

INSPECTION REPORT

ST NICHOLAS SCHOOL

Southend-on-Sea

LEA area: Southend-on-Sea

Unique reference number: 115444

Headteacher: Mrs G M Houghton

Lead inspector: Mike Kell

Dates of inspection: 13th – 15th June 2005

Inspection number: 268645

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
Age range of pupils:	5 – 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	95
School address:	Philpott Avenue Southend-on-Sea
Postcode:	SS2 4RL
Telephone number:	01702 462322
Fax number:	01702 600487
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Reece

Date of previous inspection: 18th – 22nd January 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Nicholas School is slightly smaller than average for a school of this type and age range, and is for pupils in Years 1 – 11 with moderate learning difficulties. There are more than twice as many boys as girls and all pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need. In two thirds of cases this is for moderate learning difficulties; the remainder are identified as having autism, emotional and behavioural difficulties or speech and communication difficulties. Approximately a third of pupils are in Years 1 – 6. Because of pupils' learning difficulties, their attainment on entry to the school is below the average of others of a similar age. Pupils are admitted from across the local education authority (LEA), but overall the school's socio-economic mix is well below average. A high proportion of pupils are in public care.

Almost all pupils have a white British background, and there is only one pupil for whom English is an additional language. There are nine classes. Two contain pupils of primary age, two have a mixture of pupils in Years 5 or 6 and Year 7, three are for the range Years 7 to 9 and two are for pupils in Years 10 and 11. There are only three pupils in Year 2 and so they are not reported upon.

The school was part of the Southend Education Action Zone (EAZ) until late 2004, when it became an associate member of the newly formed Southend Excellence Cluster. It was awarded a School Continuous Achievement Award (1999 - 2002) and has been an Investor in People since 1998. It received a School Achievement Award in 2003 and was confirmed as a Healthy School the following year. This year it received the Football Association Chartered Standard for Schools.

Much management attention is currently engaged in preparing for the school's change in designation in September 2006, when it will become a school for pupils aged 11 – 16 years with more complex needs and challenging behaviour. Because of the changes that have taken place, comparisons with the previous report are of little significance.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
13101	Mike Kell	Lead inspector	Art and design French Music
9052	Helen Barter	Lay inspector	
2480	Christine Gilder	Team inspector	English Religious education Special educational needs
10678	Margaret Paull	Team inspector	Science History Physical education Personal, social and health education and citizenship
21529	Greg Sorrell	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

St Nicholas is an effective school. The headteacher provides good leadership and is supported satisfactorily by other key staff. There are effective management systems in place. Good teaching promotes pupils' learning well. The positive ethos means that pupils achieve well in their personal development. An effective governing body ensures all statutory requirements are met. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Strategic planning is very good; there is a very good approach to managing finances and linking spending with the school's priorities.
- Very good links with other schools, colleges and the community support pupils' learning extremely well.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are prepared very well for leaving school through a well-structured curriculum and very good work-related provision.
- Some shortcomings in senior managers' leadership and monitoring of the curriculum mean that pupils do not receive a properly balanced curriculum or the planned teaching time in all subjects.
- The outcomes of statistical analyses of pupils' performance are not scrutinised fully to determine what messages they are giving the school, such as the relative performances of some groups of pupils.
- Pupils have many very good opportunities to enrich their learning both in school time and outside the normal school hours.
- Unsatisfactory features of some aspects of the accommodation hinder pupils' learning and personal development.

There has been good improvement since the last inspection, particularly against the backdrop of a long period of uncertainty about the school's future and role and subsequent changing pupil profile. In the terms of the key issues and other development areas identified in the last inspection, there has been good improvement. The curriculum for pupils in Years 10 and 11 has improved significantly, and assessment and planning in information and communication technology (ICT) have also seen improvement. There are no longer health and safety issues associated with physical education, and there are appropriate acts of collective worship. The library remains an area for development, although the school has no surplus accommodation to use, as does routine planning to meet the needs of all pupils.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement at the end of:	in relation to individual targets in:	
	Subjects of the curriculum	Personal and social education
Year 6	Satisfactory	Good
Year 9	Satisfactory	Good
Year 11	Good	Good

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

Pupils **achieve satisfactorily**. Those in Years 10 and 11 achieve better because they follow a good curriculum, with a strong emphasis on work-related learning (WRL) supported very well by links with other schools and colleges. Overall, pupils achieve well in speaking and listening and satisfactorily in reading and writing. They achieve satisfactorily in mathematics and well in personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship.

Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are good. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. **Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good.**

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a good quality education for its pupils. **Teaching and learning are good**, although better in 3 – 7 and Years 10 and 11 than in Years 8 and 9. Relationships between pupils and adults are good, and there are high levels of adult support and encouragement. Teachers and learning support assistants have high expectations of behaviour and manage pupils well. Teachers use good quality resources well and generally have good subject knowledge, but there are a few times when their uncertain subject expertise has a detrimental effect on pupils' learning. Lesson planning frequently lacks sufficient detail to show how the needs of all pupils are to be met.

The school provides a satisfactory range of curricular opportunities, although there is a good curriculum in place for pupils in Years 10 and 11. However, shortcomings in effective curriculum monitoring have resulted in discrepancies between planning, class timetables and actual lesson content. Pupils have many very good opportunities to extend their learning both in school time and outside the normal school hours. The unsatisfactory features of some aspects of the accommodation hinder pupils' learning and personal development.

There are good procedures for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety. Pupils receive good support, advice and guidance, and they are encouraged well to contribute to the school's development.

The school has a good partnership with parents, and very good links have been forged with the local community and with other schools and colleges.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is led and managed well. The headteacher provides strong leadership and is supported satisfactorily by other key staff. Management systems are effective. Senior staff provide good role models. They are particularly effective in promoting inclusion through the links that have been created with mainstream schools and colleges by enabling pupils to be included, either individually or as groups. Governance is good, and governors ensure that all statutory requirements are met.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents have good views of the school because it works well with them to support their children's learning at school and at home. Pupils like coming to school, enjoy learning, and participate very well in the many activities in school and the community.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Amend the structure of the timetable and implement routine systems that monitor and evaluate the quality and balance of the curriculum that pupils receive.
- Use assessment information to raise standards and to ensure that all pupils are achieving as well as they can.

