

INSPECTION REPORT

ASHLEY SCHOOL

Widnes, Cheshire

LEA area: Halton

Unique reference number: 111515

Headteacher: Linda King

Lead inspector: Michael McDowell
Dates of inspection: 6th – 8th December 2004

Inspection number: 268531
Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community special
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16 Years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll;	121
School address:	Cawfield Avenue Widnes Cheshire
Postcode:	WA8 7HG
Telephone number:	0151 4244892
Fax number:	0151 4245980
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Marjorie Constantine
Date of previous inspection:	23rd November 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Ashley is a community special school in the Borough of Halton for pupils aged 11 to 16 years who have moderate learning difficulties. There are 121 pupils, 83 boys and 38 girls. Most of the pupils have additional special educational needs. These include Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, and Autistic Spectrum Disorder. All the pupils have statements of special educational needs. On entering the school pupils' attainment is below or well below average for their age. Most come from families in the more socially and economically deprived areas of the borough. Almost all are white and English is the language spoken at home. The school has achieved national recognition for its work in citizenship and in involving pupils in decision making.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1405	Michael McDowell	Lead inspector	Art and design, music, religious education
13450	Jenny Madden	Lay inspector	
10782	Henry Moreton	Team inspector	Science, geography, history, physical education
30559	Jenny Taylor	Team inspector	English, citizenship, personal, social and health education
10781	Bob Thompson	Team inspector	Mathematics, information and communication technology, design and technology, modern foreign language, (German)

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the school is very good. Pupils are taught very well. They are given very interesting things to do and they enjoy learning. Their achievement is very good. Pupils are fully involved in the development and planning of the work of the school and they are given very good support, advice, and guidance. As a consequence, their attitudes to learning and their commitment to the school and the wider community are excellent. The school is led, managed, and governed very well and gives **very good value for money**.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Achievement is very good.
- Because the ethos of the school is excellent and the curriculum provides outstanding opportunities for personal development, pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and awareness of the responsibilities of living in a community.
- Arrangements for involving pupils in the school's work and development, especially through the School Council, are excellent.
- The school makes excellent use of the community to enrich pupils' learning opportunities.
- The leadership of the headteacher is excellent.
- The level of the course followed in English by pupils in Years 10 and 11 is insufficiently challenging for higher achieving pupils.

Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The school has taken effective action to improve teaching. It has ensured that the needs of individual learners are known and understood, and that lessons are planned to meet these. There has been a new building programme that has improved accommodation and specialist provision. Staffing is now in line with national recommendations. Younger pupils below secondary age, for whom the school could not properly cater, are no longer admitted to the school. The time given to teaching and learning that was low is now sufficient.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement at the end of:	in relation to individual targets in:	
	Subjects of the curriculum	personal and social education
Year 9	Very Good	Very Good
Year 11	Very Good	Very Good

Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor.

Achievement is very good; by the end of Year 9 pupils have made significant gains in all areas of learning. Pupils continue to move forward very well in Years 10 and 11 but opportunities to have their achievements accredited at an appropriate level have only recently been provided in most subjects, and have not yet been provided in English. This has meant that to a large extent, pupils in Year 11 have until this year been unable to show, through success in sufficiently demanding external courses, what they have accomplished. Achievement is very good in English across the age range with speaking and listening being particularly strong. In mathematics, achievement is also very good. Achievement in science is good. In art and design, in which, in Year 11, pupils regularly gain passes in the General Certificate of Secondary Education, (GCSE), in design and technology, (DT), and in information and communication technology, (ICT), achievement is very good by Year 9 and by Year 11. Achievement is very good for pupils in Years 7 to 9 in music. In physical education, (PE), across the age range, achievement is very good. In religious education, (RE), it is good for all age groups. In personal, social and health education, and citizenship, pupils' achievement is very good as is clearly demonstrated by their excellent attitudes and very good personal qualities. Pupils meet the targets that are set for them in their statements and at annual

reviews. The school attains or exceeds the challenging targets for Year-on-Year improvement that it sets.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral and social development, are very good. Attitudes are excellent and behaviour is very good. Pupils' awareness of the responsibilities of living in a community is outstanding. Their relationships with adults and with one another are very good. Attendance is satisfactory.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. The quality of teaching is very good. Lessons are planned most thoroughly. Teachers make very effective choice of materials and methods and take full account of the capabilities of pupils and the requirements of the curriculum. This is because assessment is good, and at times, very good. It is accurate and clearly recorded and includes the assessment of pupils' individual learning styles. As a result of the high quality of the teaching they are given, pupils learn very well. They are attentive and industrious.

The curriculum is very good; it provides pupils with chances to learn that fully meet their needs and excite their interest. There is very good provision for learning outside of the school day and outstanding opportunities for personal development. Accommodation and resources are very good.

Provision for the care, welfare and guidance of pupils is very good. Pupils' academic and personal achievements and their behaviour are thoroughly and accurately monitored and they are given very good advice based on the information this provides. Arrangements for involving pupils in the school's work and development are excellent. Each class meets weekly with its School Council representative to discuss and form opinion. Because staff committees hear and take account of the views that the School Council expresses, pupils are fully included in making important school decisions.

The school works well in partnership with parents, very well with other schools, and has excellent links with the community. Outstanding features include the support for sport that is provided by the disability team from Everton Football Club, and the work of the local Healthy Schools Initiative team. These partnerships, amongst others, have greatly increased pupils opportunity to learn and to achieve success both during the school day and in their free time.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The leadership of the headteacher is excellent. The support given by others in leadership roles is very good and management is very effective. Governance is very good. Achievement is aided by the high quality of education provided, the pupils' excellent attitudes to learning, the outstanding provision for personal development and the leadership of the headteacher. A barrier to raising achievement still further is the level of the English course followed by pupils in Years 10 and 11 that demands too little of them. Statutory requirements are met.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are pleased with the education and opportunities that the school offers to their children. They think that it is good. Pupils say that the school is excellent and present and former pupils took the opportunity provided to tell of how much it had helped them.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Provide pupils in Years 10 and 11 with sufficient opportunity to fully demonstrate their achievement in English by entering them for more challenging, externally accredited, courses.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Achievement is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- By the end of Year 9 pupils' performance is well above the average for similar schools.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve very good results in the many accredited courses they follow.
- The accredited course followed in English in Years 10 and 11 does not sufficiently challenge higher achieving pupils.
- The school meets or exceeds the challenging performance targets that it sets.
- In most subjects, pupils, across the age range, achieve very well.

