

INSPECTION REPORT

THE AVENUE SCHOOL

Reading, Berkshire

LEA area: Reading

Unique reference number: 110179

Headteacher: Sue Bourne

Lead inspector: Hilary Gannaway

Dates of inspection: 18th - 21st April 2005

Inspection number: 268651

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:	2-19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	115.5
School address:	Basingstoke Road Reading Berkshire
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Chris Manning
Date of previous inspection:	18th January 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This is a 164 place special school for pupils and students from 2 to 19. At present there are 115.5 on roll of whom four are part time in the nursery, and 12 are students in the Post -16 provision. The majority of the rest of the pupils are of secondary age. There are 68 boys and 46 girls full time. All pupils and students have statements of special educational needs. Although those with moderate learning difficulties are still the largest group, most have additional needs. These are more complex than at the last inspection and include an increasing number of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, physical difficulties and autism. The largest group of pupils and students are of white background with the significant ethnic minority group being Asian British – Pakistani. There is one traveller and 6 are in local authority care.

The school is in a very disadvantaged area with high unemployment. Pupils are increasingly entering the school with attainment that is well below average compared to that expected for their age. The school is involved in the Healthy Schools Initiative and has Investor in People status, Investor in Careers and a careers guidance award. There is community use of facilities, including use by a theatre group. Links with two primary schools, one special school and a college provide a useful and increasing range of opportunities for pupils and students to work alongside those from other establishments. Significant partners include therapists and the Education Business Partnership. The learning support service is based on site.

Numbers are falling; for example in 2004 there were 150 on roll. This is because the school is subject to re-organisation. It is to be closed and re-located. The time span is not known but it is hoped that a new school for pupils with severe physical difficulties and complex learning needs will open on a different site by 2007.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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10678	Margaret Paull	Team inspector	Science Religious education Art and design Special educational needs
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective school. In the short time that the present headteacher has been in post she has made sure that the school has regained a sense of purpose and direction, while at the same time undertaking planning for an effective transition to the new school. This has contributed very well to staff morale and the very good levels of team work. Pupils and students achieve well due to good teaching. Very good support for personal development and life in the community ensures most pupils and students have very good attitudes to work. As a result they behave very well and are effectively equipped for life after school. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses:

- The headteacher has a very good understanding of the way forward for the school so pupils and students receive the best possible education.
- Very good relationships and consistent behaviour management have brought about a big improvement in behaviour and attitudes to learning.
- Support for learning outside lessons and in the community very effectively adds to the learning experiences of pupils and students.
- Pupils' and students' access to learning and their achievement benefits significantly from the way all staff, including therapists and teaching assistants, work together.
- The very good way staff care for pupils and students successfully promotes their confidence and self-esteem.
- Some aspects of accommodation limit learning opportunities.
- While access to the curriculum for those with more complex needs is effectively supported by the use of technology and switches, there is inconsistent use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support work in subjects.
- Lesson planning for pupils of school age is sometimes insufficiently adapted for different learning needs because assessment of pupils' work is not always used to set a range of clear learning objectives.

Improvement since the last inspection is good. For example behaviour is now very good due to reliable and successful management strategies which are supported very effectively by senior managers. Achievement in mathematics and ICT, which was unsatisfactory, is now good. Planning and assessment have improved, although they are not, as yet, consistent in all subjects. Good teaching and better subject expertise has led to more consistent achievement. However, accommodation still does not meet all needs, although staff are doing all they can to mitigate this as an interim measure before the school closes.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement at the end of:	in relation to individual targets in:	
	Subjects of the curriculum	personal and social education
Year 2	Good	Good
Year 6	Good	Good
Year 9	Good	Good
Year 11	Good	Good
Year 13	Good	Good

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

It was not possible to make judgements on achievement in the Foundation Stage as there are few children in it at present. However, their progress in lessons is satisfactory overall but often good in personal, social and emotional development and creative and physical development.

