showing a good understanding of verb tenses and a variety of language structures. As with younger pupils, independent and spontaneous speaking is the weakest area, but pupils perform competently in well-rehearsed dialogues.
63. Teaching and learning throughout the school are very good. Sometimes they are excellent. Teachers plan their lessons very well and enable pupils to develop their language skills through a wide range of appropriate activities that are very well matched to pupils' needs. As a result, pupils are clear about what they need to learn and they sustain interest. They are regularly challenged and they respond very positively. Teachers contribute very effectively to the development of pupils' literacy skills by encouraging them to think about language patterns.
64. Very good leadership and management have made a major contribution to the very good improvement since the previous inspection. The head of faculty, leading by example, has created a cohesive team of teachers that has effected improvements in standards, in GCSE results, the quality of teaching and in the achievement of pupils. The teachers recognise that the success of their assessment procedures in Years 10 and 11 is more effective than in Years 7 to 9, and they are addressing the issue in order that more of the younger pupils understand better how to improve their level of performance. More frequent and effective use of ICT to develop pupils' language learning is also being investigated. There is a shared vision for the development of the subject that puts at its heart further improvement of teaching and learning, but teachers do not have enough opportunities to develop their work by observing one another.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils achieve very well throughout the school.
- Pupils learn very well, because of very good teaching and because of their very good behaviour and attitudes.
- Because the department is very well led and managed, there has been very good improvement since the last inspection.
- Departmental assessment procedures are good, but there is still room for improvement.

Commentary

65. Pupils' results in 2004 were in line with the national average, and well above those for similar schools, both in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests (SATs) and in GCSE at Year 11. Standard assessment test results have shown an upward trend, above that seen nationally over recent years. GCSE results, too, have improved much faster than those seen nationally. Given that the pupils come to the school with below-average mathematical skills, these results show that the pupils are achieving very well. Their results, compared with previous test scores, are well above the national rate of increase at both Year 9 and Year 11.
66. The pupils' work, seen in their books and during lessons, is average by the end of Year 9, and above average in Year 11. This standard shows very good achievement over time, as might be expected from the national test and examination results. In Year 9, about three-quarters of

the pupils are producing work equivalent to National Curriculum level five or better. Numerical and algebraic work is secure. Higher-attaining pupils can use Euclid's algorithm to find highest common factors and least common multiples; lower-attaining pupils can work out the size of angles at a point and are confident multiplying by multiples of ten.

67. In Years 10 and 11, almost six in ten pupils show the capacity to obtain a grade C or higher. These pupils can solve geometrical and trigonometric problems, using Pythagoras' theorem or sine, cosine and tangent. They can find the roots of quadratic equations by using the formula and, in some cases, by completing the square. All pupils seen were clearly capable of gaining a GCSE grade, with very few likely to gain less than a grade E.
68. Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school. In a substantial majority of the lessons observed, learning and teaching were good or better; in a half they were very good or excellent. There were no unsatisfactory lessons. The application of principles established in the National Numeracy Strategy with total consistency across the department means that lessons are very well planned and taught. The pupils are given challenging work and a variety of activities in each class, so there is always plenty to do that holds their interest and concentration. Lessons almost invariably include a range of tasks and activities that are well suited to the different strengths of the pupils in them. In an excellent Year 10 lesson, for example, the pupils were treated to mathematical legerdemain when the teacher had written and concealed the answer to a problem they appeared to have chosen for themselves on a cupboard door at the back of the class. A Year 7 class composed almost entirely of pupils with special educational needs provided another example. The pupils benefited from the teacher's excellent preparation and planning, and responded extremely well to her firm direction and outstandingly skilful use of questioning and praise, as they came to terms with finding the area of complicated shapes formed from rectangles. In this, as in many other lessons, the pupils' learning benefited from excellent technical and learning support assistants.
69. Learning support assistants are well trained and very effectively deployed in classrooms. Technical support is effective in ensuring that computers are available and working, so that teachers can plan for their use, confident that they will work. Relationships between teachers and taught are very good, and the pupils behave very well in class; both factors make a significant contribution to the quality of learning.
70. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good, because of very good departmental leadership and management and through the impact of the work of the department's advanced skills teacher. Teachers who are new to the school and student teachers benefit from very good training and induction procedures. Each member of the department makes a contribution related to their individual interests and experience. Some, for instance, have established very good links with primary schools, where children benefit from taster lessons such as kite making. There are bridging courses, so that work begun in primary schools in Year 6 continues into the pupils' first weeks at Woodchurch. Schemes of work are under constant review, kept up to date and subject to continuing improvement. The head of department provides a very good lead. He sets and maintains very high standards. He is a very good teacher, combining erudition with humour in his lessons. The teachers value the way in which he supports and encourages them.
71. There are many examples of very good and excellent use of assessment in the department, ranging from the three-leafed 'traffic light' fans with which pupils signal their level of understanding of the subject, to the detailed analysis and use of test and examination results to improve and inform lesson planning and schemes of work. The department has yet, however, to co-ordinate these into a uniform approach that can be made common to all. The head of department recognises the need for greater consistency, particularly in the application of a policy for improving learning by ensuring pupils are more involved in assessment of their work.