Commentary

1. Pupils entering the school in Year 7 swiftly build on their previous learning and begin to make significant, measurable, improvements in performance. They grow in confidence as learners. By the end of Year 9, when what they know understand and can do is assessed through standardised assessment procedures-SATs, they are found to have made very good gains. In 2003, in a Department for Education and Skills Pilot Study, to quantify "Value Added" by schools between Year 7 and Year 9, the "Value Added" by Ashley School was calculated as 103.4%. This placed the school in the top 5% of all schools for enabling pupils to improve their performance.
2. In the Standardised Assessment Tests for Year 9 pupils in 2004, (Key Stage 3 SATs), pupils' achievement in mathematics and science, and also in English, in which teacher assessment was used instead of the test, was far higher than the average for similar schools.
3. Since it was last inspected the school has sought to offer to pupils in Years 10 and 11, many more opportunities to have their work tested, assessed and accredited by external examination agencies. Until this year, the courses followed in most subjects, including English, mathematics and science, were for Entry Level Certificates. In art and design, however, a course leading to a full GCSE was provided. In addition to subject based courses pupils had also successfully undertaken the Youth Award Scheme of the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network, (ASDAN), and work related Entry Level courses in Child Care and Motor Vehicle Studies. The school has now become aware that many of its pupils are capable of successfully completing courses that are more challenging. In subjects where formerly only Entry Level Certificate courses were offered, additional GCSE Foundation Level courses are now planned or underway. In 2003, the DfES Value Added, Pilot Study, states that between Year 9 and Year 11, "Value Added" is 98.8%. This performance is similar to that of the middle 20% of all schools. In 2004, of pupils in Year 11, 18 per cent gained one A*-G grade in GCSE, 100 per cent of pupils gained the Entry Level Certificate in English, as did 92 per cent in mathematics and 100 per cent in science. Pupils, who were entered, also gained Entry Level Certificates in design and technology, information and communication technology, food studies, Child Care and Motor Vehicle Studies. In English, records show that the percentage of pupils attaining the top grade in the Entry Level test has risen from 44 per cent in 2002 to 84 per cent in 2004. These results are very good in comparison to those achieved by similar schools.
4. Pupils' literacy skills improve very well over the time they are in school. Teacher assessment of pupils currently in Year 10 shows that a significant number had already reached, by Year 9, a level of performance beyond that required to gain an Entry Level

Certificate. The great majority of pupils are now gaining top grade scores in their English Entry Level examination. For many the Entry Level course is insufficiently challenging and the possibility of offering an accredited course at a higher level should be, urgently, explored.

5. The school sets challenging targets for pupil performance. It succeeds in meeting or exceeding these. Over time targets can be seen to have become, progressively, more demanding especially in regard to performance in key areas such as English, mathematics and science. For example, whereas, in 2003/4, it was projected that 75 per cent of Year 11 pupils would succeed in gaining an accredited certificate in English, in 2004/5 the target is that 85 per cent will do so. Similar increases in success are looked for in mathematics and in science.
6. Within their lessons, and over time, pupils experience success in all subjects. Achievement is very good in English, mathematics, art and design, music, design and technology, information and communication technology, PE, and in personal, social, health and citizenship education, (PSHCE). It is good in science and religious education. It was not possible to make a full judgement about achievement in history, geography, or German. Much of the success that the pupils experience as learners is based on their growing understanding of personal responsibility and the requirements of the community of which they are a part. The unique and extensive emphasis given to PSHCE must take great credit for this.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes are **excellent** and their behaviour is **very good**. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **very good**. Attendance is **satisfactory**, whilst punctuality in arriving at school and lessons are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school sets very high expectations for pupils' conduct and these are rewarded by excellent attitudes and very good behaviour.
- Pupils are proud of their school community, respect it, and have outstanding opportunities to influence its work and development.
- The school promotes a strong moral code and social understanding which is enriched by extra curricular activities.
- Pupils' spiritual and cultural development is good.
- Attendance is about the average for similar schools and exclusions are low and static.
- The high standards of behaviour and the positive attitudes of pupils to learning noted at the last inspection have been maintained and improved.

Commentary

7. The ethos within the school is very conducive to learning. Throughout, it is anticipated and hoped for that pupils will develop habits of hard work and good conduct. They are continuously encouraged to make the fullest commitment to their tasks, and to take up the many opportunities provided to contribute to the life of the school and develop their own knowledge, skills and understanding. Teachers, and all those who support learning, take time to explain what is right and what is wrong. This is done in ways that the pupils understand. The positive consequences that flow from trying hard and doing what is right, even in the face of difficulty are continually emphasised. As a result, pupils show very positive attitudes towards their work and learning. Their conduct both in the classroom and around the school meets the high expectations set. Attitudes to work are excellent and behaviour is very good.

8. Pupils speak readily to visitors about their pride in their school. They compare it favourably with others that they have previously attended. They feel, that the school's insistence on good behaviour and smart appearance, helps, in a positive way, to set them apart from others. They are enthusiastic about the community spirit within the school, and about their lessons. Through a questionnaire analysis of their views pupils were found to feel safe and to be positive about the absence of bullying and other forms of harassment. Pupils felt that their relationships with staff were very positive and that this led to an environment where everyone was treated equally and with respect. Pupils felt, correctly, that they were successful in achieving their individual goals. A key feature of the school is the very good way all pupils are included in its work. In conversation with inspectors and in their questionnaire answers, pupils were particularly enthusiastic about the way in which they have influence over school life through membership of school committees and the School Council. The management and organisation of this democratic forum is an outstanding feature of the provision made by the school.
9. Provision for moral and social development is very good. The school promotes a clear moral code. The school's reward and sanctions policy is applied rigorously and pupils respond very well to it. The excellent programmes for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Citizenship run through the life of the school. These are very outward looking and the extensive work undertaken with the Anne Frank Trust is a unique feature that permeates the culture of the school. Participation rates in both competitive and recreational sporting activities are very good. Very good opportunities are provided for pupils of all abilities to take part in trips, visits and residential experiences. The effectiveness of this provision is readily apparent in the very good development of pupils' personal qualities. Pupils relate very well to one another and to their teachers. They willingly take on responsibilities, which contribute very well towards their social and moral development. Their social understanding is enriched by good extra curricular activities. Visitors to school speak very highly of pupils' contribution to the wider community. Opportunities are provided, including in Citizenship lessons, for pupils to explain and defend their ideas, beliefs and principles. They debate issues vigorously and show mutual respect for different ideas.
10. Pupils' spiritual development is good. It is well supported by a good contribution from well-organised school assemblies where pupils share their achievements with others. All assemblies begin with a short prayer. Work in personal, social and health education, and citizenship, offers very good opportunities for reflection on, and exploration of, the views and ideas of others. Provision for cultural development is also good. The school places significant emphasis on broadening pupils' awareness of other cultures through the use of good resources, displays, visits and community links. The school enables pupils to explore aspects of different cultures through visits, and through lessons in art and design, geography, history and music.
11. Attendance is just below the national average but it is satisfactory because monitoring and promotion of good attendance within the school are good and consistent. Parents are kept well informed about their children's attendance. Unauthorised absences are above the national average but this reflects the school's strict approach in refusing to authorise in term holidays. Few reasons for absence are accepted. Punctuality is good and lessons begin promptly. Absence figures for the school Year 2003/2004 are shown below.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting Year (%) 2003/2004

Authorised absence	
School data:	8.9
National data:	7.7

Unauthorised absence	
School data :	3.3
National data:	1.9

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

12. Pupils are excluded from time to time for unacceptable behaviour but exclusion of pupils is rare. The single permanent exclusion last year shown in the table below happened after all other approaches had been exhausted.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school Year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	120	5	1
White – any other White background	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