Overall the achievement of pupils and students is good. By the end of Year 14, Post-16 students achieve well in communication, basic skills, personal and social education and vocational work. This equips them well for the next stage in their life due to a curriculum that is matched to their varied needs and a range of relevant awards. For school age pupils, achievement is good in English, particularly in speaking and listening. Pupils with more complex needs achieve well in communication across all areas of work using gestures, signs, symbols and switches. However, there are not always enough opportunities for older more able pupils to build on, and reinforce, achievement in literacy across a range of subjects. Achievement is good in mathematics, ICT and religious education because of high levels of team work among all staff including therapists. Good achievement in personal, social and health education (PSHE) is a result of all the positive ways staff reinforce personal development. In physical education, achievement is good due to high levels of subject knowledge with work matched very well to needs.

Pupils' and students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good. Attitudes and behaviour are very good in the classroom, round the school and in other establishments. Very good relationships mean pupils and students feel valued, like school and are interested in all they do. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching and learning are good. Co-operative working between teachers and teaching assistants is of a high quality so pupils and students are supported well in their learning and feel confident to tackle new work. The very positive way staff encourage pupils and students helps them to concentrate. The curriculum provides a wide variety of activities including effective sensory activities for those with more complex needs. Pupils and students have very trusting relationships with adults and this very effectively supports their sense of worth.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management of the school are good. Statutory requirements are met and governors have a satisfactory overview, supporting staff, pupils and parents well. The leadership of the headteacher is very good and she has a very clear view of the way forward based on self-review and priorities for the future move. Other key staff contribute well with those involved in overseeing behaviour management contributing very well. There is effective management with staff performance management being very good.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS

Parents feel the school is open and welcoming. They express widespread pleasure at the involvement they now have in their children's education and the value that is placed on their own views and opinions. They consider the quality of education and support provided is good and have high levels of confidence in, and admiration for, the staff. Parents consider that their children like school and feel that the school is helping them to be better prepared for later life.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Plan consistently for ICT across all subjects.
- Ensure assessment is used more precisely to set learning objectives for different levels of need in lessons so progress can be more accurately measured.
- Investigate ways of making up the lack of some opportunities due to accommodation difficulties in areas such as science and physical education, especially for those with physical disabilities.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils' and students' attainment is well below that expected for their age. However, all pupils, including those with additional and complex needs, and those students in the Post-16 provision achieve well. Children in the nursery make satisfactory progress in lessons.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good in a wide range of subjects due to good teaching and very effective class and behaviour management.
- Older, more able, pupils and students at Post 16 achieve well in accreditation.
- Good achievement in communication skills for pupils and students with more complex needs supports their learning well.
- While achievement for additional and complex needs is well supported across the curriculum through the use of switches and other devices, there are not enough planned opportunities to use ICT in a range of subjects.

Commentary

1. The school has worked hard to bring about the good improvement in achievement made since the last inspection when achievement was satisfactory overall but very uneven across subjects. This improvement is despite pupils and students having more complex needs and the loss of some staff as the numbers on roll have decreased. It is due, in part, to good training of teachers, based on the school's priorities and the very good performance management procedures. Improvement is also a result of very effective team work between teachers, teaching assistants and therapists. The impressive improvement in behaviour, supported by the strong emphasis on behaviour management, has resulted in pupils and students having much more positive attitudes. This means that little working time is lost and pupils and students have better opportunities to access learning. It has enabled pupils to get off to a good start in Years 1 and 2 supported by a carefully adapted curriculum matched, where possible, to individual needs. This improvement in behaviour has had a consistent and positive effect on achievement throughout the school. Staff know pupils and students very well. They have worked successfully to raise achievement and, despite lesson objectives not always being precise enough to cover all needs in classes where there is a wide range of ability, good achievement is now much more consistent across subjects.

2. Good achievement in English, mathematics and science from Years 1 to 11 is supported by well planned and organised lessons. Staff have good levels of subject knowledge and this helps to ensure pupils make effective gains. Much work is practical and there is a very good emphasis on a sensory approach, for instance using activities involving touch, hearing, taste and smell for those who need this reinforcement to support their small steps of progress. The good, and sometimes very good, achievement in PSHE, citizenship and physical education is aided by pupils being encouraged to support each other, turn take and take part in a range of activities out side lessons. This also very effectively supports their personal development.