- Improve the accommodation, particularly changing and showering facilities, indoor accommodation for physical education, the library and rooms to work with families or to provide effective pupil counselling.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. There are no differences between the achievements of boys and girls and pupils with additional learning needs.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well in relation to their individual social and personal targets.
- Pupils' achievement is good in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils do not always receive the subject teaching that is planned for them.
- Reading recovery programmes contribute very well to raising some pupils' achievements in literacy.
- On a few occasions, achievements are hindered by teachers' insecure subject knowledge.
- Assessment data is not analysed routinely and comprehensively.

Commentary

1. Generally, pupils achieve well in relation to the individual social and personal targets set in their individual education plans (IEPs). There are good systems in place for assessing, monitoring and evaluating pupils' progress towards these targets and this information from across the school is analysed well.

2. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve well because they are well taught and they follow a well-structured curriculum that prepares them very well for leaving school. They are successful in a wide range of accredited courses that includes General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), Certificate of Secondary Education (Entry Level), achievement tests in literacy and numeracy, and ASDAN's (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) Youth Award Scheme. They experience a very good work-related learning programme, and their achievements are enhanced through the school's very good partnerships with other establishments.

3. Despite being taught well, pupils' achievements in other age groups are no better than satisfactory. This is because of how the timetable is constructed and by the way individual teachers deliver the curriculum through class timetables and use the planned time available. For instance, the achievements of the youngest pupils are reduced by the timetable arrangement that results in them having long sessions in subjects like science and physical education. In other subjects, such as English, all of the time recorded on the timetable as being for this subject is not actually devoted to it in practice. In mathematics, lessons are often cut short or teachers choose to spend part of the allocated time doing activities other than mathematics.

4. The school has invested heavily in a Reading Recovery specialist to work with individual pupils and their teachers, and it also provides an accelerated learning programme. This extra support has been available for three years, and the in-house reading recovery work and the Accelerated Literacy Project funded by the EAZ have each made a demonstrable, very positive impact on raising pupils' achievements.

5. Teachers generally have a good understanding of the subjects that they teach. However, on a few occasions their uncertain subject expertise has a detrimental effect on pupils' achievements, such as in French and mathematics. In ICT, teaching is good in those aspects of the curriculum with which teachers feel confident, such as word processing. However, their insecure knowledge of other aspects, such as control and monitoring, results in them sticking to a relatively narrow subject curriculum.

6. Some features of assessment and the use of assessment data also contribute to limiting pupils' achievements. Pupils' achievements are only measured against National Curriculum or 'P' levels in English, mathematics, science, ICT and PSHE. In all other subjects, teachers do not assess pupils' attainments against these nationally recognised levels. Therefore, they cannot make exact judgements of gains in pupils' learning and the progress they make against nationally recognised levels. Although senior managers collect a lot of data about pupils' achievements, they do not routinely use this information to analyse and compare the relative performances of different groups of pupils, particularly pupils with different types of special educational needs.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. Their personal development through the provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils like school very much and have good attitudes to their learning.
- The school manages pupils with challenging behaviour well.
- Pupils' cultural development is very good.
- Assemblies and acts of collective worship promote pupils' personal development well.

Commentary

7. Although pupils' attendance is satisfactory, levels of unauthorised absence are slightly higher than would be expected. However, this is mostly accounted for by the poor attendance of just two older pupils. The school's monitoring of attendance is satisfactory and reasons for absence are quickly followed up with parents.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.7	School data	2.8
National data	8.2	National data	1.8

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

8. Pupils like coming to school, enjoy learning, and participate very well in the many activities in school and the community. They try hard to answer questions in class, contribute to discussions and generally apply themselves to tasks until they are completed. Parents are very pleased that their children like the school so much. They and their children are made to feel a part of the school community because staff welcome them and take time to get to know them. This helps pupils to settle and gives them confidence to learn.

9. Behaviour is good throughout the school because staff set clear rules and routines so that pupils know what is expected of them. Good behaviour and positive attitudes towards others are consistently reinforced in lessons and in assemblies. Pupils value the house point system, which recognises their good or improved behaviour and encourages them to help their peers to behave well. Lunch times are sociable occasions where pupils sit together in class groups and are rewarded for being the 'best table.' In the playground, most pupils behave well and enjoy using the play equipment.

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	92	41	0
Mixed - any other White background	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0

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

10. As increasing numbers of pupils with challenging behaviour have joined the school, high priority has been placed on training for staff in behaviour management techniques. These are constantly reviewed to meet the needs of individual pupils. Staff are skilled at defusing potentially disruptive or violent behaviour, but senior staff are clear about events when exclusion from school is necessary to protect the learning or physical well being of others. Data from the current academic year shows that the number of fixed-term exclusions is falling, but two pupils have been permanently excluded. These exclusions were entirely appropriate and reflect senior managers' commitment to a safe and orderly environment. Some parents are concerned about behaviour and bullying in the school, but inspectors found no evidence to support this and consider that the school is a safe community in which behaviour is managed well.

11. Pupils' personal development is good. They are provided with a wide range of activities in the curriculum, through visits to places of interest and through links with other schools, which promote their cultural understanding very well. For example, following a visit to Paris, pupils produced a striking mural of digital photographs, along with the Southend Arts Partnership and a local specialist media college, for display in a teenage health centre. Provision for pupils' spiritual development has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Assemblies and acts of collective worship effectively promote strong moral and social values, as well as praising and celebrating pupils' achievements. This raises their self-esteem and promotes their confidence well. Their personal development is also enhanced well in PSHE lessons and through careful support and guidance from staff.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a good quality of education. Teaching and learning are good, and pupils follow a satisfactory curriculum, with very good opportunities for enrichment. Pupils' learning is supported by good links with parents and very good partnerships with other schools and links with the community. The school looks after its pupils well.

Teaching and learning

Overall, teaching and learning are good but there is a difference between different age groups. There are satisfactory procedures for assessing pupils' achievement.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships between pupils and adults are good; there are high levels of adult support and encouragement.

- Teachers and learning support assistants have high expectations of behaviour and manage pupils well.
- Good quality resources are well used.
- Lesson planning frequently lacks sufficient detail to show how the needs of all pupils are to be met.

Commentary

12. Teaching and learning are good overall, and the proportion of teaching that is good or better has improved since the last inspection. However, there is a difference in the quality of teaching between different age groups. In Years 3 – 7 and Years 10 and 11, approximately three quarters of lessons are taught well or better. In Years 8 and 9, the corresponding proportion is about half. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen in classes containing pupils in Years 3 – 6. While there was a little in Year 10 and 11 classes, there was more in those lessons involving pupils in Years 8 and 9.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 45 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (2%)	9 (20%)	21 (47%)	11 (25%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)	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.