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

13. At the last inspection attitudes were very good, behaviour was good and personal development was very good. Behaviour has improved and is now very good. The other very good outcomes in terms of attitudes and personal development continue to be strengths of the school, and are all securely embedded in its daily life.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is **very good**. There is very good teaching and learning and a curriculum that provides pupils with very good learning opportunities both within and outside of the school day. Accommodation has recently been improved and is now of high quality and resources for learning are very good. Provision to support the personal development of pupils is excellent and they are given very good support and guidance.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good command of their subjects, know the learning needs of their pupils very well and use this knowledge to prepare lessons very thoroughly.
- Classes are managed very effectively to ensure that pupils have the support they require.
- Very good relationships between pupils and their teachers underpin the pupils' willingness to learn.
- Assessment is thorough and accurate.
- The quality of teaching and learning has improved significantly.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 48 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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1 (2%)	22 (46 %)	22 (46) %	3 (6%)	0	0	0
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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. The quality of teaching benefits from the fact that many teachers are specialists in the subjects that they teach and have very good knowledge of the requirements of both the National Curriculum and accredited courses. Subject leaders have worked very effectively to ensure that the resources to best support learning are in place. The school has made very good use of training to develop the skills of its teachers. They are, for example, confident in their understanding of information and communication technology (ICT) and incorporate this into their teaching. They make good use of computers to aid their planning. Teachers understand that children have a dominant mode of learning, be it visual, auditory or kinaesthetic. They take this information into account in their lesson planning so that individuals have the best chance of learning. Plans also take account of pupils' capabilities and individual targets, where these are set, especially for literacy, numeracy and personal development. They match the tasks that they set to these. Good attention is given in planning to ensuring that the start to the lesson grabs the pupils' interest and that pupils are told clearly what it is they are expected to learn or accomplish by the end of the lesson. Almost all plans also make clear the importance of reinforcing and testing out learning through a plenary session at the end of each lesson.

15. Because they know their pupils very well teachers manage their classes very effectively. Teaching assistants, a number of whom are attached to subjects rather than to class groups, play a vital part in the smooth running of lessons. They are very well equipped to help the pupils because they have a thorough understanding of the subject and the purpose of each session. Their involvement with individuals or small groups of pupils is pre- planned in team discussions with the teacher. Support is therefore appropriately directed and very beneficial to the pupils.

16. Because of the emphasis that the school places on developing the personal qualities of children and on ensuring that the individual worth of each is acknowledged the learning environment is a happy one. There are more smiles than frowns in most classrooms and it is rare to hear a teacher repeatedly having to check inappropriate behaviour. Pupils and those who teach and support their learning get along very well. In discussions with inspectors and in their questionnaire answers pupils say directly that they like their teachers and believe that the adults in the school do their best for them. They feel that there is always an adult to whom they can turn at need. This strong basis of trust helps to ensure that the classrooms are places in which pupils are not reluctant or embarrassed to be. Learning and attitudes to learning are excellent.

17. Within each subject teachers assess what their pupils know understand and can do very accurately. They record these assessments and make use of suitable scales, including those designed to measure small gains in attainment, as well as the National Curriculum levels. Other formal means for assessing progress, especially in reading, spelling and numeracy are also used to keep track of pupils. Overall, assessment procedures are very good. Assessment is used well. Individual targets are set in English and in mathematics and for personal development and these form the basis of individual education plans that are reviewed termly. The need for individual education plans for most pupils is not clear. This is because the careful attention given to subject and lesson planning already ensures that the work set for pupils is progressive, promotes their learning and matches their capabilities. The school should review its policy on IEPs in the light of the advice given in the Code of Practice.

18. At the time of the last inspection the quality of teaching and learning was found to be good. It is now very good and lessons have excellent features. The school has made very good

use of its performance management strategy to monitor and improve the quality of teaching. It has also worked very effectively to improve the learning skills and attitudes of its pupils.

The curriculum

The curriculum is **very good**. There are **very good** opportunities for enrichment and for learning outside of the school day. Accommodation and resources are **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The learning needs of individual pupils are carefully provided for and all have equal access to a broad range of learning opportunities both during the school day and beyond it.
- In English, the accredited course offered is insufficiently challenging for some pupils.
- The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 gives pupils every chance to develop their independence.
- There is excellent provision for personal, social, health, and citizenship education and many opportunities for pupils to become involved.
- Accommodation and resources are very good.

Commentary

19. The curriculum has improved since the last inspection. It fully meets statutory requirements. The school provides a wide range of exciting opportunities to learn that takes account of the requirements of the National Curriculum and the age, capabilities, and learning characteristics of the pupils. The careful matching of work to the individual learning style of each pupil is a particular strength. For older pupils, there has been a very good and notable increase in the development of courses leading to vocational qualifications, for example in childcare and motor vehicle studies, and to courses leading to external accreditation at an appropriately challenging level. These include, for about half of the pupils in the relevant age group, a G.C.S.E. course in art and design, and for most pupils, Foundation Level GCSE courses in science, mathematics and several other subjects. Throughout the school, all pupils have equal access to an appropriate curriculum, which ensures very good equality of opportunity. The curriculum for all pupils is greatly enriched by the many opportunities for learning beyond the classroom that the school provides. These include residential journeys in the United Kingdom and abroad, visits to theatres, galleries and the chance to take part in competitive sports. Pupils also take part in theatrical productions and film making. There are very strong connections with the Anne Frank Educational Trust, including residential visits, open to all pupils, to the Anne Frank Museum in Amsterdam. As part of PHSE and citizenship course there are visits to the Houses of Parliament and pupils are also able to work towards gaining the Princess Diana Award. In a joint project with Halton's Drug Action Team and the council's Arts Development Team, pupils' work, including a short film, were shown in the local arts centre. Everton Football Club supports the school through its Football in the Community project and this has led to pupils joining sports teams and developing their interest in sport in their own time.
20. Because of their special educational needs, many pupils have particular difficulties in developing their literacy skills. However, by the end of Year 9, about half have already reached the standard at which the Entry Level certificate is awarded. For these pupils the course that leads to the Entry Level certificate at the end of Year 11 is insufficiently challenging.
21. The curriculum for Year 10 and 11 pupils is very good. Its strength is in its relevance and preparation for adult life. For Year 11 pupils, opportunities include a good programme for work related learning and participation in the ASDAN Youth Award Scheme. Emphasis is directed at developing the skills necessary for economic and social independence. These include learning to make the best impression and developing competencies, such as writing letters in relation to job applications and scanning, understanding and completing relevant forms. All of this encourages pupils to be forward looking and to plan for the future.

22. The very strong emphasis placed by the school on personal, social and health education, and the excellent provision for citizenship make a major contribution to the development of pupils' personal qualities. The School Council is a focal point of the school community and is held in high regard, and, nationally, it is held to be a model of best practice. Its formal structure enables pupils to understand and experience purposeful debate and democratic, decision- making. Consequently, pupils have an excellent understanding of their role in the community. Through their membership of the School Council, class forums and various committees, and through their involvement in the prefect system, pupils have many chances to act responsibly and exercise real influence in their community.
23. Recent refurbishment and extension of the accommodation has resulted in a very good learning environment and previously reported deficiencies in accommodation, resources and specialist teaching areas have been remedied. There is now a dedicated specialist room for teaching information and communication technology. There is a small, well furnished library which is, productively, used as a teaching space. There is a drama studio and very good and well equipped rooms for practical subjects and for science. In addition, there is a School Council chamber that is used exclusively for student meetings.

Care, guidance and support

The care, guidance and support given to pupils are **very good**. There is excellent involvement of pupils through seeking, valuing and acting on their views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The involvement of pupils in the life of the school and the contribution of the School Council in particular is outstanding.
- Staff are very vigilant and caring in promoting the best interests of pupils so that pupils work in a very safe environment where each child's personal needs are consistently safeguarded.
- The very good pastoral and academic advice and guidance given to pupils is based on very good relationships and in depth monitoring of all aspects of pupils life in the school.