3. As a result of more consistent achievement, and carefully formulated targets which do meet their needs, older, more able pupils, gain a good range of entry-level qualifications by the time they complete Year 11, with some gaining the highest levels. These pupils take this work seriously and concentrate well. While less able pupils, especially those with profound and multiple learning difficulties, do not take accreditation at Year 11, the school is looking to change this now that the needs of those coming through the school are more complex. For students in the Post-16 provision, there is a very appropriate emphasis on basic skills, communication, PSHE and very practical activities. These are carefully matched to the often very complex needs of students in order to equip

them effectively for life in the community and they work towards ALL (Accreditation for Life and Living Skills) and NSP (National Skills Profile) accreditation in which they achieve well.

4. Pupils and students are confident in the use of ICT, and are beginning to achieve well and use it effectively. This is because the school has made good progress in developing their skills in ICT lessons. However, ICT to support learning in other subjects is not consistently used to assist learning so pupils do not always achieve as well as they could. For pupils and students with very complex needs, the availability of an access co-ordinator means that augmented communication aids such as switches and adaptations for computers are matched to pupils' needs. These are programmed so that they can fully access work and so achieve to the best of their ability. Overall, pupils and students communicate well, with more able pupils achieving particularly well in speaking and listening, although staff do not always pay enough attention to using other aspects of literacy to reinforce learning in other subjects. Along with communication aids, staff consistently use a good range of signs and symbols, including picture exchange systems, with those with more complex needs. This aids achievement because it is clear to pupils and students what is expected and they, in turn, use their symbols well to join in lessons, make choices and construct simple sentences.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' and students' attendance is satisfactory. Their attitudes to work and learning and their behaviour in lessons and around the school are very good. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good relationships contribute significantly to pupils' and students achievements.
- Improvement in behaviour in lessons and around the school gives pupils and students every chance to concentrate and learn.
- The school's very positive ethos ensures that pupils' personal development is very good.

Commentary

5. In spite of their difficulties, pupils and students of all ages appear happy and secure. They say, and their parents confirm, that they like school and enjoy attending. One parent said her child always wanted to attend even when too ill. Attendance has improved over the last few years and due to good monitoring procedures there is very little unauthorised absence. Pupils and students feel very confident in the school. This is because they trust staff and several took time to explain that teachers made lessons and learning good fun. Much of this is due to the very high level of rapport between them and staff. This is a real strength of the school and plays a major part in shaping pupils' and students' very positive attitudes to school. They convey a natural enthusiasm for the day to day activities, for the very good range of special and extra curricular activities and in lessons they often become engrossed in their work and show a real determination to succeed. Within the last two years, the school has increasingly provided opportunities for pupils and students to take on responsibilities. This helps them feel valued and they have eagerly and proudly risen to the challenge. The newly formed school council is keenly supported and starting to ensure that school development takes account of the pupil voice.

6. Behaviour has significantly improved since the last inspection, particularly in the last two years. This is because behaviour expectations have been reviewed and behaviour management strategies overhauled to include high levels of support from senior managers. Staff now work consistently and effectively to help and support those experiencing difficulties. In lessons there is now an environment where pupils and students share resources amicably, take turns patiently and are considerate towards each other. For some pupils and students with complex needs, there are occasions when disturbances are unavoidable but staff quickly minimise the disruption to learning and effectively support those with problems. Pupils and students are much more involved in assessing their own behaviour and, where necessary, agreeing improvement targets. The net result

is that pupils and students know routines, respect the code, work hard and respond very positively to praise, encouragement and the effective reward schemes.

7. Problems with behaviour noted at the last inspection around the school are now rare. At breaks pupils and students interact in a polite and socially mature manner. At lunch it was notable how school age pupils were happy to sit and chat in mixed age groups, how clearing away trays and plates was accepted, how the more mobile pupils were happy to help others and how some pupils automatically stacked chairs away when everyone had finished. Pupils themselves confirm that any incidents are quickly and effectively dealt with and that bullying is not an issue.