Mathematics across the curriculum

72. Pupils demonstrate average mathematical and numerical skills across the range of subjects they study. In engineering lessons, Year 10 and 11 pupils use trigonometric formulae to calculate angles for practical work. In geography, they read and interpret graphs and diagrams to understand climate change, and convert two-dimensional shapes from contour lines into three-dimensional representations of relief features.
73. The contribution to the pupils' improving numerical understanding made in subjects across the curriculum is very good. There is a well-developed school policy for numeracy, which is incorporated into departmental policies in every curricular area. Teachers take the teaching of numeracy seriously and have given it considerable thought. In art, for example, there is emphasis on accurate estimation of size and proportion in relation to portrait drawing, and links with mathematics are positively reinforced. In religious education, teachers take the time to discuss the various geometrical shapes included in a Star of David.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving across all years, and are in line with the national average or better.
- Teaching is very good overall, and some is outstanding; teachers have excellent subject knowledge and lesson planning is very good.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Assessment strategies and the analysis of data are very well established.
- Engineering College status enhances the provision in science.
- Attitudes are very positive, and pupils and teachers are very enthusiastic; science has an exciting and stimulating image.
- Most accommodation is dated and is unsatisfactory overall.
- There are no significant weaknesses; rather, some areas for continued development.

Commentary

74. Results of national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were slightly higher than the national average, and this represents the high point of a pattern of gentle improvement over the past few years. However, validated results in 2004 are below the national average. Therefore, in comparison with schools that have pupils with similar prior attainment, results were below average. Pupils' attainment on entry is well below the national average, and the results at the end of Year 9 represent good achievement by many over their first three years in the school.
75. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are generally in line with the national average. About four out of five pupils study double award science to GCSE, and they show good achievement from a relatively low starting point. The proportion of double award pupils gaining passes in the A* to C range is slightly above the national average. Of the remaining pupils, in 2004 about half did single award and a similar proportion studied three separate sciences (triple science). Those pupils doing single science did slightly better overall than the national average, although there were no passes above grade C. Achievement is very high among those taking all three separate science subjects: typically, all pupils gain passes in the A* to C range in physics, chemistry and biology. In 2004, these results were the best in the local education authority area. Numbers in this group of higher-attaining pupils have gradually increased since the last inspection, and in 2004 there was no difference in the performance of boys and girls. However, over a similar period, there is some indication that girls are significantly less successful than boys, particularly at the higher grades in the double award course. Overall, pupils show very good achievement and progress from Year 7 to Year 11.

76. The quality of teaching and learning in science is very good overall, and there is some outstanding practice. Together with effective strategies for assessment, these are strengths of the faculty. The national strategy is well developed; the use of starter and plenary activities, and the introduction of a wide range of teaching and learning styles, are strong features of many lessons. Teachers have excellent knowledge and understanding of their specialist subjects, although standards of marking vary in quality and usefulness to the pupil. Thorough and detailed planning and focused questioning help pupils to do very well, and they respond with energy and enthusiasm. In all lessons, pupils show high levels of initiative, responsibility and maturity in the way they work, independently and in small groups. Students are well-motivated and enthusiastic, and use equipment with care and enjoyment. They consistently work hard, behaviour is excellent and attitudes are very positive.
77. The leadership and management of science are excellent, and documentation is very supportive and of high quality. The head of faculty demonstrates exceptional clarity of vision, commitment and high aspirations. Key areas for development have already been successfully identified, and work has begun. The team of teachers, learning support assistants and technicians are very well supported and handled with sensitivity, and all have high expectations of their pupils. Learning support assistants are very effectively deployed, and their support and contribution to the work of pupils with a range of disabilities is excellent. Four part-time technicians (the equivalent of three full-time staff) make an outstanding contribution to the quality of learning for all pupils. There is a keen sense of purpose to their work, and of belonging to the team working in science. Their specialist knowledge and understanding is high, and is used very effectively.
78. Improvement since the last inspection is very good, and many changes have been brought about that support learning very well. During this period, the head of faculty has been seconded to the local authority advisory service, and is also the Engineering College manager. Acquired since the last inspection, Engineering College status has a significant effect on science throughout the school and on its links with other establishments. Courses have been reviewed, updated and resourced, and support to pupils is very good. Assessment is regular and rigorous, and information is easily accessible by all staff. However, its use to inform pupils of what is required to meet targets is not yet fully established. Assessment for learning and other developing strategies enable pupils to assume greater responsibility for their own learning, and improved styles of teaching and assessment are supported with continuing professional development. Students' experience is enriched through a very wide range of extra-curricular activities, and by frequent contact with other schools and the community. The majority of science laboratories are dated and unsatisfactory, which has a pronounced negative effect on the teaching and learning of many groups. However, an extensive programme of refurbishment of laboratories is imminent. The faculty celebrates success openly. Very good quality work is on display throughout, supporting a popular and positive image of science.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement by Year 11 is very good.
- Teaching is very good overall.
- Standards are below national averages at the end of Years 9 and 11.
- The attitudes of pupils are very good.

- The department has successfully developed a number of courses for Years 10 and 11.
- Technical support is excellent.