Commentary

24. Pupils are involved in every aspect of school life through class forums and the School Council. They are involved in the work of management committees such as that on health and safety, and their views are taken into consideration. The School Council has recently been asked to collate pupils' opinions on the new building. Problems identified were discussed by the School Council and suggestions for improvement were put forward. It is clear that teachers and those who support learning listen very carefully to pupils both in lessons and outside the classroom and that they take their views very seriously. As a result, pupils express themselves enthusiastically and confidentially and are not afraid to speak out.
25. The interests and welfare of pupils are of first importance to the school. Child Protection issues are given high priority. Staff are well trained and knowledgeable and act effectively as needed. They work well in partnership with other agencies. Health and safety are ensured by the vigilance of trained staff and risk assessments, including those for all outside visits by pupils, are thorough. Great care is taken in lessons to keep pupils safe. The school works enthusiastically for its Healthy School status and holds a Health Awareness Day, as well as involving pupils in the presentation of their work at the accreditation day for the Healthy School standard.
26. The headteacher and her staff know the pupils very well. There is detailed monitoring of pupils' academic and pastoral needs. Each teacher is responsible for the pastoral care of their class and very well targeted support is available for each pupil through specialists

working in the school and outside agencies. Pupils' behaviour and attendance are carefully monitored, and if difficulty occurs speedy and effective action is taken to put matters right.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school works **very well** in partnership with parents, other schools and the community. There are excellent links with the community, very good links with other schools and colleges and good links with parents.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Community partnerships are a strength of the school and they provide pupils with a very wide knowledge of the world outside school.
- The very good links with other schools provide opportunities for pupils to form positive relationships with their peers, develop self-confidence and enhance the school curriculum.
- Good links with parents ensure pupils benefit from the good working relationships provided by this partnership.

Commentary

27. The school has exceptionally well developed links with its community and these make a sustained contribution to pupils' achievement and to school improvement. There is excellent use of significant local partners to promote sporting activities. These include regular coaching from the disability access team from Everton Football Club, and a productive partnership with the local manager of "Sport for All", to increase sporting opportunities in the community. The school is also closely involved in such initiatives as the Princess Diana Memorial Award and helps to organise local conferences for example, on Community Safety which involve, amongst others, Members of Parliament, Councillors, sponsors from national and local firms and theatre companies. The school is also effective in gaining access to cash resources for community initiatives, through grant applications on behalf of the community. Pupils are currently involved with a local newspaper in a project to improve the environment. Widnes Rugby League Football Club has been working with the pupils on a literacy project that has resulted in the production of a literacy booklet for use in primary schools.
28. The school is at the forefront of community involvement and as a result pupils have been able to meet and interact with a very wide range of organisations and individuals including government ministers and influential people in all walks of life. This has considerable influence on developing pupils self confidence and ability to operate on level terms with the rest of the world. The school has developed an impressive range of formal and informal contacts with other schools both locally and nationally. Partnership with the local nursery enables pupils to access practical childcare in support of the curriculum whilst cooperation with the neighbouring special school supports trips and out of school activities. Close links with a local high school have been beneficial for both schools in helping with after school clubs involving long term partnerships between peer groups which has resulted in Ashley School pupils leading Year group assemblies at the high school. The involvement of pupils with other mainstream schools at national conferences and meetings has provided pupils with a wide platform on which to practise their social and presentation skills.
29. The good communication with parents enables them to keep up to date and involved in the learning of their children, reports and reviews are informative and provide parents with the information to make informed judgements on their child's progress and provide targeted help where they are able to do so.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are both **very good**. Leadership by the headteacher is **excellent**. Governance is **very good**. Since the completion of the new accommodation, there are no serious barriers to raising standards.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The qualities of leadership and management displayed by the headteacher are excellent.
- The headteacher has created a very effective leadership team and the school is very well managed.
- The governors have very good knowledge of the work of the school and they support the headteacher and leadership team very well.
- The very effective school improvement plan is clearly linked to exemplary financial planning.
- There has been significant improvement in leadership and management since the last inspection.

Commentary

30. The headteacher is an excellent role model for staff and pupils. She leads and manages a united staff and is fully committed to meeting the needs of pupils by ensuring provision of high quality. She also plays a significant role in the promotion of educational standards outside the school, by participating in several educational initiatives across the authority, and has a considerable reputation in this area, and this enhances the reputation of the school in the authority.
31. The headteacher has built up and leads a very good team of senior managers. Collectively they set very high standards, inspire, motivate and maintain conditions so that staff and pupils are regularly able to achieve their best. The headteacher delegates responsibilities very effectively to the leadership team. Staff appreciate this, take their responsibilities seriously and as a result, are working extremely hard to implement positive aspects to raise standards. This is very good improvement since the last inspection. Parents are strongly supportive of the way the school is led and managed. The parents', and pupils' questionnaires, show that they are very satisfied with the school's management and leadership. Staff have been helped by the considerable commitment of the headteacher to increasing their effectiveness through performance management procedures. Including, for example, monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and checking the planning of lessons. Where staff training needs are revealed by these procedures these are incorporated into the development priorities for the school. The quality of teaching and learning have made good improvement since the last inspection because teachers and support assistants have taken part in relevant opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge. Procedures for inducting new staff work well. They help staff learn about the school and their role so that they quickly become efficient at their work.
32. The governing body takes its responsibilities seriously and ensures all statutory requirements are fully met. Except for a single vacancy, the governing body is complete and individual members provide the body with valuable personal expertise. Governors are committed to the school and have considerable empathy with the pupils and their special educational needs. They have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and of where priorities for improvement lie. They play a full part in planning for improvement. They are very supportive of the school and have very good relationships with the headteacher and the staff. They are, however, not afraid to challenge the headteacher when necessary and to offer criticism if this is required.
33. There are clear links between the school's priorities and its financial planning. The headteacher and governing body give exemplary consideration to the outcome of their spending decisions and they use the principles of 'best value' effectively. The school has handled the recent building and refurbishment programme very effectively. School administration staff keep all accounts very well and provide good quality support and

information for the headteacher and governing body. The latest auditors' report confirmed the high quality of the school's financial practice and made only minor recommendations for improvement, which have been fully implemented.

34. Overall, leadership and management of the school have improved very well since the previous inspection. The shared commitment of all staff ensures that pupils' needs are met. High morale and an excellent ethos in school have been key factors in this improvement and in the raising of pupils' achievements. The school now gives very good value for money.

Financial information for the Year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	885,038	Balance from previous Year	10,760
Total expenditure	869,519	Balance carried forward to next Year	26,279
Expenditure per pupil	7,186		

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

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision for English is **very good** for Years 7 to 9, and **good** for Years 10 and 11.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well and continue to develop their literacy skills throughout their Years in school.
- Teaching in English lessons and the teaching of literacy in subjects across the curriculum is good.
- The course followed by pupils in Years 10 and 11 is insufficiently challenging for higher achieving pupils.
- Management is good and the subject is well resourced.

Commentary

35. Pupils' achievement in English is very good, overall and this is a good improvement since the last inspection. There is no significant difference in the achievements of boys and girls. Pupils reach the targets set for them in their statements and at their annual review. Pupils reaching the end of Year 9 respond well to adult questions and ask pertinent questions on their own account. Most pupils are able to read accurately although not all are fluent readers. They are happy to read aloud to the class from books, worksheets, their own work and play scripts. Higher attaining pupils read with fluency and expression that is very good in relation to their capabilities. Pupils who experience difficulty in reading unknown words attempt to sound out the letters but in some cases need adult intervention to help them. When writing, pupils construct simple sentences using full stops and capital letters in clear, legible print often using a pencil. They correctly spell familiar, simple words unaided and will spontaneously look for the spelling of more difficult words in a dictionary. A significant proportion of the pupils in Year 9 reach a standard that is equivalent to that for which an Entry Level Certificate in English is awarded.