8. The provision for pupils' and students' personal development has greatly improved since the last inspection. Spiritual development is very well promoted through assemblies and the daily collective worship period at the start of the day, when they are encouraged to discuss and reflect on thoughts and themes for the day. In PSHE and citizenship lessons, pupils are taught to develop their self awareness, to develop tolerance and respect for the feelings of others, to understand rights and responsibilities and the need for organisation in an orderly society. Social development is very well encouraged in day to day activities in the school, through the growing interaction with pupils from other schools, through welcoming a wide range of visitors and through the opportunities to experience residential visits. For older pupils and Post-16 students, work experience programmes and college links offer very good social development experiences.

9. Cultural development is very effectively promoted through visits to theatres and through the large number of performing arts groups that visit the school. Further opportunities to understand other people's cultures and traditions are provided in religious education and through themed events which celebrate the food, fashion and festivals of other faiths, for example Diwali and Eid.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.9	School data	0.9
National data	8.7	National data	1.9

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	78	11	

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is good. Pupils and students are supported well in their learning. The very positive way staff encourage pupils and students means that they concentrate well. The curriculum provides a wide variety of activities including effective sensory activities for those with more complex needs and this is reinforced by a very good range of activities outside lessons. Care and welfare is very good with pupils and students having very trusting relationships with adults and this effectively supports their self-esteem.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good overall. Assessment of pupils' and students' learning is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good behaviour management ensures that pupils settle well and work hard.
- Team work with teaching assistants and therapists is very effective.
- The way staff communicate with pupils and students with more complex needs, and make sure they have effective access to activities, is good and carefully supports their learning.
- Pupils' learning is very successfully supported by very good relationships and the positive way teachers encourage pupils and students.
- While most planning is good, there are times when learning objectives are not clear enough to make sure all needs are met.
- Assessment of pupils' work is improving but the information is not yet used well enough to plan for different levels of attainment in lessons.

Commentary

10. Teaching has improved since the last inspection with a greater consistency of good teaching, despite the wider variety of more complex needs. This is due to well targeted staff development, better curriculum planning and careful monitoring. The successful emphasis on improving behaviour means that staff expect pupils and students to behave well, which they do. Any problems are dealt with promptly so that little teaching time is lost and pupils continue to concentrate. It is expected that any pupil or student who has to leave the classroom will be back in and learning as soon as possible. The improvement in behaviour has had a positive effect on the way staff teach. The confidence gained has helped teachers increase the amount of practical work and this keeps pupils' and students' interest.

11. Team work with teaching assistants and therapists very effectively aids pupils and students to access a wide variety of purposeful activities. This is because teachers plan lessons so that teaching assistants can work very effectively with groups and individuals, ensuring that they are fully involved in lessons. Intervention to support those with more complex needs, such as profound and multiple learning difficulties, is careful, and staff check very effectively with these pupils to make sure they understand and can make their own choices where possible. Classroom staff also liaise and work collaboratively with therapists such as the speech and language therapist for communication and the physiotherapists for activities such as Movement Opportunities Via Education (MOVE). This latter activity particularly helps to improve physical skills so improving the access to education of pupils and students with more complex needs. In Post-16 lessons, teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is particularly impressive. Students have a wide range of needs and the positive way staff work together helps them to participate together in lessons and during activities outside school.

12. Pupils and students with complex needs are fully included in all lessons, and mobility is increased wherever possible as, for example, when changing position from a wheelchair to a standing frame for some lessons or parts of the day. Staff are very adept at using relevant communication aids such as signing, symbols and switches with them and carefully monitor responses such as eye contact and gesture, recording the evidence of learning immediately. They often plan lessons that use the senses, and resources such as the sensory room, so that learning for these pupils and students is relevant, reinforced and further opportunities are opened up for them.