13. All lessons have common characteristics of effective teaching and learning. Relationships between adults and pupils are good; teachers and effective learning support assistants interact well with pupils and give them good levels of support and encouragement. Teachers and learning support assistants work well as teams. They have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes and the pupils generally understand this. Some boys occasionally become restless in lessons; they make immature and irrelevant comments and a few leave their seats and wander aimlessly. However, teachers and learning support assistants usually manage this behaviour effectively and efficiently. Therefore, the learning of other pupils is generally not adversely affected by the short-term behaviour of a few. Pupils generally learn well and work hard, with good understanding of what they are required to do. Some work well independently, such as the Year 10 and 11 pupils who completed their personal statements as part of their ASDAN coursework, and at other times they co-operate well when working in small groups or as a whole class. For instance, a group of Year 8 pupils worked very well together when investigating the properties of magnets and another class listened and watched very well in a music lesson as they followed a graphic score and played their instrument at the right time.

14. Teachers use good quality resources well to engage and motivate pupils and in classrooms where they available, interactive whiteboards are used appropriately and effectively to promote learning. Teachers use questioning well to do this too, especially when they are targeted at individual pupils and worded in ways that ensure that all are included.

15. Some features of teaching are not so effective, especially in Years 7 – 9. In particular, much lesson planning lacks sufficient focus and detail. Therefore, teachers are not able to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met, especially in terms of extending the learning of the most capable pupils and providing activities that less capable pupils can attempt independently, or with less adult support. As a consequence, time is not always used productively and on a few rare occasions learning support assistants are either not

deployed efficiently or fail to take the initiative themselves. Generally, teachers have good knowledge of the subjects they teach but there are a few times when their uncertain subject expertise has a detrimental effect on pupils' learning.

16. Assessment procedures are satisfactory. There are good systems in place for assessing pupils' progress towards their personal targets in IEPs, and this information is analysed well using information from across the school. Procedures for monitoring and recording their achievements in different subjects are satisfactory; pupils' achievements are only measured against National Curriculum or 'P' levels in English, mathematics, science, ICT and PSHE. The curriculum development co-ordinators for English and mathematics sample pupils' work and liaise with other teachers to moderate the levels determined by their colleagues. In other subjects, teachers do not assess pupils' attainment against these nationally recognised levels. Therefore, they cannot make exact judgements of gains in pupils' learning and the progress they make against nationally recognised levels.

The curriculum

The school provides a satisfactory range of curricular opportunities. Curriculum enrichment is very good. Learning resources are good, but the accommodation is unsatisfactory overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a good curriculum in place for pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- There are discrepancies between planning, class timetables and actual lesson content in Years 4 – 9.
- Pupils have many very good opportunities to extend their learning both in school time and outside the normal school hours.
- The unsatisfactory accommodation hinders pupils' learning and personal development.

Commentary

17. The curriculum as a whole is satisfactory. On the positive side is the curriculum for pupils in Years 10 and 11 and the strengths in the enrichment programme. However, despite planning that is at least satisfactory and good teaching, the curriculum as experienced by the pupils is leading to achievement that is satisfactory. This is because teachers implement the curriculum in a very individual way which negates much of the planning and uses time in ways other than those intended.

18. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow a good curriculum that is well structured and which provides them with the opportunity to follow a range of nationally recognised courses and has a good appreciation of what is required to prepare pupils for leaving school. Work-related learning provision is very good. An effective careers education programme includes extensive work experience placements provided by Trident through the former EAZ, and a mini enterprise scheme in the past. It is supported very well by the school's partnerships with other establishments. Links with Writtle College enable pupils to follow courses in agriculture and horticulture; other colleges provide 'taster' classes in vocational subjects such as catering, mechanics and construction; and the on-site Education-to-Employment Centre (e2e) provides a very good leavers' transition project after school. Pupils are prepared very well for leaving school.

19. All pupils, including those with additional learning needs have good and equal access to all of the subjects that are offered and there are additional procedures and strategies in place to meet individual curriculum needs. For instance, pupils with less developed literacy skills follow a very effective Reading Recovery programme and a few pupils benefit from inclusion programmes at mainstream schools. These programmes extend learning by providing, for example, the opportunity to follow a GCSE course that the school does not provide and contribute very well to pupils' social development.

20. The planned curriculum for Years 4 - 9 shows a good breadth and balance of subjects in each year. However, this is not always reflected in practice in the way in which individual teachers deliver this curriculum through class timetables. Often, teachers are not teaching what their timetables say should be taught, and start and finish times may be very different to those on the timetables. The problem is further compounded by long lessons as this reduces managers' ability to be more creative with timetables. The net result is that not all classes receive the balanced curriculum that senior managers believe they are getting and this has an impact on pupils' achievements. For instance, some mathematics or English lessons were seen to be, or include, long periods of PSHE activities. Many timetables show two subjects for a single period, with no indication of when or how often each will be taught. These include many mathematics and English alternatives, often under the banner of ASDAN courses, or 'finishing off' or 'social time'. Religious education and PSHE may also alternate, as may science, geography, French and history. The consequence of this is that although long-term subject planning is good and produces a clear plan of learning through the school, senior managers cannot be sure that plans are being implemented effectively. They do not have a clear and accurate picture of what is being taught, for how long and how frequently in each class.

21. Very good opportunities are provided for pupils to take part in many varied and additional activities, including lunchtime and after-school clubs. Many visitors into the school provide pupils with very good enrichment experiences. These include workshops with theatre and dance and drama groups, a folk story group, artists, and focused talks from local people such as the community police officer, the Samaritans, and staff from an anti-drugs project. Opportunities for participation in sport are also very good. Pupils take part in gymnastics, athletics, trampolining, sailing and canoeing and aerobics and they receive skilled coaching from players from Southend United Football Club and the local rugby club. In addition, many older pupils accept, and succeed in the Trident Personal Challenge, which is run in partnership with the army. Many of these activities take place away from the school through its very good links with different agencies and institutions. In subjects such as geography, history and art and design pupils visit many places of interest to deepen their understanding of what they have been learning in class. The social development of pupils benefits greatly from residential visits to hostels, to a canal boat, a sailing ship and a Thames barge.