36. By Year 11 most pupils listen carefully and respond thoughtfully to discussions. For example, in a lesson on writing to inform and explain, they reacted with keen interest to a video about the importance of cycle safety and wearing a cycle helmet. They made very sensible and articulate contributions in the subsequent discussion. Most pupils talk with some confidence about their work. They show enjoyment and growing certainty, accuracy and fluency in their reading and writing.

37. Pupils' very good achievement in English is brought about by good teaching both within English lessons and in lessons in other subjects in which great attention is given to the development of pupils' oral and literacy skills. For example, how words to be encountered in each lesson are listed, their meanings discussed, and their spelling noted. In English lessons, most teaching and learning is good with some very good features. These include the very effective management of pupils' behaviour and the development of positive attitudes. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan their work well. Planning is based on the principles of the National Literacy Strategy which has been carefully and well adapted so as to meet the particular needs of the pupils. Great care is taken to match the style of teaching to the individual learning style of pupils. A very positive feature is the skilful, knowledgeable advice given to pupils by both teachers and teaching assistants. They

make very good use of questioning to prompt pupils to reflect and organise their ideas rather than merely giving them the answer. Overall, very good relationships are apparent between adults and pupils in all classes. Pupil's work is very well monitored and checked. Assessment of what they know understand and can do is analysed to ensure pupils' needs are met. Targets are set and based upon the previous attainment and the pupils learning style

38. Pupils do not have sufficient opportunity to demonstrate their academic achievement at the end of Year 11. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 learn best when they can see the relevance of the work that is set and clearly understand that it is moving them towards a higher level of accomplishment. However, for a significant proportion of pupils the course followed in Years 10 and 11, which is for the Entry Level Certificate, does not challenge them sufficiently. While they do what is asked of them, they are capable of more, and the true level of their achievement is not, therefore, fully reflected in the accredited certificates that they gain.
39. Management of the subject is good. Teaching and learning is monitored to identify areas for development and a wide range of teaching methods are used to create interest and stimulate imagination, for example through drama and film making. The very strong links with other areas of the curriculum especially history and PHSE and citizenship provide exceptional opportunities for pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills as well as writing for a wider range of purposes.
40. The library has recently been relocated. It is now between the lower and upper schools. It is equipped with a core supply of good quality books addressing a broad range of interests including information and stories about other faiths and cultures. There are plans to extend the stock of books. Good use is made of electronic thumb scanning to enable pupils to borrow books more easily. There are also small class libraries and those pupils who are not yet proficient readers follow structured reading programmes. There is a good range of dictionaries available within classes.

Literacy across the curriculum

41. Provision to develop pupils' language and literacy skills across the curriculum is good. There are a wide range of planned opportunities to include the development of English skills particularly in spoken English and reading. Links with personal, social, and health education, and citizenship are particularly strong throughout the school. In Year 8, pupils participate in making a film about a wide range of thought provoking issues including bullying, the value of friendship, recycling and the importance of healthy eating. In Year 11 pupils discuss safety issues and how accidents are often caused by human error. In history, Year 9 pupils are encouraged to research their subject and then write letters home from the trenches as part of their study of World War II.

Modern foreign language German

42. There was insufficient evidence to support a judgement on provision. However, examination of documents and discussion with the subject leader made it clear that there is a programme of study in place for pupils in Years 7 to 9. This is linked very well to the work that pupils do in ICT, mathematics, geography and English. Leadership of the subject is well informed and enthusiastic. Planning of what is to be taught is very good and the small amount of teaching that was observed was very effective. Pupils evidently enjoyed their lesson and their relationships with their teacher were very good. They were challenged by the work that they were asked to do and responded very positively by showing good attitudes, behaving well and taking pride in their work. Discussion with pupils confirmed that they were enthusiastic about the subject.

MATHEMATICS

Provision for mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject is very well led and managed and has made good improvement since the last inspection.
- Teachers plan very well, are confident in their knowledge of the subject and know their pupils well; as a result, teaching and learning are consistently very good.
- Pupils enjoy mathematical activities. Their positive attitudes and very good behaviour contribute to the very good quality of the learning.
- Pupils of all ages and all abilities, including those with additional special educational needs, achieve very well.

Commentary

43. The subject is very well led and managed by a knowledgeable coordinator. The range, quality and use of resources are very good. Higher quality of teaching and learning, improved resources and appropriate accreditation at Year 11 have all combined to ensure that there has been good improvement made since the last inspection. Pupils, by the end of Year 11, have, consistently, achieved very well in the Entry Level Certificate. To offer greater challenge, the subject leader has developed plans to introduce a higher level of accreditation, the GCSE Foundation Level mathematics examination to suit the needs of higher attaining pupils.
44. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently very good. Teachers have very good relationships with their pupils. In turn pupils trust their teachers and are willing to try their best even when something new and unfamiliar is asked of them. Lessons are very well planned with clear learning objectives. Teachers routinely incorporate the recommendations of the National Numeracy Strategy into lessons. Good training opportunities provided for staff have resulted in them having improved knowledge of the subject and teaching with confidence and enthusiasm. They know the capabilities of their pupils very well and they set them individual targets for numeracy. In lessons, tasks are matched to the needs and capabilities of pupils very well and as a result, pupils, including those with additional special needs, are, always, sufficiently and effectively challenged. Time is used to the full. Pupils as they walk through the classroom door are immediately engaged and are happy to join in the starting activities, mostly mental mathematics, which are both active and fun. At the end of each lesson time is taken to check on progress and celebrate achievement.
45. Teachers take care to build on previous learning and relate mathematics to everyday things. This is seen very clearly in the way in which pupils operate the school's snack bar. Through this activity they learn to handle money, give change and calculate profit or loss. The practical use of mathematics is also seen in science and technology lessons in which measuring, weighing and timing take place. Teaching assistants are deployed well and make a consistent and valuable contribution to pupils' learning. They model appropriate behaviour, record progress and make timely interventions to keep pupils on task.
46. Pupils' very positive attitudes to learning make an important contribution to the very good standards they achieve. They behave very well, are interested in their work and are pleased when they have done well. They take great care and pride in presenting their work and on showing this to visitors. Older pupils work independently using computers and calculators. They are confident enough in their knowledge to discuss their method and solutions with others or actively seek alternative solutions to a problem.
47. As a direct result of the very good teaching they are given and the breadth of the mathematical experiences that they are offered, pupils become confident learners and achieve very well. Teachers' records show that pupils make gains in their knowledge and understanding of mathematics and in their practical competencies in calculation and

measurement throughout their time in school. In the standard assessment tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 and in 2004 a significant proportion of pupils reached level 4 or level 5. This represents far higher achievement than the average for similar schools. By the end of Year 11 almost all pupils gained the Entry Level Certificate, many with the top grade.

Mathematics across the curriculum

48. Numeracy skills are both taught and consolidated very well in other areas of the curriculum. For example, pupils count in German and weigh and measure in design and technology, including food technology. In their motor vehicle studies, pupils carried out a practical survey of 'Pedestrian Activities' in Liverpool using their knowledge of tallying and data handling effectively. In information and communication technology, pupils input mathematical data and interpret graphs and charts. In music pupils use their knowledge of number to count and keep time while in PE they time their physical activities. Pupils use their practical money skills when out shopping or within school at the tuck shop and café. In art and design, pupils recognise and use a variety of shapes and greatly refine the accuracy of their measuring skills. Teachers are vigilant in encouraging pupils to use mathematical skills and language in many different contexts.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well, work hard, and are successful in improving their standards.
- Teaching is well organised and effective.
- The improvement since the last inspection is linked to good use of the well -resourced science laboratory by all pupils.
- Leadership and management are good and keep the subject under review.