13. A feature of many lessons is the way staff praise and encourage pupils and students, often getting the group to celebrate each others' efforts. Staff manage classes very well. They organise a good variety of activities to motivate pupils, with a mix of individual, group and whole class work. Along with very good relationships this helps pupils and students to trust staff. As a result, they are

keen to do well, feel confident in trying difficult tasks and gain in independence and self-esteem. Lessons are generally well planned with a good range of resources available to support pupils learning. This helps staff to be well prepared and organised and, therefore, time is used well in lessons. Teacher's knowledge of their subject matter is good so pupils and students get to experience a wide range of activities.

14. However, in some lessons the objectives that staff want school age pupils to achieve or understand by the end of the lesson are not always specific and clear enough. This is because assessment is not always used to plan effectively for different levels of learning needs in lessons where there is a wide range of needs. This means that work is not always matched to individuals and it is not easy to see if pupils and students have learnt as well as they could. In some cases individual education plans are also relatively general and do not support precise target setting. However, staff know pupils very well and this helps to ensure the generally good progress.

15. Assessment has been a focus for development, and good progress has been made since the last inspection when it was unsatisfactory. There is now very comprehensive information that shows continuity of planning and recording for every pupil, from their statement, assessments by support services, and educational assessment right through to their individual education plans. A pupil's or student's needs can be tracked from these files to form the basis for more effective planning and teaching. Assessment is used well to plan and teach pupils and students with complex needs such as profound and multiple learning difficulties. Teachers record individual achievements after a lesson and in the best examples they involve a pupil fully in the process enabling them to learn more about their own progress.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 50 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0 (0 %)	11 (22 %)	28 (56 %)	11 (22%)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)

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

The curriculum

The curriculum is good and provides a broad range of opportunities and activities, relevant to the needs of the pupils and students. Opportunities for pupils and students to enrich their learning experiences are very good. The school's accommodation and resources are good overall, although elements of accommodation are unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Curriculum planning has improved since the previous inspection.
- The strong commitment to equality of opportunity contributes very well to the progress made by all pupils and students.
- The good 16–19 curriculum ensures activities are relevant, and practical for students with wide ranging needs.
- Extra-curricular activities provide a varied range of visits to support and enhance the curriculum.
- While the school has worked hard to make the best use of the accommodation, some aspects limit pupils' and students' learning.

Commentary

16. The headteacher and senior management team have worked hard to improve the structure and quality of the curriculum since the last inspection. One of the most important improvements has been to ensure that suitable schemes of work are in place for all National Curriculum subjects and religious education and that these are utilised more consistently as a basis for planning. These

schemes are now being used to construct appropriate termly plans from which lessons are prepared, ensuring that pupils are taught a good range of basic skills. Overall, the curriculum is well modified so that it can be taught appropriately to pupils with different attainment levels and a wide range of complex needs. For example, the multi-sensory curriculum makes a good contribution towards pupils' learning in other subjects by enabling greater inclusion and access to the whole curriculum generally. The very strong commitment to equality of opportunity contributes very well to the progress made by all pupils. For instance, there are now co-ordinators for both ICT access, via a range of electronic equipment, and the multi-sensory curriculum. Therapies are very inclusive and helpful in planning the most appropriate way of teaching the curriculum and identifying particular educational needs and resources for a pupil.

17. The programme for students over 16 is good and is highly appropriate in its provision of vocational skills, preparation for adult life and the development of students' capacity for personal responsibility. It continues to build on the highly relevant key skills of communication, numeracy, literacy, and ICT, as well as a range of other accredited courses that help students to become more independent, or continue at college after leaving school. The improvement in curriculum provision for these students since the last inspection has been good. It is effective in preparing them for other educational links, and for gaining a range of appropriate accreditation such as ALL and NSP.