22. There are some good features of the accommodation, such as the playing field, outdoor hard surfaces and specialist subject areas like food technology, music and dance, computing, art and design and science. However, these are outweighed by the deficiencies that hinder learning in other areas and pupils' personal development. Some aspects are poor, such as the absence of any showering or changing facilities. The library is very small, too cramped to be used for study and research, and is a thoroughfare from one part of the school to another. Similarly, the hall is not suitable for physical education for the oldest pupils and is also a thoroughfare. In wet weather, several classrooms also become passageways, and the demountable classrooms are not accessible at all without going outside. The administration area and entrance hall have a very cramped feeling and restrict easy circulation, and there is no appropriate accommodation to work with families or to

provide effective pupil counselling. The rooms for the multigym and resistant materials are too small for their purpose, although each has a good set of resources. The resources generally are good, as are staffing levels for teaching and classroom support. Well-managed administration and general premises staff maintenance support the school's work well.

Care, guidance and support

Provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety is good. The support and guidance given to them is also good. The way in which the school seeks, values and acts on pupils' views is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils have good relationships with staff and feel they look after them well.
- Staff understand pupils' backgrounds very well and provide sensitive support.
- Guidance towards further study and career opportunities is very good.
- The school council is an effective forum for pupils to air their views.

Commentary

23. This is a caring school in which pupils are well looked after by all adults working with them. Pupils get on well with staff and are very confident that they can go to any adult in the school who will help them if they are worried. Parents feel that their children are cared for well within the small family atmosphere of the school. Some are concerned that their children are upset by the behaviour of others although inspectors feel that the school manages this well to minimise any disruption to others.

24. Teachers and learning support assistants are sensitive to the difficulties which many pupils face in their home lives and the impact that this has on them in school. Procedures for child protection, health and safety and for monitoring the progress of pupils in public care are good. The school works effectively to provide guidance for the wide variety of needs of pupils in its care. For example, very good preventative work is done by the social inclusion team therapist in liaison with school staff to support pupils at risk of exclusion and in danger of committing offences in the community. Pupils with emotional difficulties are provided with good quality art therapy and counselling by trained staff.

25. As pupils move through the school they receive very good quality guidance to help them make decisions about their futures. The school's very good links with other schools and colleges result in staff being knowledgeable about the suitability of different routes that pupils may take beyond the age of 16 years. The very good careers programme helps pupils to understand their own capabilities and the options open to them.

26. The school places good importance on listening to what pupils have to say and seeking their views and ideas when decisions are to be made. The school council is a well-established forum in the school for pupils to share the views of their classes and to bring issues that concern them to senior staff. Members of the council are very clear that all are able to put across their views and that there are good opportunities for them to discuss their meetings with their peers. The participation of all pupils in the formulation of school rules, following some concerns about behaviour, has been particularly effective and is evidenced in the way in which pupils clearly understand what is expected of them.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents are good. Links with the community and with other schools and colleges are very good and a significant strength of the school's work.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents like the school because of its positive partnership with them.
- The home-school liaison project is very effective in strengthening links with parents.
- Extensive links with the community make a very good contribution to pupils' learning and social development.
- The school's emphasis on developing strong and useful links with others is very good and benefits both pupils and staff.

Commentary

27. Parents have good views of the school because it works well with them to support their children's learning at school and at home. They say that the school makes them welcome and is prepared to listen to their views and act on their concerns. Parents feel that the school communicates well with them and that they are well informed about how their child is getting on. Inspectors agree with parents' positive views and find that the school works hard to involve them as much as possible in everything it does. The development of informative weekly newsletters, for example, helps parents to know what pupils across the school are doing.

28. The importance of the emphasis that the school places on home-school partnerships is evidenced through the home-school liaison project. It is very effective in following up concerns about pupils' attendance and welfare, and creating positive links with parents and families so that they have confidence in the school. Parents strongly approve of this facility which keeps them in everyday touch with school, links them with outside support agencies and provides an informal 'listening ear' when they have concerns. The school works very closely with other agencies, and its membership of the Southend Central Multi-Agency Cluster strengthens its links with these outside bodies.

29. The school uses every opportunity it can to forge links with the community. It is well supported in this work by parents and community representatives on the governing body. The business community supports the school very well in providing work experience placements, professional sports coaching and events like *'Kids Day Out'*. Pupils' social development is promoted very well by undertaking community work in the borough's parks and gardens, playgroups and senior citizens' homes as part of the Trident Gold Award Scheme. A wide range of visits throughout the year to museums, theatres, art galleries and places of worship considerably enrich pupils' work in the curriculum.

30. The school's networking with other schools and colleges is extensive and constantly developing to meet the individual and changing needs of pupils. It uses the expertise of local specialist media, arts and agricultural colleges very well to provide pupils with opportunities to participate in photography projects and dance workshops and to undertake horticultural and other vocational courses. The school is an active participant in special school sports leagues. Where suitable, the school makes good use of its links with mainstream schools to provide some individual pupils with inclusion opportunities, such as following an accredited course that is not available at St Nicholas. There are also reciprocal links with other schools in place. For instance, staff expertise has been well used to provide primary school teachers with training in art therapy and oral language development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides good leadership and is supported satisfactorily by other key staff. Management systems are effective. Governance is good, and governors ensure that all statutory requirements are met.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Strategic planning is very good and well supported by very good financial planning.
- Governors contribute greatly to shaping the school's future direction.
- The curriculum is not effectively monitored and evaluated.
- Leaders are very committed to inclusion and are successful in meeting the needs of individuals.
- The data available on pupils' achievements is not used well enough to plan what pupils should learn next.

Commentary

31. The headteacher and four senior colleagues, especially the deputy headteacher, have successfully managed significant change as the school has ceased admitting primary aged pupils and has begun to admit secondary aged pupils with more complex needs and more challenging behaviour. The implications of these major shifts in the school's provision have been well addressed by changes in staffing and the provision of increased staff training and development. Governors have played a prominent role in supporting all staff through this turbulent period, and they have worked especially closely with the headteacher to develop an amended vision and direction for the school. They have been able to achieve their objectives because, together, they have developed a very good strategic plan that is underpinned by governors' good first hand knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and their high degree of challenge of senior managers' proposals.

32. The school's financial planning is very good because the headteacher, business administrator and governors work very well together in matching finances to the school's strategic direction and development priorities. Senior staff are very good at ensuring that the spending is most effective; the principles of best value are implicit in all spending decisions. In addition, they monitor how much benefit is obtained from major spending decisions such as those on staff training, computer equipment and programs, new staff appointments, or the re-surfaced playground. Additional grants and funds are well spent on each area for which they are intended.