Commentary

49. Pupils achieve well. By the time they leave school at the end of Year 11 all pupils achieve accreditation in the Entry Level science award, equivalent to National Curriculum levels 1 to 3. Given their attainment on entry to the school this represents good achievement. This Year, for the first time, a significant number of the able pupils are studying for GCSE in science. It is anticipated that the more able pupils will attempt a dual award in science. Pupils behave very well in science. Their very positive attitudes are a significant factor in their learning. They try hard with their written work, taking pride in their presentation. Pupils make every effort to reach the good standards that they achieve and their self-confidence is boosted by their success.

50. Pupils are achieving well in lessons because the quality of teaching and learning is good. There are several very good features. Relationships are very good. There are very high expectations for behaviour. Very explicit use is made of learning objectives and these are appropriately challenging. In addition these are routinely revisited at the end of lessons so that both teacher and pupils might be able to judge what has been achieved. Assessment is good, showing clearly how pupils are learning over time. Time is well used and pupils are actively engaged in a range of practical activities. There are good opportunities to benefit from group work and whole class teaching. A very good feature of some lessons is the teacher's use of pupils to demonstrate. Year 11 pupils, for example, greatly enjoyed their task of showing the class how to wire up an electrical plug. Teaching assistants are very well deployed, providing effective support to individuals.

51. Pupils' numeracy and literacy are well developed through measuring and the use of statistics, and the use of key words and word banks. Pupils behave very well, sustain their

concentration, and try hard. Pupils respond to focussed questioning, and they are keen to offer their answers. When using the Internet for research pupils need more guidance when using the search engines to give their work more focus.

52. Leadership and management are good with many very good features. Assessment data is well used to set targets for whole classes and individual pupils. Teaching assistants are very effectively used to assess pupils' learning in lessons and these records are well used to build up a picture of pupils' understanding of science over time. Pupils' areas of weakness are beginning to be clearly identified. Both teachers of the subject are science specialists which means that they have good knowledge of the subject and of all the requirements of the National Curriculum. These are comprehensively addressed.
53. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. The most significant development has been the provision of a new and well equipped science laboratory. All pupils have time tabled lessons in this room and treat the good facilities it provides with great respect. They appreciate the opportunity that it provides to do exciting practical science. In addition, the assessment of pupils' progress has developed well with further improvement already identified and in hand. The subject is in a very good position from which to move forward.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision for information and communication technology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The ICT suite provides very good opportunities for learning because of the high quality of equipment and because each pupil is able to work at their own workstation.
- The teacher and support assistant have very good subject knowledge, promote very good achievement by the pupils and make effective use of procedures that check the progress pupils are making.
- Leadership of the subject is very effective.
- Teachers and pupils use computers confidently to help learning across the curriculum.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to ICT and as a result their behaviour is very good.

Commentary

54. Since the last inspection provision for ICT and pupils' achievement have been considerably improved. An ICT room has now been established and all pupils have discrete ICT lessons with very experienced staff. This room provides a very good base for teaching and learning with very high specification hardware, including Internet access and an interactive white board. Learning is supported, very well by computer use in other subjects across the curriculum. Pupils lining up to enter the ICT room are keen and enthusiastic to get on with their work. The cry at the end of the lessons is often 'doesn't time fly in here!' 'Can't we stay?'
55. The quality of teaching is consistently very good. The teacher has considerable specialist knowledge and benefits from very good support from the very competent learning support assistant, who has spent much of her own time acquiring extra ICT qualifications. . Expectations of what pupils will achieve are high and pupils are inspired by their teachers to reach the very high standards they routinely achieve in their learning. By the end of Year 11 pupils are well prepared to succeed in the Entry Level course that they have completed and the proportion of pupils attaining higher grades has increased steadily over time. Pupils are excited about their learning and eager to spend as much time as possible on the computers. They are quick to move to their places, log on to their own file system and wait for their instructions. When they come, these are clear and concise. Lessons are very

well structured and ICT presentations are used to demonstrate techniques and make learning more interesting. The teacher keeps track of the progress made by each pupil and there are clear records of what each knows, understands and can do. This information is used in making sure that the tasks set are suitably matched to the capabilities of individual pupils.

56. The subject is very well led and managed and the subject leader provides very good support to all other teachers in using computers to support learning in their subjects. All teachers have completed the national training programme, which increases their own specialist knowledge and confidence, and in turn enhances the pupils' achievements. Because of the success enjoyed by pupils who have traditionally taken the entry level examination in Year 11, the leader has taken the decision to prepare more able pupils for a higher level qualification. This decision illustrates a sound determination to improve provision and enhance pupils' achievement.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

57. Planning to use computers to support teaching and learning in subjects is good. Teachers and pupils are confident in using the Internet to gain information. Year 11 pupils, for example, in a design and technology lesson, were speedy and purposive as they searched web sites for advice on how to wire a three-pin plug. In German, the teacher makes very effective use of an interactive white board and PowerPoint presentations to add interest to the task of developing German vocabulary. In food technology, pupils use word processing and printing skills to make price tickets for their break time mini enterprise café. There is also very good use of ICT in mathematics. Pupils in all subjects, routinely use word processing to draft out their work and improve presentation. Overall, ICT is used well across the school.

HUMANITIES

Geography and History

58. There was insufficient evidence of teaching and learning to make an overall judgement about the quality of provision in geography or history. Teachers' planning and records show that the pupils achieve well and are given opportunities to experience the full range of activities that are required by National Curriculum regulations. Leadership and management of both subjects is good. The quality of the documentation to support teachers in their planning is good. Attention is given to the different learning styles that pupils have, and good use is made of videos and artefacts. Assessment of pupils against national standards is good. The quality of the accommodation has improved significantly since the last inspection and the 'humanities' classroom is spacious, well equipped and has very good displays of pupils work. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their geography and history skills by visits are limited. Overall, the subjects are in a very good position from which to move forward.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good and pupils think about what they learn.
- Teaching stimulates pupils' interest and helps them learn well.
- Good leadership has enabled improvements in provision to be brought about.
- Pupils have too few opportunities to learn from direct experience.

Commentary

59. Pupils across the age range achieve well. In lessons, pupils in Years 7 to 9, learn at a very good rate and gain a good knowledge and understanding of world faiths. They learn about festivals and remember stories associated with these, such as the legend of St. Nicholas or the story of the visitation of the Magi. Pupils recall their previous learning very well and make use of this in trying to understand their lessons. Their thoughtfulness is impressive. Through their work over time, pupils have developed a sufficient vocabulary to enable them to discuss, meaningfully, a range of concepts and customs associated with world religions. This process is greatly aided by the attention paid in each lesson to pupils learning the meaning and the spelling of a small number of key words connected to the topic. In Years 10 and 11 pupils' work in religious education focuses on moral and social issues and on the those notable lives that exemplify courage and moral tenacity. Their work contributes to the ASDAN Youth Award in which they do well.

60. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are prepared very well to ensure that pupils of all levels of capability are included. A good feature of the lesson planning is that the learning objectives for each lesson are clearly specified. Management of classes is very effective because teachers know their pupils well and make sure that they have plenty to do. Support for learning is provided effectively so that no pupil is left uncertain about how to proceed. Pupils work hard and remember what they have learned previously. The questions that they ask show that they are interested in their lessons. Teachers have good knowledge of the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. They understand that a balance is required between teaching facts about world faiths and providing opportunities for pupils to learn from, as well as about, religion. Good use is made of ICT to give greater impact to lessons. However, the full interactive potential of the electronic whiteboard is not yet used.

61. The subject is led well and managed well. An appropriate programme of work for pupils across the age range has been put in place and the teachers' planning and pupils' work are monitored by the subject leader. A good range of resources including artefacts representative of many world faiths has been built up to support learning and the subject leader offers advice and support to teachers of religious education at need. Provision for religious education was satisfactory at the last inspection. There has been steady, satisfactory, improvement since then.

62. Pupils do not, at present have the opportunity to visit churches, temples, gurdwaras, mosques, or synagogues so as to give the substance of experience to their learning about faiths. Representatives of faith communities have visited the school in the past but no further visits are in present plans.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

Provision for design and technology, including food technology, is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is consistent very good teaching across all ages through which pupils skills, knowledge and understanding are developed and consolidated across the curriculum.
- Design and technology has been developed to support learning in other subjects.
- Pupils enjoy their lessons.

Commentary

63. Pupils' achievement is very good across the age range and in all aspects of the subject. This is an improvement since the last inspection when achievement was good. This is because of the very high expectations of the teachers, their very good planning and very good teaching that ensures that pupils are given a full opportunity to work with their hands as well as with their minds. By Year 11, pupils succeed in both food technology and design and technology in the Entry Level Examinations and gain certificates of achievement. Over recent years the proportion of pupils gaining higher grades has notably increased. In their work with resistant materials, using a wide range of tools, equipment and components, pupils work, assiduously, to make well finished products. They take care as they work and are clear about what they should do and how they should behave. Irrespective of their learning needs or capabilities, they complete work of high quality of which they are rightly very proud. A group of pupils who have shown particular interest have joined the design and technology club. Here the skills they have learned in lessons are carefully developed by their teacher. They have completed many practical projects. The long case clocks that they were making at the time of the inspection were an excellent example of their outstanding work. In food technology in which achievement is equally high, pupils make excellent use of the opportunity to channel their developing capabilities into practical achievements. Year 8 pupils, for example, run a 'mini enterprise', for which they have designed and established a food outlet. They have opened a pupils' café through which snacks and drinks are sold. This provides an excellent learning opportunity as pupils cost and buy all ingredients, cook and make products hygienically and sell these for profit.
64. The task of running the café demands that pupils use many facets of their learning. It is a good example of how work in design and technology is used to support learning in other subjects. Pupils, in operating the enterprise, extend many of their key learning skills including competencies in mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), personal and social skills, and literacy skills.
65. Pupils are eager to work in the design and technology rooms. They act responsibly and feel mature. They enjoy being active in their learning. They especially enjoy making their own project from the design brief and explaining what they have done and why they did it that way to visitors. A particularly exciting lesson was in Year 7 where the youngsters had to design and make a 'desk tidy' using plastic and a 'vacuum former'. It was evident from watching their faces and reaction as the plain sheet of plastic was put into the machine and the vacuum formed a desk tidy from the mould that this was an exciting experience for the pupils.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching of very good quality gets the best out of pupils.
- Pupils enjoy their learning and take full advantage of the chance they are given to pursue their work to a high standard.
- Very good leadership has brought about significant improvements.

Commentary

66. Teaching and learning are very good. The teacher is a specialist with very good subject knowledge, management skills, and understanding of pupils' learning characteristics. She has very high expectations of the pupils and of what they will achieve. She understands how to best make clear what is expected. Preparation of lessons is meticulous and takes full account of the fact that pupils learn most effectively when they can see, through very well prepared exemplars, what it is that they are expected to accomplish. Her use of prepared exemplars is exceptionally good. The teaching assistant who supports art and design lessons is very knowledgeable and a vital part of the subject teaching team. Excellent teamwork has been developed. Together, teacher and assistant take great care to present lessons in a manner that fully engages pupils' interests. Pupils' attainments are assessed fully and accurately and they are given very clear information on what they must do to improve. As a consequence of the very good teaching, pupils enjoy their lessons and their achievement is very good across the age range. A particularly good feature of all lessons is the attention paid to the development of pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy. The meaning and spelling of key words that are important within each lesson is rehearsed and, when tasks involving the laying out of work, are undertaken, measuring skills are carefully taught.
67. Pupils enjoy their learning. They like the clarity with which tasks are presented and the very good directions they are given enable them to feel confident that they will succeed. In their responses, they frequently produce imaginative and carefully wrought work. They are willing contributors, evaluating their own work and that of others. Their attitudes are very positive and their behaviour is very good. Development of creative skill, accuracy, visual literacy, knowledge of artists and the ability to evaluate own and others work is rapid. Pupils, by the end of Year 9, have learned to look carefully and to recognise from its style the work of artists of renown, or the typical products of past or present cultures. They note and comment on similarities in form or texture and from such starting points, they create their own lively work. Their painting and drawing is founded on a well developed knowledge and understanding of colour texture and style. They are confident users of the computer as a medium for making art. By Year 11, those who are following the GCSE programme, are on course to achieve good grades as was the case in 2004 when the five pupils entered for the examination gained grades in the range B to E.
68. Art and design is very well led and managed. As a result of the subject leader's full understanding of how the subject should develop, provision has improved very well since the last inspection. She has very high expectations of her pupils and what they should achieve and she has reflected this in drawing up a curriculum for pupils in all age groups that is broad and challenging. Through the leader's efforts, a very well equipped room that features stimulating displays of work by the pupils and by renowned artists is now at the centre of art activities. Resources have been improved and there are now many ICT facilities including digital cameras and access to computers, with suitable software to support drawing and animation that are also linked to the Internet.

Music

Provision for music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils take pleasure in making music and achieve very well.
- Insightful teaching and excellent teamwork in the classroom enables pupils to become confident learners.
- Very good leadership has brought about improvements since the last inspection.

Commentary

69. Pupils achieve very well. By the end of Year 9 pupils are responsive, interested learners. They understand many musical terms, successfully identifying known tunes from their

rhythm. They accurately, describe the qualities of music in terms of mood, tempo and tone. They recognise and identify the sounds made by the various orchestral instruments. All can read a simplified musical notation and many have good knowledge of conventional notation. In answers that they give in lessons they show that they recognise and know the purpose of symbols such as the treble clef, sharps and flats. They play confidently, both individually and as a group, using instruments such as bells or ocarinas. They pay good attention to direction as they play and enhance simple melodies with harmonies. They are very pleased with their accomplishments and quite thrilled when their group performances go well. Individuals who are very high attainers are helped to develop their musical gifts outside of lesson time. One talented pupil has developed great facility as a pianist during his years in the school.

70. Teaching and learning are very good. The teacher, who is very experienced, infuses her lessons with practical activities that are fun to do. They are very well planned. As a result, pupils enjoy learning about and making music. They prove this by using their own time, during the lunch hour, to join the ocarina group. The teaching assistant who supports all music lessons makes an excellent and invaluable contribution. Importantly, she makes use of her ICT skills to help pupils write up their compositions in simplified notation. The teacher manages her pupils very well; she anticipates possible difficulties and seeks out opportunities to praise the efforts of more reluctant learners so that they soon rediscover their enthusiasm. Assessment is accurate and very well recorded with clear examples of what each pupil, knows, understands, and can do. Because of the teacher's success in inculcating in her pupils both an element of personal confidence and a genuine delight in music and performance, learning is very good.