18. The school provides a rich and varied range of experiences through extra curricular activities that raise pupils' and students' self-esteem and increase their awareness of the wider world. Transport difficulties restrict after school clubs but a number of well thought out lunchtime activities, including sport and arts activities, are well supported. School teams regularly compete against other local schools in a number of sports and some pupils enthusiastically represent the school at local and national sporting events. Regular visitors to the school include theatre and music groups providing a varied range of creative activities. These experiences successfully enthuse pupils and students who eagerly take part in musical and theatrical productions put on by the school each year. The school hosts a wide range of special events like book week, one world week, arts and craft week, a French day and events celebrating the food, fashion and festivals of other cultures, all of which stimulate them and broaden their understanding. Visits, to local and national places of interest, support teaching of many aspects of the curriculum very well. For example, visits to the local shops, restaurants, the zoo and art galleries offer a variety of chances to enhance curriculum studies. There are also good opportunities for pupils and students to interact with others outside the school community. Most pupils are given opportunities to enjoy residential visits to holiday and activity centres.

19. The school has made great efforts to improve accommodation despite plans for closure and re-location. As a result, some areas of the site are pleasant and well maintained. For example, a sensory garden provides the sound of flowing water, scented herbs and flowers for pupils and students to experience. Physiotherapy and sensory rooms have been improved to give pupils and students a wider range of experiences. However, overall, accommodation is unsatisfactory, especially for children with physical difficulties. The required temperature for the well used hydrotherapy pool can only be reached at the expense of humidity damaging the walls, which are already deteriorating after recent refurbishment. The lack of play areas hinders opportunities for pupils' and students' social and physical development and facilities for physical education are inadequate. There is no science laboratory. As a result, practical investigations are restricted to experiments requiring no heat or the use of domestic equipment in the food technology room. Although the school's access plan meets statutory requirements, many aspects of the accommodation hinder independent movement around the school. Ramps are too long and steep and thresholds and swing doors present obstacles for pupils in wheelchairs. Accommodation for Post-16 students, while satisfactory, would benefit from a social area more suitable for their age and increasing maturity.

Care, guidance and support

Procedures to ensure pupils' and students' care, welfare, health and safety are very good. Good quality support and advice help pupils to make progress. Pupils' and students' views and opinions are valued and are increasingly being sought.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils and students enjoy very good and trusting relationships with all adults; they are well looked after and this positively influences the progress they make.
- Careful guidance and support assists pupils' and students' achievement and personal development.
- Involvement by pupils and students in the life and development of the school is good and helps them become more mature.

Commentary

20. Very good and improved arrangements for child protection and health and safety are in place. All staff show high levels of care for pupils and good procedures ensure that the school is a safe and orderly environment where pupils and students learn. Therapists and other professional support staff make a significant contribution to ensuring pupils' health and welfare. In lessons, at breaks and on arrival and departure, careful supervision ensures the safety of pupils. Risk assessments are routinely carried out because staff know that many pupils and students are vulnerable and some need careful handling, for example, when moving between wheelchairs and standing frames. As a result, all pupils and students feel valued. Staff interact with them in a consistently understanding and positive manner. In this climate they readily adapt to the daily routines and quickly feel secure. The strong and trusting relationships that develop with adults ensure that all gain confidence and readily seek help or support if they do not understand or if they have any concerns. Discussions with pupils and students indicate that they know who to approach with problems and they agree that staff help them to enjoy their experiences at the school. This positively influences their feelings towards the school so they are keen to learn and make progress.

21. All pupils and students have personal and social development targets and tutors effectively monitor and record progress through daily observation and discussion. Any experiencing difficulties are quickly identified and tailored support programmes are put in place. A handful have behaviour management plans with short term targets to aid improvement and a number of others have requested a behaviour plan as they feel it would help them make progress. Pupils and students with physical difficulties have targeted movement development programmes and physiotherapy staff monitor changes closely. The effective support and guidance given to pupils and their parents helps to bring about improvement. Good records of academic progress and achievement are routinely collected but, in some curriculum areas, insufficient use is currently being made of the data to focus teaching on individual pupil needs.