Financial information for the year April 2004 to March 2005

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	1128278
Total expenditure	1119722
Expenditure per pupil	11543

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	52953
Balance carried forward to the next year	61509

33. Other aspects of the school's leadership are equally effective. Senior staff provide good role models and motivate colleagues well. They are particularly effective in promoting an inclusive culture, which is especially important in the context of the school's changing

roll. They also do this through the very good links that have been forged with other schools and colleges by enabling pupils to be included, either individually or as groups, in many sessions. However, management of the curriculum requires further development. Currently, management and evaluation systems do not ensure that pupils receive a properly balanced curriculum or the planned teaching time in all subjects.

34. Some elements of the school's management systems are good. Effective performance management systems are used to improve achievement, and staff objectives and school aims are supported well by good training and development opportunities. Senior managers collect a lot of data about pupils' achievements and much of this is analysed statistically, but the statistical outcomes are not scrutinised fully to determine what messages they are giving the school. The relative performances of some groups of pupils are compared, such as boys and girls, but there is no attempt to look at how well pupils with different types of special educational needs perform. The school needs to analyse regularly the achievements of pupils with different learning difficulties to determine whether all pupils are doing as well as they can.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

WORK-RELATED LEARNING

Provision in work-related learning is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good community links are exploited very well.
- The on-site e2e project helps to prepare pupils very well for leaving school.
- In very good work-related lessons, pupils study relevant and age-appropriate topics.

Commentary

35. Provision for work-related learning is a strength of the school. Pupils follow a very good programme as they prepare for leaving school. It is meticulously planned and delivered to meet the individual needs of every pupil in their final years at school. They achieve very well.

36. The lessons observed were of very high quality, capturing the essence of transition from school to adult learning and its very different needs. All the pupils were treated with high expectations of maturity and behaviour, and yet with sensitivity so that the groups were relaxed and confident. The pupils listened and contributed maturely, and there were friendly but appropriate interactions between pupils and teachers and their peers. Pupils showed that they were eager to accept the new challenges in their lives with optimism and enthusiasm. All the sessions observed provided valuable social, economic, and life skills learning opportunities, which were valued and appreciated by all the pupils.

37. The school's provision is very well supported by its e2e Centre's membership of the regional work-based learning Nova Partnership, through which a number of work experience placements are found. Very good community links such as this help with the transition to adulthood and workplace learning. Students' confidence and knowledge is further strengthened by courses that they follow at local establishments. Local colleges provide 'taster' classes in vocational subjects such as catering, mechanics and construction, and regular attendance at Writtle College enables pupils to follow courses in agriculture and horticulture. The e2e project on site provides a very good leavers' transition programme. Pupils work on activities that require them to apply what they know to real life situations, such as working out the financial responsibilities involved in living or working independently. For instance, a group of pupils worked very diligently as they considered housing

costs; they searched the Internet for advertisements for flats, discussed saving money and rental and purchasing costs and calculated different percentages.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 2 – 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils in Years 3 - 7 and in Years 10 and 11 learn well because they are well taught.
- The structure of the timetable, and teachers' use of planned time adversely affect pupils' achievements.
- The Reading Recovery programme is very effective in supporting pupils with limited literacy skills.
- The curriculum development co-ordinator supports teachers very well, but does not monitor lessons routinely.
- Planning for lessons does not always focus enough on pupils' individual learning needs or include enough emphasis on writing.

Commentary

38. Overall, pupils learn well during their lessons, but their achievement is no better than satisfactory. This is because of problems associated with the construction and use of the school timetable. Lessons are long, particularly for the youngest pupils, and this frequently affects their ability to maintain focus and concentration. In addition, the timetable is not checked rigorously enough to confirm that enough time is available for teaching, and that the time that is allocated for English is used as intended. This is particularly true for pupils in Years 8 and 9. Currently, teachers' interpretations or changes to the timetable mean that senior staff do not know how much of the time recorded as English is devoted to the subject in practice.

39. Teaching and learning in Years 3 - 7 is good, and sometimes very good or excellent. High expectations and a consistently positive climate for learning mean that all these pupils are keen to learn. Teachers have high expectations and work consistently at a very good pace. All teachers of these year groups showed very good subject knowledge and understanding of their subject in terms of content and teaching methods, and there was first-rate use of the National Literacy Strategy. In the very best lessons, highly skilled teachers maintained pupils' interest even during long sessions. The main reason for pupils' extremely good achievement in these lessons was the teachers' ability to devise activities that matched pupils' capabilities, interests and different learning styles. Pupils learn well in Years 10 and 11 as accredited courses are used well to provide a framework for extending pupils' vocabulary, reading and writing. The most capable pupils successfully complete the course leading to an Entry Level qualification, while those who do not achieve the full accreditation receive recognition of their work through a unit award for each module completed. Pupils also develop their literacy skills well through ASDAN's Youth Award Scheme modules. In these, there is a strong focus on real life situations, such as the pupils who were seen writing for different purposes and audiences; one group wrote a postcard to a friend, while another used ICT to amend their personal statements as part of their record of achievement. Satisfactory teaching and learning take place in Years 8 and 9. Lessons have some effective features, such as relationships and pupil management, but there is a shortcoming in planning and subsequent presentation of activities. Lesson plans do not have a clear focus on pupils' individual literacy targets and the expectations for learning of each individual or group. Consequently, classroom activities and materials do not consistently match the range of capability in classes.

40. Speaking and listening are promoted well throughout the school by a wide range of approaches. The weaknesses in listening skills of the youngest children noted at the last inspection have been addressed effectively. Drama is not taught formally, but very good enrichment takes place through theatre visits, performances and school productions.

41. Pupils' achievements in reading are satisfactory. The school invests heavily in a Reading Recovery specialist, who works with individual pupils and their teachers and also provides an accelerated learning programme. The school's analysis of pupils' performance in reading during the three years this extra support has been available shows that both the in-house Reading Recovery work and the Accelerated Literacy Project funded by the EAZ have each made a demonstrable, very positive impact on raising pupils' achievements. Reading has also been very well supported by the curriculum development coordinator's relentless efforts to find and introduce reading materials that are particularly appropriate for the interests and age of secondary aged pupils. There have been some very good individual literature projects in the secondary phase, including studying *Macbeth*. However, teachers of this age range do not routinely provide a sufficient emphasis on using literature to develop the more capable pupils' interest in a range of literary genres, such as extending their critical and analytical skills and the use of poetry.

42. The curriculum development co-ordinator and headteacher have identified that writing is an area that merits further development and continued vigilance. Many pupils arrive in school with a strong and ingrained resistance to writing. In less effective lessons, teachers occasionally do not make enough demands on pupils, such as by providing demanding activities like factual writing to extend their understanding of important themes and issues.