71. The subject is very well led and managed. The learning needs of the pupils are very well known to the subject leader and these have been borne in mind when decisions have been made about how music is to be developed. A very good emphasis is placed on practical rather than theoretical learning. The subject leader has ensured, because of the good choice of learning activities, that music lessons will provide a very good outlet for pupils' expressive creativity. Purposeful use is made of a commercial scheme to give continuity and structure to learning from Year 7 to Year 9. Over time, the subject leader has built up resources in music so that now these support learning well. There has been a good improvement in the provision for music since the last inspection.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are many opportunities for pupils to participate in physical activities.
- The subject is very well led and it encourages the enjoyment of physical activity.
- For all age groups, good teaching and learning lead to very good achievement.

Commentary

72. The school's philosophy of 'Everybody Active' is well established in all that it does. A significant number of boys and girls benefit from taking part in sporting events, locally, regionally and nationally.

73. The physical education programme and the extended extra curricular activities at lunch time and specialist courses make a significant contribution to the learning and achievements of all pupils at the school. Within the taught curriculum, pupils and students have the use of the school hall to develop skills in football, basketball, badminton, gymnastics, and dance. Opportunities are also provided for participation in cricket, judo, fencing and even skiing. In addition Year 7 pupils receive swimming instruction at the local leisure centre. Year 9 pupils

are involved in a narrow boat trip while the oldest pupils attend a residential outdoor and adventurous activity centre in the Lake District.

74. Teaching and learning are good with many very good features. Participation rates are high and pupils get on very well together. They enjoy their lessons because they get the chance to be busy and active, and also because they like to learn new skills. Because of the teacher's very good management of pupils, ably supported by the teaching assistants, no time is wasted.
75. The subject leader is very enthusiastic and is a good role model for pupils. He has developed very good links with local providers, including for after school activities. These activities promote enthusiasm for sport. There are teams in several sports that help to build personal and team skills. The highlight for the pupils during the inspection was the visit of coaches from the Everton FC Football in the Community group to teach football skills. One pupil has been chosen to represent the England Disability football team. Extensive records kept by the subject leader show the progress made by pupils in participating and making the effort to improve. Their achievement is very good across the age range. Records of pupils' progress are detailed and effective use is made of them to identify and note down what pupils have achieved and to inform planning for their next stage in learning.
76. The good provision reported at the last inspection has been enhanced by more focussed planning and assessment, and the consolidation of links with outside providers. The standard of accommodation, including appropriate changing facilities, has improved greatly. This year, for the first time, a significant number of the older pupils are studying for the short course GCSE in the subject. However, there is still no sports specific facility, only a multi-purpose hall. The subject is in a very good position from which to move forward.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Provision for PHSE and citizenship is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- High achievement in PSHE and citizenship benefits learning across the curriculum.
- Teaching makes effective use of many learning opportunities.
- The School Council has great prestige and is an excellent model for learning about democracy.
- Pupils are encouraged to be involved in the world beyond school.
- Leadership is exceptional.
- Former pupils encourage those still at school.

Commentary

77. In response to excellent provision and the very good and sometimes excellent teaching they are given, achievement is very good. Pupils, readily, reach the individual personal development targets set for them. Within PSHE and citizenship lessons great emphasis is placed on the development of respect for self and others and on exercising personal responsibility and this is entirely consistent with the school's overall approach to the development of pupils' personal qualities. As a result pupils receive a consistent message and they develop excellent attitudes to learning and to the needs of others. This has a very positive impact on standards across the curriculum.
78. Teaching in PSHE and citizenship makes use of the school's very strong links with the wider community to enable pupils to develop their social and language skills in other social

contexts beside the classroom. Knowledge of the role of the citizen is greatly extended by opportunities to experience democracy in action through in-school elections, or for some, visits to Parliament. The subject plays a pivotal role in the teaching of all other subjects. Teachers and support staff sensitively and skilfully support pupils so that all pupils are enabled to fully participate in the high quality curriculum that the school offers. Pupils' work is carefully assessed and their individual targets reviewed and revised as necessary.

79. The School Council is firmly established and has great prestige within the school. It is acknowledged nationally to be a model from which others might learn. It is at the heart of much of the school's activity in personal social and citizenship education and, as far as is possible, it is used to demonstrate how democracy can effectively influence the quality of life for individual pupils, the school and community. Pupils formally, and democratically elect class representatives on the School Council. Twice each year, for Council members, there are visits to London to experience the procedures of parliament. Pupils consequently have an excellent understanding of the democratic process.
80. Learning activities frequently involve pupils in projects that include the community beyond the school. For example, in their exploration of how various media present information, and in partnership with the borough's Arts Regeneration Project, Year 8 pupils have made a film about the principles of personal, health and social education. Pupils enacted scenes to illustrate a wide range of issues including the value of healthy eating, the dangers of drink driving, the value of friendship, the power of persuasion and tolerance of the points of view of others. Pupils all make a special study of the life of Anne Frank. This topic is explored through drama, discussion and the direct experience gained by visiting the Anne Frank museum in Amsterdam.
81. Leadership of citizenship and PSHE is excellent. The subject leader has worked with great energy to ensure that the core ideas and values of the school are taught and demonstrated by the programmes he has devised. His pioneering work, particularly in relation to the School Council and in enabling children's ideas and views about their educational environment to be heard and acted upon has attracted widespread attention and praise. The central role afforded to the development of pupils' personal qualities by the emphasis placed on this area of learning gives the school much of its distinct character.
82. Visits by former students who have achieved well encourage pupils to raise their own expectations. As a result of the school's innovative work all pupils benefit from developing confidence, independence and self esteem as well as becoming knowledgeable and informed citizens.

Example of outstanding practice

An outstanding lesson in citizenship that reflects the excellent manner in which the school uses many means to develop pupils' sense of personal responsibility and social awareness.

Many of the pupils who meet on Tuesday morning to consider the weekly agenda for the School Council are still tired and still excited. They have just returned from a journey to Amsterdam, of which the highlight, was, as always, their visit to the Anne Frank house. They have used this visit, as have all those from the school who have made this trip before them, to refresh, in a deep, personal way, the lesson that intolerance leads to dreadful consequences. Now, in their bright classroom, they are considering "democracy" and how it involves both choice and compromise. Lively discussion shows that they understand these concepts and they happily entrust their delegate to the School Council to represent their views fairly. The lesson ends with a challenge. Pupils are thrilled as their teacher reads out a letter, just received, from a boy, "somewhere in Europe", in reply to the message in a bottle that they had dropped into sea during the voyage to Holland. Using a chart showing

the coasts and currents, pupils are invited to calculate where the bottle washed ashore. They do this very eagerly. The prize for the winners is a free place on the next visit to Amsterdam.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	2
How inclusive the school is	2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2
Value for money provided by the school	2
Overall standards achieved	2
Pupils' achievement	2

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)	2
Attendance	4
Attitudes	1
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	2
The quality of teaching	2
How well pupils learn	2
The quality of assessment	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	2
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	1
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	3
The quality of the school's links with the community	1
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2
The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	2
The leadership of the headteacher	1
The leadership of other key staff	2
The effectiveness of management	2