22. Good, and increasing, opportunities are being created for as many pupils and students as possible to express their views and to become involved in their own development and in the day to day life of the school. In some lessons they are asked to give an opinion on their own work and performance which they are keen to do. Older pupils and students are positively and sensibly involved in negotiating, agreeing and reviewing their development targets. The newly formed school council provides a good opportunity for pupils and students to suggest improvements to school routines and facilities. Representatives on the council are proud of their positions and take the responsibility very seriously. The names for the different buildings and the design and development of the sensory garden were closely influenced by the pupils and students.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school enjoys a very good partnership with parents and carers. There are very good links with the wider community and good links with other schools and colleges.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good communication and consultation with parents, along with parents' positive support for the school, ensures effective involvement in the education of their children.
- The school draws very effectively from the local community to broaden and enhance pupils' and students' learning and personal development.
- Developing links with mainstream schools and colleges contribute positively to pupils' and students' social development and their preparation for life after school.

Commentary

23. In the last few years the school has worked very hard to improve the links with homes. Parents confirm the school is open and welcoming and express widespread pleasure at the involvement they now have in their children's education and the value that is placed on their own views and opinions. There is a high level of satisfaction with the quality of education and support provided and high levels of confidence in, and admiration for, the staff. All parents confirm that their children like school and feel that the school is helping them to be better prepared for later life. They are particularly complimentary about the quality of leadership, teaching and the fact that all pupils are treated and valued equally, regardless of their difficulties.

24. Parents are kept very well informed about school life and about their children's achievement. Communication is maintained in many ways such as letters, newsletters, telephone calls, through the home school diary, open evening, social events, parents' evenings and annual review meetings. Events at the school are well attended and parents enjoy very close relationships and contact with the on-site therapists and other professional support staff. The dialogue with parents is supplemented with regular requests for views and opinions and there is good evidence to show that comments are highly valued and suggestions taken very seriously. The parent and community education officer works closely and effectively with minority ethnic parents passing on concerns, interpreting where necessary, helping parents to participate in activities, and works to build parent confidence in the school.

25. Staff at the school are outward looking and have established some very good links within the local community which enhance pupils' and students' education. The site and facilities are regularly used by community groups. For example, a major theatre school uses the facilities three times a week and an adult disability group, which has worked with some ex-pupils, are based on the site. Community support organisations like the police, the fire service and guide dogs for the blind are regular visitors to the school and there is a good level of interaction with elderly people in the community at harvest festival and Christmas. Very good use is made of the local community for outings and visits which support the curriculum. There are frequent visits to local shops, the library, the railway station, historical sites and landmarks, the football club and a farm.

26. Relationships with other schools are good and developing quickly. There are strong links with two primary schools which enable pupils to visit each other for special events and productions. For example, pupils host an annual teddy bears picnic for pupils from one mainstream primary school. A few primary age pupils, very well supported by staff, spend a half day each week attending lessons in the two primary schools and this effectively supports a range of social and academic skills. There are no comparable arrangements yet for secondary age pupils but the school is working hard to identify opportunities for carefully selected pupils. Good social interaction with mainstream pupils occurs for all ages through sporting and other competitions.

27. There are good links with the local college and with other educational establishments which are developing on an individual basis through the work experience programme. All Year 11 pupils spend half a day each week at the college. They attend a very well organised programme of sample vocational courses alongside pupils from two other special schools. Where appropriate, arrangements are made for Post-16 students to attend link courses at the college for up to two days a week. One pupil, who is successfully enjoying a work experience placement with a charity based

organisation offering nationally accredited courses in horticulture, is about to accept an offer to attend full time from September.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management overall are good, as is management by key staff. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. The governance of the school is satisfactory but improving.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher's very good vision for moving the school forward is well supported by senior managers and staff.
- The approach to staff development has had a good effect on pupils' and students' education overall.
- There has been improvement in the effectiveness of management provided by other key staff including subject co-ordinators.
- The governors are very supportive but do not, as yet, take a big role in forward planning.