43. The quality of provision has improved satisfactorily, particularly in view of the school's changed population. The curriculum development co-ordinator provides good leadership and management and support of teachers. An experienced and energetic primary specialist, she offers advice and guidance to colleagues. Regular reviews of the subject's development are held between the headteacher and the curriculum development co-ordinator. The subject development plan identifies an effective programme of activities to meet clear development needs across the school. Currently, there is a shortage of formal monitoring and evaluation of colleagues' lessons in order to disseminate best practice and to support teachers who are not specialists in the subject. In addition, performance data is not rigorously analysed to track pupils' progress or to compare the relative performances of different groups. Library provision remains limited in terms of the number and range of books available. It is also adversely affected by its cramped space; situated in a narrow corridor, it cannot provide a relaxed and welcoming place in which groups of pupils can develop their independent reading for pleasure or their information gathering and research skills.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

44. Overall, pupils' language and literacy skills are promoted satisfactorily. Speaking and listening are particularly well promoted in subject lessons; staff make time for pupils to express their ideas, prompting and supporting as needed. Staff are committed to promoting pupils' self-confidence to speak and to develop their skills in listening to others. In addition, there are formal and planned opportunities for pupils to speak to a range of audiences, such as in assemblies and school council meetings. Teachers do not routinely focus enough attention on writing. Pupils have anxieties and resistance to writing and on a few occasions teachers fail to include opportunities for writing, or insist on them being completed, in order to reduce possible confrontation.

French

45. Insufficient lessons were seen for judgements to be made about the overall provision or the quality of teaching and learning. In the lesson that was sampled, learning was poor. This was because of the teacher's inadequate subject knowledge, a lack of appreciation of the most effective method of teaching a modern foreign language and a complete lack of

challenge and expectation. Significant work needs to be done to develop appropriate subject planning and teachers' confidence and expertise in teaching this subject. Significant work needs to be done to develop appropriate subject planning and teachers' confidence and expertise in teaching this subject.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils in Years 3 – 8 are taught well.
- Practical mathematics in real life situations supports the learning of pupils in Years 10 and 11 well.
- The time allocated to teaching mathematics is not always used appropriately or effectively.

Commentary

46. Pupils' achievements are satisfactory. Learning focuses mainly on developing number skills, but sufficient attention is also paid to areas such as data handling, shapes and measure to enable pupils to make satisfactory progress overall. Pupils up to Year 8 achieve well, while those in Years 9 – 11 make satisfactory progress and achieve satisfactorily in the accredited courses available to them at the end of Year 11. These include Entry Level, Unit Awards and ASDAN. Older pupils do much of their mathematics through practical and 'lifeskills' sessions. These include budgeting for meals, shopping, telling the time, buying items for the home and even weighing pigs on the agriculture course they attend at Writtle College.

47. A number of factors combine to prevent pupils achieving better overall. The school sets realistic targets for pupils, and gathers a large amount of information about their progress. However, the information is not well organised and is not always well used to determine where pupils are making the best or least progress. Therefore, not enough is done consistently to decide which pupils need more help, or which areas of mathematics need a change of approach or more emphasis. The arrangement of the timetable, and teachers' use of time allocated to mathematics also have an adverse effect on pupils' achievements. Often, lessons are cut short, perhaps because the teacher decides to have a PSHE activity instead of mathematics, or there is an assembly in the middle of a lesson. Some lessons that are timetabled as mathematics are actually something else, such as making a 'Streetwise' video. These interruptions and omissions mean that pupils have less time for learning in this subject, and teachers do not always have time to teach a full lesson or to cover all of what they have intended each week.

48. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory. Where the teaching is good, which is mainly in Years 3 to 8, lessons are planned well. There are clear targets for what pupils are expected to learn. Teachers prepare their resources thoroughly, basing their planning on the National Numeracy Strategy and their own good knowledge of the subject. They have a positive and warm relationship with their pupils, motivating them to learn well, to pay attention, and to concentrate on their work. Lessons are well structured in three parts; an introductory 'warm-up', a main activity in which pupils' work is well organised to match their capabilities, and a final review of the lesson. The lessons are quick-paced and the work challenges the pupils well. They are supported well by effective learning support assistants.

When teaching is less effective, and occasionally unsatisfactory, the learning aims are not clear or the planning is scarcely followed. Teachers' knowledge of mathematics is uncertain, and it is sometimes not clear what they expect pupils to learn. The activities may have little structure, be very repetitive, or show no clear connection to previous learning.

49. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The curriculum development co-ordinator has done well to maintain the level of provision since the previous inspection, especially in view of the changing pupil population. The resources are good, accessible and well used by staff. Teachers use computers satisfactorily in their lessons, to expand the range of pupils' mathematical learning, and to help to motivate them. The plan of what is to be taught in the long term is new, although it is well organised. It leads well to the award of national certificates for the older pupils. There is regular checking of planning, and there have been some observations of teaching, but these have been too few to be fully effective in raising standards.

Mathematics across the curriculum

50. Teachers in other subjects bring mathematics into their lessons satisfactorily. They provide activities such as using computers to analyse data, measuring in science and design and technology, and reinforcing numbers, distances and dates in geography and history.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Investigative activities are used well to promote learning.
- Teaching is knowledgeable and enthusiastic.
- The curriculum subject co-ordinator does not have the opportunity to monitor the quality of teaching and learning across the school.

Commentary

51. Teaching and learning are good overall, and some very good learning takes place. At these times, pupils' responses capture the essence of wonder attached to scientific discovery. For instance, Year 8 pupils were thoroughly engrossed in their learning about magnetism. This was because of the good balance between the teacher's initial demonstration, during which he gained the full attention of the pupils, and the pupils' own investigative work. Challenging questions, supported by the consistent use of appropriate scientific terminology, kept pupils keen and on their toes, and fully absorbed in what they were doing. The different teachers teaching science lower down the school also showed good knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject as they devised interesting ways of involving pupils in their learning. The consistency of an experimental approach to learning ensures that pupils' interest in scientific inquiry is nurtured and increased as they progress through the school.

52. Provision in science has at least maintained its good standard since the last inspection. Pupils achieve well and so they are able to follow an accredited course in Years 10 and 11. Many are successful in sufficient modules to receive an Entry Level qualification. Those who do not achieve the full accreditation receive recognition of their

work through a Unit Award for each module completed. On a few occasions, the achievements of the youngest pupils are reduced by the timetable arrangement that results in them having long sessions.