Commentary

79. Pupils enter school with attainment in ICT that is well below national expectations. They achieve well, and by the end of Year 11 the standards are just below national expectations, which represents very good achievement.
80. The 2004 teachers' assessments in Year 9 gave levels that were just below national averages, a significant improvement on the previous year's figures. The improvement has happened despite a shortfall in the number of hours that pupils in Years 7 to 9 have been taught ICT. Insufficient time allocation has had an adverse impact on teaching and learning. The school has acted to address this problem. From September, all pupils in Years 7 to 9 will experience at least one hour per week of discrete ICT. Standards observed during the inspection were just below national expectations. Pupils are taught the full range of National Curriculum ICT, through well-written units of work that ensure that they progressively acquire ICT skills. By Year 9, pupils are annotating their work well. They become increasingly aware of ways in which their work can be improved and work hard to improve it.
81. In the 2004 GCSE full course ICT examination, pupils in Year 11 attained standards that were in line with national averages. However, only a minority of the year group take this course: the majority followed alternative courses, and standards in these were below national averages. Pupils have had patchy provision in the past, but new courses have been successfully introduced that fit well with pupils' diverse needs. The courses are accredited, and so all pupils have the opportunity to leave school with recognised certification in ICT. The estimated grades for this year's GCSE examination pupils show substantial improvement on the year before. An analysis of pupils' work corroborated this view. The predicted improvement is in part caused by a change of examination board, which helps pupils to work to their strengths.
82. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Not one of the lessons observed was judged to be less than good. Subject knowledge is very good. Teachers have formed very good relationships with their pupils, so lessons are very orderly and purposeful. Pupils concentrate very well, staying on task throughout lessons. There is very good planning and preparation of lessons. They have good structure and variety, which engages and retains pupils' interest and motivation. Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together as a team. Technical support is excellent. No time has been lost because of technical failure of the network in the last year, and technicians are very effective in dealing with minor day-to-day problems.
83. Leadership and management are very good. The head of ICT has a clear vision of what needs to be done to improve standards in the subject. She has created a very good team, which has the capacity to respond very well to the challenges it faces. She leads by example and is a very effective teacher. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. New schemes of work and examination courses have been introduced that more closely match pupils' needs. The time allocation for pupils in Years 7 to 9 has been improved, and assessment is now a strength of the department.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

84. The competence of pupils in ICT is below average overall, but getting better. Provision for cross-curricular ICT has improved greatly over the past few years, and a number of subjects, such as physical education and technology, are using it very well. The school has committed the resources to bring about this improvement. Although senior management are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and are allocating resources based on a good overview of ICT in the school, there is presently no overall scheme of work for ICT to further aid the management and development of this important tool for learning.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Pupils' achievement is excellent.
- Teaching and learning are of a high standard.
- Teaching and support staff are highly dedicated to their work.
- The excellent ethos and work culture produce well-above-average results in GCSE examinations.
- Plans for additional computer input into teaching recognise the potential for improvement.

Commentary

85. GCSE examination results in 2004 were well above the national average, maintaining the trend over the past three years. Improvement since the last inspection has been excellent. From below-average and, in the case of some pupils, well-below-average attainment on entry to the school, the results indicate excellent achievement by the end of Year 11. The standard of work seen during the inspection was well above average. The high quality of reports from the fieldwork on tourism in Betsw-y-Coed reflects the organisational skills of the staff and the interest, enthusiasm and outstanding efforts of the pupils. Teacher assessment of pupils' work at the end of Year 9 in 2004 was in line with national expectations. However, the work seen during the inspection was above average, representing excellent achievement, given the improvements made since entry in Year 7.
86. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent overall. All teaching is done by specialist staff, who use their very good knowledge of the subject to stretch the thinking skills of all the pupils, but especially the gifted and talented. Lessons are exceptionally well planned, with a variety of activities carefully timed to reflect the concentration span of the pupils. A range of teaching and learning strategies caters for the different learning styles of the pupils, and ensures maximum learning for all pupils. The excellent support provided by teaching assistants contributes to the success of the pupils. The excellent relationship between staff and pupils provides a climate in which lessons are enjoyed. Pupils' work is valued, as evidenced by the excellent displays around the department. Very good use is made of ICT, but provision of additional hardware and software is planned to bring about further improvement.
87. Leadership and management are excellent. A clear vision, exceptional organisation, team building and an excellent role model of dedication to staff and pupils are some of the characteristics of the head of department. The department has been selected as a lead subject for the government's Key Stage 3 Strategy within the local education authority, and has contributed in-service training courses for other schools. The head of department has organised meetings with colleagues from the Birkenhead Cluster Group, in order to increase co-operation and sharing of expertise. Other innovations, business links, contributions nationally to Assessment for Learning and a number of professional activities are indications of the energy and enthusiasm in a dynamic department. The department is exceptionally well managed. Staff are dedicated: for example, they provide excellent support for pupils in regular lunchtime clubs, after school and during school holidays. Each member of staff makes a distinct contribution to the department, based on interest, expertise and enthusiasm. The quality of material produced to enhance teaching and learning is superb.
88. Excellent improvement has been made since the last inspection. Standards have improved very significantly, the quality of teaching is now excellent overall, accommodation is among the best encountered, the match of staff to the requirement of the curriculum is first class and the department makes significant contributions to the training of teachers. Assessment

procedures provide a very good model for subjects and the department is at the forefront of developments in the subject.

History

Provision in history is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils from Years 7 to 11 learn and achieve excellently, as a result of excellent teaching.
- The effect of excellent learning is enhanced by the pupils' excellent attitudes to work.
- Limited access to ICT facilities means that there is not enough systematic use of ICT to promote research and presentation skills further.
- Excellent leadership provides the subject with a clear vision and direction.
- The assessment, monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are strengths of the department.

Commentary

89. By the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment in tests is average. Standards of classwork are well above average, representing excellent achievement, as pupils enter the school with skills in history that are well below average. Pupils comprehend with empathy the plight of the Jewish community in Nazi Germany, and the higher-attaining pupils understand how Hitler used a range of methods, including anti-Semitism, to maintain power.
90. GCSE results have been well above national norms in the last three years. Standards, as seen in Year 10 classes and pupils' work at Year 11, are well above average. Teachers' emphasis on thinking and enquiry skills ensures that pupils of all abilities make excellent progress, particularly in developing skills of analysis and interpretation; higher-attaining pupils show a mature understanding of historical concepts. Pupils with special educational needs, as well as those who are gifted and talented, make excellent progress, because they are effectively challenged by a range of appropriate materials.
91. Nevertheless, the achievement of all pupils has scope for improving still further as the lack of in-class access to ICT facilities hinders the development of their research and presentation skills. In Years 10 and 11, with very few exceptions, there is little evidence of wider reading to enhance both style and knowledge. The high standards of pupils' oral answers are not always replicated in their written work.
92. The quality of teaching and learning in all years is excellent. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to plan a variety of stimulating activities which strongly engage the attention of all pupils. They develop pupils' research skills and empathy very well. Teachers are enthusiastic and have high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. Their obvious love for their subject is strongly communicated to pupils, providing a firm basis for learning. Their enthusiasm shows in, for example, the additional teaching sessions provided for pupils. Pupils are stimulated and excited by high quality teaching, so that history has become a very popular subject. Homework is always used effectively as a means of preparation for the following lesson.
93. Learning is excellent. The vast majority of pupils show strong interest in the subject, co-operate well with the teachers and their classmates, and work and learn very effectively. Their attitudes and behaviour in class are excellent. Such attitudes are developed and fostered by the teachers, whose additional supporting activities are much appreciated by the pupils.
94. Leadership and management are excellent. The head of department has produced documents that signal his clarity of vision about the future of the department. The documents are informed, and underpin much of the good work of the department, both as a subject in its own

right and as a lead contributory subject in cross-curricular activities such as citizenship. He is supported particularly effectively by the senior management of the school and by his colleagues, whom he, in turn, supports. The head of department has established a very effective assessment regime, which incorporates, with great effect, the use of self- and peer-group assessment; together with his monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, this is a strength of the department, recognised both within the school and in the authority. He and his colleagues are excellent role models of commitment to the maintenance of the highest standards.

95. The strong commitment to improvement has already had success, as measured by the very good progress made since the previous, pleasing report. This is an excellent department with excellent potential for even greater success.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils from Years 7 to 11 learn and achieve excellently, as a result of excellent teaching.
- Pupils' excellent attitudes to work are positive factors in their excellent achievement.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to engage in outside visits to enhance learning.

Commentary

96. Attainment is above average by the end of Year 9, which represents excellent achievement, as pupils enter the school with skills and knowledge in religious education that are well below national norms. Lower-attaining pupils explain how belonging to a religion and a community involves religious beliefs and practices. Higher-attaining pupils place these practices in their historical and cultural contexts.
97. On both the short and full courses, results in the 2004 GCSE examinations were above average. In Years 10 and 11, in class and in work seen, pupils attain standards that are well above national levels. Lower-attaining pupils show considerable understanding of moral issues that confront people in their lives, such as abortion and euthanasia. The higher-attaining pupils display a high level of empathy when considering religious attitudes towards these complex issues, and are able to recognize and express valid opinions about different points of view. Pupils of all capabilities make very good progress, particularly in developing their maturation and analytical skills.
98. Teaching and learning are excellent across all years. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to plan a variety of stimulating activities, which strongly engage the attention of all pupils. Teachers' enthusiasm about the subject is transmitted to the pupils. Marking and assessment are very strong features of teaching, and target setting is a particular feature of very good overall practice. Pupils consequently know their attainment level and how to improve. Well-planned enquiry work has clear learning objectives, challenging tasks and good resources. All these strong teaching elements enable excellent learning to take place. Pupils develop strong empathy and research skills. The discussion of moral issues helps pupils' moral and social development. Pupils have very excellent attitudes to the subject and relationships are excellent.
99. Leadership and management are excellent. The head of department has clear vision about the department's future development. He is aware of the lack of access to ICT and of the not yet fully realised opportunities to visit places of religious interest in the vicinity to enhance pupils' cultural experience. He is an excellent role model of commitment to the maintenance of the highest standards. He is supported by his colleagues in the department, whom he, in turn,

supports. The department has made excellent improvement since the time of the previous report, particularly in teaching and learning and fulfilling statutory requirements.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent leadership and management are key factors in continued improvement and development.
- Very good teaching leads to very good achievement by pupils.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and performance.
- GCSE results show an improving trend.
- Teachers have a high degree of awareness of how design and technology can contribute to the personal development of pupils.
- High quality support is deployed very effectively, and greatly assists pupils' learning.