53. The curriculum development co-ordinator leads and manages the subject satisfactorily. Although not a specialist scientist teacher, both he and the laboratory-based learning support assistant have attended laboratory technician courses, and there is good support from the LEA advisory service. Regular termly meetings take place between the curriculum development co-ordinator and other teachers to co-ordinate and develop the science curriculum further. However, there are no formalised monitoring procedures in place at present to ensure consistency of teaching and planning across the curriculum, and the school recognises that this is an area for further development. The curriculum development co-ordinator uses the results of satisfactory assessment procedures well to provide valuable information about planning for individual needs and curriculum development. Resources for science are good, and the laboratory is very well used, with clear notices and adherence to safety regulations.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Learning resources are good.
- Very good assessment procedures are in place.
- The subject curriculum is too narrow.
- The curriculum development co-ordinator leads and manages the subject well.
- The school lacks an acceptable Internet user policy.

Commentary

54. There has been good improvement in provision since the last inspection. The school now has good resources, both hardware and programs, and there is much improved accommodation. This has had a significant impact on pupils' learning.

55. At the time of the last inspection, ICT was not taught as a discrete subject and staff's expectations of pupils were insufficiently high. Pupils now learn well in dedicated ICT lessons. However, their achievements in acquiring new skills, knowledge and understanding are no better than satisfactory. This is due to the narrowness of the subject curriculum, which in turn is linked to some teachers' insecure subject knowledge. Consequently, pupils achieve well in those areas in which teachers feel confident. This is typically in areas such as word processing and use of the Internet to research information about topics in other subjects and vocational courses. Most pupils have a good understanding of using search engines to find information about a range of topics and entering and formatting text for a range of audiences. However, little attention is paid to aspects such as control and monitoring. Teachers' lack of confidence in these areas results in them being underrepresented in the curriculum and weakens what would otherwise be good provision.

56. Overall, teaching is good. Teachers are well prepared and lessons are well planned. Consequently, lessons proceed at a good pace and staff are deployed well to support individual pupils. Learning support assistants provide good encouragement, and an enthusiastic technical learning support assistant provides good back up. Pupils are managed efficiently, and they generally show good attitudes to their learning as the activities are appropriately challenging. They apply themselves well and many work independently. Few pupils enter text with any fluency and consequently word-processing can become a laborious activity; the absence of copyholders to secure worksheets also impedes their ability to type with two hands. Pupils who attend the breakfast club show increased confidence and competence when using computers.

57. The curriculum development co-ordinator is a very good role model and leads and manages the subject well. For instance, a recent audit of staff skills has highlighted areas for development and the planned change of role for the school has been the subject of school-based research that has given the curriculum development co-ordinator a well-informed base on which to secure further improvement. The school has recently introduced a computerised system to assist the assessment of pupils' achievements. This has now produced a very good comprehensive overview of pupils' progress in ICT and also improves the quality of teachers' planning for the next stage of development. The school does not have clear guidance that is shared with staff, pupils and parents about appropriate

use of the Internet, although the school's management is now aware of the importance of such a policy to guide everyday practice.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

58. The use of ICT is satisfactory, because teachers do not consistently provide opportunities for pupils to rehearse skills learned previously. However, there are some good examples. For instance, in English pupils draft and redraft written work and in mathematics and science some create graphs from data they have collected. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 create presentations about themselves that support their record of achievement and vocational coursework. Recent technical difficulties have had an adverse effect upon the overall provision and teachers' ability to provide additional opportunities. As a result of new networking, several programs, including one that supports literacy with subject specific word-banks, have not been available. These technical failures limit pupils' opportunities and diminish teachers' confidence, although the curriculum development co-ordinator has worked hard to overcome these difficulties.

HUMANITIES

Geography

59. No lessons were observed during the inspection, and the curriculum development coordinator was absent. Therefore, it is not possible to make an overall judgement about the quality of provision. Displays indicate that many visits into the local area and further afield support pupils' learning in the classroom very well. For instance, pupils have undertaken project work, such as studying the estuary, which linked very well with subjects such as art and design, history and ICT.

History

60. Not enough history lessons were seen to judge the quality of provision, and it was not possible to speak with the curriculum development co-ordinator. In the lesson sampled, Year 3 pupils learnt about features of Tudor life satisfactorily. Some high quality discussion took place, but the lesson was over-long for younger pupils and activities did not always match the capabilities of all pupils. There were some good links between this topic and other subjects, such as when pupils watched a programme on food in Tudor times during an English lesson, and the same pupils practised Tudor dancing in a physical education lesson.

61. Displays around the school showed varied and carefully produced work by other groups. These included an interesting display on the Vikings, their lives and what they did and looked like, using pupils' own writing and illustrations. Another large and eye-catching display illustrated life in Egyptian times, together with their kings and queens, and lives of ordinary people living by the River Nile. This was accompanied by a well-presented display of Egyptian hieroglyphics and cartouches.

Religious education

62. No lessons were seen and so it is not possible to make judgements about the quality of provision, teaching and learning. A very recently appointed curriculum development co-ordinator is tackling the role energetically and with commitment, but weaknesses noted at the last inspection have only been partially met. Planning now complies with the Locally Agreed Syllabus and staff have taken part in training to improve their subject knowledge

and understanding, but attention to the in-depth study of all the major world religions remains patchy. In addition, the learning resources and approaches used do not reflect the full age range in the school.

63. While it is not possible to judge pupils' achievements, it is evident that current timetable arrangements must have an adverse effect on the standards pupils achieve. The subject rarely appears on the timetable in its own right, and is generally linked with PSHE, citizenship education, or both. Teachers spend differing amounts of time on it. A lack of recent monitoring means that senior staff do not know exactly how much time each class spends studying the subject and how much subject knowledge pupils develop over a year.

TECHNOLOGY

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Information and communication technology is used particularly well to stimulate pupils' interest.
- Very good use is made of community resources and local schools to enrich pupils' learning.
- The subject makes a strong contribution to pupils' cultural development.

Commentary

64. The high standards of achievement identified during the last inspection have been maintained. Pupils are taught well, particularly in Years 7 to 11 when a subject specialist teaches them. As a result of consistently good teaching, pupils achieve well and a few are entered for either a full or short course GCSE at the end of Year 11. The most capable achieve a grade C in this examination.

65. The subject is well led and managed by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable subject specialist. She has developed a good subject curriculum that is built around a number of different themes, through which pupils develop new skills as they experience working with a variety of media. Teachers use a range of good resources well. In particular, the interactive whiteboard is used very effectively to display the work of artists in order to stimulate discussion and to generate pupils' ideas. For instance, a group of Year 10 pupils discussed and commented critically on the sculptures of Henry Moore, while Year 6 pupils thoroughly enjoyed looking at pictures of fantasy creatures.