Commentary

100. GCSE results in 2004 were above average, and A* to C grades have shown a rising trend since the last inspection. The subject also has a creditable record of a 100 per cent pass rate for A* to G grades. Comparative figures show that pupils perform better in design and technology than in many other examination subjects.
101. Teacher assessments for current Year 9 pupils indicate above-average standards, and this is confirmed by observations during the inspection. Positive action to engage all pupils in their learning – changes to the curriculum, greater use of ICT and computer-aided design and manufacture, and an extensive range of extra-curricular activities – has helped to close the gap in performance between boys and girls.
102. By Year 9, pupils reach above-average standards across a wide range of technology areas. Given the below-average standards on entry, this represents very good achievement. Strongly structured courses help all pupils to make very good progress in knowledge, understanding and capability, but are of particular benefit to pupils with special educational needs. Pupils thrive in a practical situation. Year 9 pupils, for example, worked with a high level of concentration and involvement to make a sweet or savoury snack. They understood the practical processes well, and were able to manage their time and effort efficiently. The result of their efforts was a source of pride. Pupils can follow a good design methodology, generate ideas and record their work with clear two- and three-dimensional drawings. They can translate their ideas into practice using good practical skills, for example, when using patterns and templates in textiles. There is an emphasis on quality in all design and manufacture activities, and practical outcomes are often impressive. Clocks made by Year 9 pupils, for example, are accurately engineered and finished to a high standard.
103. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average, although there is a significant body of work that is better than this. Pupils are able to build on their earlier positive experiences to develop a greater degree of independence. Pupils' achievement continues to be very good. Higher-attaining pupils are able to produce detailed and comprehensive design folders, with thorough individual research and analysis. Research often includes studies of engineers, designers and craftsmen who have made a significant contribution to our national heritage. Work is often presented with a good standard of graphics and presentation skills. ICT and computer-aided design and manufacture are used very effectively, and allow pupils to experience industrial techniques and processes. In particular, engineering pupils demonstrate expertise when making and interpreting complex engineering drawings, and make skilled use of hand and

machine tools. Textiles work reflects good emphasis on quality and creativity in design and manufacture, and in food technology, pupils write detailed and perceptive evaluations of their work. Pupils with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented in technology are given excellent support, and their progress is in line with their individual potential.

104. Standards have been improved since the last inspection because teaching and learning are consistently very good. Teachers work closely together to share good practice, and are willing to amend and adapt their techniques. Assessment is used very effectively to monitor pupils' progress and to inform changes to the curriculum. Consistent approaches to managing pupils' behaviour leads to a very positive atmosphere in most lessons. Pupils fully understand the high expectations teachers have of them, and respond well. Teachers have a high awareness of their role in developing pupils' personal qualities. Literacy, numeracy, citizenship and other aspects of personal and social education feature prominently in all lessons, and teachers take every opportunity to underline the importance of engineering to pupils' everyday lives. Technicians are deployed very effectively, and full use is made of the expertise they bring to the school. Some teachers have valuable industrial experience that is of particular benefit in supporting specialist Engineering College objectives. These factors contribute to the rapid rate at which pupils learn, the productive way in which they work and their very good attitudes.
105. The excellent quality of leadership and management has been a key factor in the excellent improvements and changes since the last inspection. There is a coherent vision for the development of the subject, and a clear understanding of its pivotal role within the specialist status of the school. Very good management strategies have ensured that every teacher has a role in improving and developing the subject. The curriculum provides very well for the diverse needs of pupils, and contains a range of opportunities for developing vocational as well as academic pathways. Excellent contacts with business, industry and the community are fully exploited to enrich pupils' technological experience. Accommodation and resources are now very good, and high quality displays celebrate pupils' work and inform their development. An ethos of continued improvement has built on the already very good provision identified in the last report, and effected fundamental changes in the nature of technology provision.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Drama

The main focus was on music, but drama provision was sampled.

106. It was not possible to form a judgement on standards at the end of Year 9, but results in the GCSE examinations in 2004 were in line with the national average. Standards at the end of Year 11 are average. Pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11. They have limited experience of drama in Years 7 to 9 – only 6 weeks per year – so there is much to learn. Pupils can take on roles and have good awareness of space and levels. Year 11 folders showed good awareness of dramatic techniques, and pupils were able to bring their knowledge of the theatre into their analyses of their own work. Pupils work very well in their groups adapting and improving their dramas.
107. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use lively and interesting methods that involve all pupils. Liverpool dramatists, such as Willy Russell, are often used as stimulus, engaging pupils' interest. Teachers provide good evaluations, both in lessons and of written work, but do not always involve the pupils or highlight areas for development sufficiently.
108. Lack of suitable accommodation for all lessons means teaching methods are inhibited, adversely affecting achievement. Drama makes a good contribution to the pupils' extra-curricular activities, but does not yet add that vibrant extra dimension to the school.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment by pupils in Years 10 and 11 is in line with the national average.
- In all year groups, pupils achieve well, and pupils with special educational needs achieve very well.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- The unsatisfactory accommodation adversely affects progress and attainment in Years 7 to 9.
- Arrangements for using ICT are not satisfactory.
- An expanding programme of enrichment activities makes an increasingly effective contribution to pupils' personal development.

Commentary

109. Results in the GCSE examination in music in 2004 were just above the national average for grades A* to C, but numbers entered, although increasing steadily, are too low for valid comparison. The trend varies a little from year to year, according to the particular abilities of individual pupils. Few pupils gain grades A* or A, but over recent years, all pupils have obtained grades in the A* to G range. Similar broadly average standards of attainment were seen during the inspection. Teachers' assessments indicate that, at the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment is in line with nationally expected standards. Standards seen during the inspection were a little below this level, primarily because the department's assessment system is not linked sufficiently closely to National Curriculum criteria.
110. Pupils in all years achieve well. Standards of attainment on entry to the school are variable, but significant numbers are below the expected standard, and very few pupils have a wide musical experience, or learn to play instruments, although this trend is currently improving. Most pupils in Year 7 are able to maintain a regular pulse, and make good progress in reading scores and playing simple pieces on the keyboard, although they rarely use accepted fingering technique. At the end of Year 9, most pupils have secure ensemble skills, playing simple melodies and rhythms fluently. Pupils of higher ability successfully combine melodies with more complex chord schemes, and the most able can improvise skilfully against given harmonic schemes. However, because of limited playing technique, pupils have difficulty in realising ideas in composing. Because there are no separate spaces for group work, the development of listening skills is restricted, adversely affecting both the quality of performing and the experimental approach to composing. Pupils who are gifted and talented achieve as well as other pupils. Pupils who have special educational needs achieve very well because of the high quality of learning support assistants, some of whom are practising musicians. One pupil with Asperger's syndrome worked tenaciously and quite independently to learn a melody, which he then performed both to and along with the class. There is no discernible difference between the achievement of boys and girls.
111. By the end of Year 11, pupils create properly structured compositions, with balanced phrasing and a secure sense of key. Higher-attaining pupils work imaginatively with rhythm and instrumentation, but most pupils restrict themselves to suggested guidelines, and few experiment outside narrow conventional styles. A minority plays orchestral instruments to a creditable level; most pupils build on their natural abilities and interests by singing or playing the guitar or keyboard, but lack the self-confidence needed for a polished performance. Pupils have limited powers of recall of technical language, but most are secure in their knowledge of the elements of music.
112. Teaching and learning are good and some very good teaching was seen in Year 10. Occasionally, inexperience and lack of specific qualifications result in musical priorities not being sufficiently clear, with too much time devoted to a single activity. Lessons are well planned to cater for pupils' individual needs and abilities, and teachers readily use their musical expertise to provide good examples for pupils. However, the range of instruments

available is not wide enough and the lessons are not sufficiently varied to give pupils a greater sense of the joy and excitement of making music.

113. Leadership and management are good. The head of department provides a good role model, and regularly monitors the quality of teaching and learning. Pupils' work is regularly assessed, although links to National Curriculum criteria are not strict enough for reliable accuracy. The current arrangements for using ICT, whereby pupils have to enter notation by mouse-click rather than by midi keyboards, are unsatisfactory. Other resources are satisfactory in quality, but there are not enough good quality pitched percussion instruments. The accommodation is unsatisfactory, because there are no separate spaces for group work, adversely affecting the development of pupils' listening and composing skills. Pupils' experience is enriched by opportunities for exploring music from other cultures. The number of pupils taking instrumental lessons is currently growing, and small ensembles and vocal groups rehearse weekly. The school's musicians take part in large-scale events, such as the Arts Evening, and in activities run by the local authority.
114. Since the previous inspection the quality of teaching has improved, and standards of attainment at GCSE have risen. Although shortcomings in the accommodation remain a barrier to raising attainment in music, improvement is nevertheless good.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 11 are well above average.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Teaching and learning are consistently very good.
- Achievement at the end of Year 11 is excellent.
- The subject makes an excellent contribution to pupils' cultural development.

Commentary

115. Standards at the end of Year 11 are well above average. Pupils' colour work is of a very high standard: compositions based on a study of butterflies are highly decorative. They paint confidently on a large scale, exploring the shapes made by the human figure in motion very effectively. Their three-dimensional work is imaginative, and items of furniture, such as chairs and stools, are richly decorated with swirling lines and shapes, using wire and card. Work from the life model in charcoal is vigorous and accurate. Results at GCSE in recent years have usually been above average. They fell in 2004, to a level that was average. However, pupils still did much better than expected, considering their standards when they started at the school in Year 7. Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average. Pupils make lively puppets based on characters from the plays of Shakespeare or Greek mythology. They create attractive paintings, and use ICT to produce unusual distorted portraits. They make imaginative sculptures in wire and shredded paper, which express the lightness and delicacy of classical dancers. They use sketchbooks well, although their experimental work in them lacks the very highest levels of excitement seen in their larger-scale work. Achievement at the end of Year 9 is very good. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well, because of the very good teaching and the excellent support that they receive.
116. Leadership and management are excellent. There is a very strong direction in the work of the department, and a strong sense of teamwork. Projects are continually evaluated and refined, and teachers are able to make the most of their particular strengths. As a result, there has been very good improvement since the previous inspection. For example, the quality of teaching and learning is now very good, and pupils' achievement at the end of Year 11 is now excellent.

117. Teaching and learning are very good. Materials and methods are exciting and inspiring, and pupils often work in plaster or textiles, make card sculptures, or paint on a very large scale. Teachers' expectations of behaviour and effort are also extremely high, producing a very active and focused learning atmosphere in lessons, with pupils often engrossed in their work. In addition, teachers' planning is always very thorough, and tasks are set so that pupils' skills build step by step, with the level of challenge gradually increasing. Learning is consistently very good as a result.
118. Achievement at the end of Year 11 is excellent, because the quality of teaching and learning is consistently very good across Years 7 to 11. In addition, assessment is very good, and pupils know exactly what they need to do to improve their drawing, painting or sculptural skills. These factors result in standards that are now well above average in Year 11.
119. The subject makes an excellent contribution to pupils' cultural development. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Displays in the teaching rooms are vibrant and exciting, and pupils' work is regularly exhibited in local galleries. Pupils take part in workshops with professional artists, and enter art competitions, often winning prizes. They also create paintings and sculptures inspired by theatre visits, or by first-hand study of local landscapes and skylines. In addition, they study the art of other cultures, such as Indian fabrics or African masks.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement across Years 7 to 11 is very good.
- The majority of teaching is very good or excellent.
- Standards in GCSE are improving and are well above the national average and the average for the school.
- Leadership and management are excellent.