66. Lessons are rewarding sessions because teaching is enthusiastic and creative. Teachers' preparation, organisation and planning means that time is used well and teachers are very well assisted by the art room-based learning support assistant. Lessons are characterised by good relationships between staff and pupils and so pupils generally have positive attitudes towards their work. Most work independently and with good understanding of what is required, although effective learning support assistants provide good support and encouragement when required. There are occasional instances of immature behaviour, calling out and restlessness but pupils are generally managed well.

67. The curriculum development co-ordinator has planned the curriculum in a way that makes very good use of the community. Pupils have recently visited the Tate Modern and a group of Year 10 and 11 pupils went on a day trip to Paris to the Picasso Museum. The very many effective links with local secondary schools extend pupils' learning as well as contributing to their personal development. One group of pupils attended a workshop with their mainstream peers, during which they worked with a digital photographer to produce a very effective pastiche of the local area. Others are shortly to go to a workshop on card sculpture at another school.

68. Art and design supports pupils' cultural development extremely well. For instance, they study the styles of famous artists and this is evident in their work. For example, there are some very good pictures of portraits painted in the style of Julian Opie. Multi-cultural understanding is also promoted effectively. A recent trip to the Hayward Exhibition focused on African art and there are striking displays around the school of story telling through Aboriginal art and papyrus pictures of Egyptian gods.

Design and technology

69. No overall judgement is possible because no lessons were observed during the inspection, and it was not possible to discuss this subject fully. Displays around the school show that pupils do project work on a number of topics, such as the pier and boats along the estuary. These projects link well with other subjects, such as art and design, geography, English and ICT. The room used for working with resistant materials is well equipped, but is too small for more than a small group of pupils at a time. On the other hand, the food technology room is used well; it is spacious and well resourced.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Music

70. Insufficient lessons were seen to enable judgements about overall provision, the quality of teaching and learning or leadership and management. Currently, the school benefits greatly from its links with other schools through the Excellence Cluster. A teacher from a specialist media and arts college teaches all classes but one over a period of two days each week, but this has been a short-term interim arrangement that is due to finish shortly.

71. In the lessons sampled, pupils learnt well and sometimes very well, because of the teacher's specialist subject knowledge and high expectations. In addition, although inexperienced in working in a special school, she also had the skill to pitch activities at a level that matched pupils' capabilities and the expertise to enthuse them and manage their behaviour.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils try hard and achieve well in lessons, although some are over-long.

- Planning shows good opportunities for reinforcing learning through other subjects of the curriculum.
- Indoor facilities are inadequate for many activities for older secondary aged pupils.

Commentary

72. The good provision identified at the time of the last inspection has been maintained, despite the changing and increasingly complex needs of pupils in the school. The provision of a wide range of opportunities and activities makes a significant contribution to the physical development of pupils.

73. Pupils enjoy their lessons and they achieve well. In some activities they achieve in line with national expectations for their age. They develop a wide range of skills and high levels of competence and co-ordination. This is because skilful teachers have very high levels of expectation and they challenge pupils to succeed. They extend pupils' learning in lessons well, resulting in some impressive performances such as the Tudor dance lesson with younger pupils who learnt some complex patterns and movements. There is also a strong element of teamwork between teachers and learning support assistants, and they all encourage pupils well so that even the least capable participate fully because they find lessons so rewarding. However, some sessions are inappropriately long, especially for younger pupils when sometimes one physical education lesson or activity directly follows another.

74. The school makes very good use of the local community. For instance, all pupils go swimming at the local leisure centre and staff from local football and rugby clubs provide coaching. The school is part of the School Sports Co-ordinators Project, and pupils have many opportunities for participation in a full programme of sports activities with other special and mainstream schools, including swimming galas and various football matches. These events help to develop teamwork and also to build pupils' social confidence and development in the community.

75. Physical education is led and managed well. The curriculum development co-ordinator has produced a good curriculum and is now trying to improve extra-curricular provision. He is doing this by encouraging more physical activity and movement during breaks and lunch times, and teachers and learning support assistants are now increasingly involved in encouraging 'practice playtimes'. 76. They do this by suggesting activities such as skipping, basketball, or by supervising pupils' use of the small multi-gym.

77. Further developments are hindered by the accommodation, which is unsatisfactory. While outdoor facilities are good, the multi-purpose school hall is totally inadequate for activities such as basketball, badminton and five-a-side football, particularly for secondary aged pupils. There are no changing or showering facilities.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, social and health education

Provision in personal, social and health education and citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject contributes very well to pupils' overall personal development.

- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' learning.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to their learning.
- The curriculum development co-ordinator is effective, knowledgeable and enthusiastic.

Commentary

78. Personal, social and health education and citizenship has developed well since the last inspection. It has high priority within the school, and the pupils are benefiting from the care with which the curriculum is planned for the different needs of all the year groups within the school. All statutory requirements are met, including citizenship education. There is a particular emphasis on building self-esteem, confidence, and developing relationships, as well as preparing pupils to enter the adult world of work, training, and leisure. In addition to formal PSHE lessons, pupils' personal development is promoted well in tutorials, circle times and assemblies, and there is the opportunity to talk to a counsellor in confidence. Collectively, PSHE activities provide a central focus for all activities within and outside the school.

79. Teaching and learning in discrete PSHE lessons are good, and pupils achieve well. Teaching involves a varied approach that provides topics and activities that are appropriate to pupils of different ages and capabilities. Expectations are high and pupils rise to these challenges; there is carefully monitored freedom for pupils to make their own decisions to learn and grow and develop through experiences of their mistakes as well as their successes. This sensitive handling results in greater maturity and confidence in pupils as they grow older, with increased capability of making sensible judgements about themselves and others in the wider society as well as the school environment. Consequently, by Years 10 and 11 pupils are developing into thoughtful and responsible young adults, with a growing knowledge about local communities, people's jobs and roles in society, and their own role as citizens.

80. An experienced and effective curriculum development co-ordinator is keen to develop the subject further. The curriculum is currently being updated, and information from pupils' personal targets is being used increasingly to develop a focus for teachers' evaluations of pupils' learning. In addition, there is a focus on identifying more explicitly those elements of the citizenship education curriculum that could be taught or reinforced by other subjects of the curriculum. These developments are being supported by staff performance management procedures, through improved systems for sharing information within the school, and by visits being made by the curriculum development co-ordinator to other schools.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

*In a special school such as this, **standards achieved** are judged against individual targets and not national standards.*