Commentary

120. Standards of work in Years 7 to 9 are above average. There are strengths in running, jumping and throwing activities. At the time of the inspection, athletics was the focus activity, and boys were developing appropriate techniques for starting and relay changeover in sprinting. In high jump, javelin throwing and shot putting, girls and boys were very aware of the different phases of the action, and basic techniques are well established. Understanding of how to evaluate performance and feed back coaching points are particularly well developed, enhanced by the very good cue cards developed within the department and regularly used as an aid to learning. The majority of pupils enjoy transferring individual techniques into the competitive context. Achievement across Years 7 to 9 for pupils as a whole is very good, and the curricular design and units of work allow pupils to pursue an activity to an appropriate depth. Levels of participation are excellent.
121. Attainment in core physical education in Years 10 and 11 is above average, with boys and girls making further progress in rounders, basketball and dance. There are examples of exceptional performance in basketball, where the standard of performance is high, and the understanding of principles of attack and defence is very good. Achievement between Years 7 and 11 is good.
122. GCSE physical education results over the last three years have been well above average and interim results for current Year 11 are outstanding. Standards seen during the inspection support this already strong but improving position. Results in dance show a similar pattern. The numbers taking GCSE dance and physical education in current Years 10 and 11 are now

much bigger. In the work seen during the inspection, current Year 10 boys are making impressive progress, developing advanced techniques in shot-putting; the majority of girls show high-level evasion skills in basketball. In both areas, pupils on the gifted and talented register are being appropriately challenged, and perform at a high level. Pupils' written work demonstrates a very good working knowledge of body systems, and the ability to relate theory to practice is very well developed across the cohort.

123. Achievement for those taking GCSE courses is very good. A significant number of boys and girls develop and refine their skills further in the strong extra-curricular sports programme. A high percentage of pupils achieve the National Curriculum aspiration of two hours of physical activity per week. There are rich opportunities for a large number of pupils to engage in internal or external school competition. Clubs also exist for those pupils who only want to participate and improve. The school teams enjoy a high level of success at local and regional level, and an impressive number of pupils take part in inter-form competition and sports days. Many gifted and talented pupils work within the Junior Athlete Education Programme. It is rare that pupils with special educational needs can be distinguished from the rest, and they attain well, particularly with the high level of help given by learning support assistants, who work closely with the physical education staff.
124. The quality of teaching and learning is very good, with a significant minority that is excellent. Across Years 7 to 11, teaching and learning succeed because of challenging objectives and teachers provide stimulating practical demonstrations and planned progressions at brisk pace, with a variety of tasks. In Year 8, teaching was very good when it set high expectations by using a video clip of high jumping to initiate the lesson. The teacher was able to use the presentation as a catalyst to draw on pupil's previous learning, to establish what they needed to develop during the lesson; activity levels were high, and the emphasis on pupils evaluating their own progress was enhanced by the use of cue cards produced within the department. Distinctive features of the teaching are the good command of subject knowledge and the opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own and others' performances. Teachers offer good role models and often offer inspiration by demonstration to enhance learning. In the majority of lessons, good support for numeracy and literacy is evident, and the teachers recognise when they are dealing with citizenship issues. They endeavour to support the wider work of the Engineering College specialist status with references to use of levers, momentum and centre of gravity where appropriate. The role of the physical education technician is central to the prompt starts and development and use of a wide range of resources in lessons.
125. Leadership and management of the department are excellent. There is a reflective approach and the desire of the teaching team to improve delivery is evident in the teamwork and sharing of ideas on planning and evaluating units of work and individual lessons. Overall provision for sport in the school as a whole is excellent. Very good improvement has been made since the last inspection, in particular in the successful integration of separate male and female departments, the advent of GCSE dance and curricular dance for boys and football for girls, the assessment of learning overall, the creation of school sport co-ordinators within feeder primary schools, and the creation of the role of physical education technician.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

126. **GCSE Leisure and tourism** was sampled in Year 10. The course is in its first year. It is well organised and delivered by a team of modern languages and geography staff. Teaching and learning are very good and excellent use is made of computers in teaching and learning. Pupils are highly motivated, as they chose the subject for its career prospects, and the standard of work seen is above average. Pupils achieve very well and reach national average standards, from a much lower than average starting point. This process is begun well in Years 7 to 9, and is successfully sustained in Years 10 and 11.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are rich opportunities across the school to participate and take responsible action.
- Specific citizenship teaching is good or very good.
- Provision is well structured and integrated with personal, social and health education and careers education.
- Use of assessment within the subject is at an early stage of development.

Commentary

127. Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average, while they are well above average at the end of Year 11. Pupils' attainment in relation to the development of participation and responsible action is good. Pupil knowledge and understanding about being informed citizens are also well developed. There is a very strong sense of community in the school to help strengthen this. Understanding the consequences of actions is a strong theme, both in lessons and in the wider life of the school. The school discipline and reward system strengthens this further. The majority of pupils are developing skills of enquiry and communication with experience across a number of curricular areas, particularly English and physical education.
128. Much is attempted within the citizenship curriculum and the wider life of the school to broaden the horizons of pupils and modify behaviour and attitudes. There is a very high level of expectation that pupils will get involved in school- and community-based activities. Such activities are well structured across the different year groups. For example, a democratic election process results in all tutor groups and year groups being represented in and contributing to the school forum, which plays a key role in ensuring the student voice is heard and acted upon. In Year 7, pupils are encouraged to appreciate the advantages of living in a multi-cultural society. In Year 8, pupils are fully involved in learning about the roles of jurors and the significance of evidence in court cases, enabling them to participate in a mock trial by jury. In Year 10, a significant number of pupils serve as prefects; they showed a very mature and courteous approach in hosting parents and guiding them within school during a parents' evening. Pupils have made very good overall achievement by the end of Year 11.
129. Teaching and learning are very good. The best lessons are characterised by thorough planning and clear objectives, which are always shared with pupils. Agreed protocols for the behaviour of the group are established at the outset, and a number of appropriate scenarios are put forward for consideration, as in the Year 7 session looking at aspects of crime. In the majority of lessons, teachers work hard to draw out ideas from the pupils, who may not be confident conversationalists. A major strength is teachers' knowledge of their pupils, which allows them to be sensitive to individuals when discussing controversial issues. All the teachers encourage pupils to be fair and balanced in their views and to respect a different viewpoint.
130. The citizenship curriculum is well structured and mapped out, underpinned by appropriate units of work. A strong feature is how links are made to other parts of the curriculum to deal with citizenship issues, such as the English lesson that considered the role of the press, and physical education lessons that underline the different demands of co-operative activities and competitive situations. The subject leader has emphasised the school's role as a community within a community, ensuring that citizenship is not only taught, but also experienced and practised in the wider life of the school. In Year 11, pupils help to ease the transition of Year 7 pupils from primary to secondary school. Although performance in citizenship is fully reported to parents, the use of assessment is at an early stage, and is not yet used to inform ongoing teaching. The absence of whole-school staff in-service training has meant that citizenship outcomes are not always fully exploited or dealt with in other subjects, reinforcing work in this

area. Overall improvement in the subject since the last inspection has been very good. The subject is fully integrated with PSHE and aspects of careers and work-related learning. Teachers have been innovative in delivery: the subject leader has been able gradually to build up a strong reservoir of resources, even involving the writing of a small play to strengthen the appreciation of specific scenarios.

Personal, social and health education

Provision in personal, social and health education is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very well planned programme makes a significant contribution to the maturity and personal development of pupils.
- Personal, social and health education is very well led and managed by an experienced and able practitioner.
- Teaching is very good overall, with some excellent practice.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of how their attitudes and behaviour can affect other people.
- There is an excellent awareness of how all aspects of school life can contribute to pupils' personal development and the quality of their learning.
- Links with outside agencies, careers advice and work-related learning are very well co-ordinated.

Commentary

131. Personal, social and health education is taught as part of a whole-school co-ordinated approach to the development of young people. It is because personal, social and health education permeates every aspect of school life that its impact on the behaviour and attitudes of pupils is so marked. The values enshrined in the well-constructed teaching programme are replicated in the teaching of each subject and, consequently, they have a much greater impact on pupils' attitudes. Pupils' personal development is reinforced further during form tutorial time, where social and moral issues are often discussed, and where pupils are regularly encouraged to reflect on spiritual issues. The cumulative effect of this is to prepare pupils for living and working harmoniously together, with a very good understanding of how their actions can affect others. This highly effective system has been developed over many years, under the guidance of a skilled practitioner with experience of developing the subject at regional and national levels.
132. Teaching and learning are very good overall, and some aspects are excellent. Because teaching is mainly by non-specialists, great emphasis is placed on providing appropriate training, which has strengthened the whole-school ethos and resulted in teachers and pupils alike taking the subject seriously. Year 10 pupils, for example, were fully drawn into the task of categorising various crime scenarios, because of the excellent way in which the teacher organised time, resources, activity and behaviour. Similarly, Year 9 pupils deepened their understanding of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination by having the opportunity to discuss these issues in a structured and rational way. By very good use of questioning techniques, the teacher was able to extend pupils' answers and help them to arrive at judgements for situations in which there were no clear-cut answers. Lessons are very well planned, and are taught with energy and enthusiasm. In consequence, sensitive, and sometimes controversial, topics are dealt with in a mature way. All statutory requirements for sex education and drugs-related issues are dealt with comprehensively. During discussions with inspectors, pupils could demonstrate a clear understanding of personal, social and health education topics, and their importance to them as they grow into adults. Pupils' knowledge and practice of moral and social behaviour is above average at the end of Year 9; in Years 10 and 11, most mature into caring and concerned young people.

133. The school has built on its already good reputation for developing the personal qualities of pupils, and continually seeks to refine and amend its procedures. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Inspection judgement

Grade

The overall effectiveness of the school	1
How inclusive the school is	1
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	1
Value for money provided by the school	1

Overall standards achieved	2
Pupils' achievement	2

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	1
Attendance	3
Attitudes	1
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

The quality of education provided by the school	2
The quality of teaching	2
How well pupils learn	2
The quality of assessment	2
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	1
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	1
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	1
The quality of the school's links with the community	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	1

The leadership and management of the school	1
The governance of the school	2
The leadership of the headteacher	1
The leadership of other key staff	2
The effectiveness of management	1

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