Commentary

28. Improvement has been particularly good since the present headteacher took up post two years ago. Since her arrival there has been an unmistakable striving for improvement which has helped to raise morale and ensure that staff are clear about the direction the school is going in. This is supported by the headteacher's well-defined vision and understanding of the areas for improvement necessary in order to ensure that pupils and students continue to receive a good quality education during the reorganisation. Priorities for the school have been very well identified through monitoring and self-review. This has been instrumental in improving standards of behaviour which were a key issue at the time of the last inspection. At the same time as bringing about improvement in the school, the headteacher is very involved in plans for the new school and identifying the best placements for pupils whose needs the new school will not cater for. She is very aware of these different calls on her time and manages them very well.

29. Performance management is very well established for all staff. The headteacher and governors are fully committed to making sure that staff have the opportunities they need to develop their skills so that they can teach and support learners with a wide range of needs. This process has been used very effectively to identify staff training needs both for the school as it is at present and for the future. It is linked very well to the school improvement plan so staff understand how the school is working towards improvement. This has helped the headteacher successfully work with staff in planning appropriate training to equip them with the skills necessary to successfully meet the needs of the full range of learners. As a result, staff feel valued and are beginning to be confident teaching pupils and students with more complex needs. This is having an increasingly good effect on the progress they make.

30. The senior staff group forms an effective team which supports the initiatives of the headteacher and governors well. Senior managers now have clearly defined roles and efficient systems have been established to ensure communication throughout the school is good. Some senior managers have been particularly effective in improving behaviour. This has supported staff very well because they know there will be swift assistance for any pupils or students in difficulties. The staff form a committed and united team, all of whom are encouraged by the headteacher to take on increasing responsibility. Their very effective team work helps ensure pupils and students receive a consistent education during a time of anxiety and change. Subject co-ordinators have clearly defined roles and most carry out their responsibilities well. However, the headteacher has rightly recognised the need for co-ordinators to further develop their role in evaluating the effectiveness of their subject and planning for further improvement.

31. Governors offer good support to the headteacher and they make certain all statutory responsibilities are met. They are committed to school improvement and have a general awareness

of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are beginning to take a more active part in monitoring and evaluating progress towards targets on the school improvement plan but they do not yet take a strategic lead in providing a vision and direction for the future of the school. However, the post of special educational needs governor is being developed through liaison with relevant staff to raise awareness of the particular and increasing additional and complex special educational needs of pupils.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	1,928,970	Balance from previous year	180,721
Total expenditure	2,001,271,99	Balance carried forward to the next	106,551
Expenditure per pupil	13,3342		

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Work related learning (WRL)

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a good programme of WRL including community visits for pupils and students.
- Good links with the local college enable pupils to learn basic vocational skills.
- There is a good programme of work experience in Years 10 and 11

Commentary

32. Provision for work-related learning is well led and managed. The teacher responsible has only recently taken up the post, but has successfully introduced a number of well thought-out measures to develop the curriculum for older pupils. There is a good emphasis on vocational education, underpinned by other courses that promote a greater understanding of the world and citizenship, while at the same time furthering basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy.

33. Alongside this, the Post-16 co-ordinator has made good improvements in the WRL curriculum, ensuring that it meets the needs of a diverse group of students with a range of needs. It builds well on experiences in Years 10 and 11, but provides more work and life related experiences. College links are well established and links with the careers service are strong. For instance, during the inspection an inspiring joint drama production underlined the value of these links both for students and their parents. The local community is also utilised enabling students to acquire literacy and numeracy skills in a social context. For example, visits into the community for shopping put learning into context making it relevant to students' lives.

34. There is a comprehensive work experience programme and very good use is made of the local community to give pupils first-hand experiences. Within the careers education programme, work experience is organised for all pupils in Year 11 throughout the year. Post-16 work experience is arranged on an individual basis by the school and involves work within and beyond the school as needs dictate. Work placements for the Year 11 pupils are a particularly strong feature of the work-related curriculum. The placements are well organised and as a result the majority of the pupils complete a very successful placement. Pupils' good preparation for leaving school is further developed through good links with the local college. This provision is highly valued by both pupils and students. A very successful emphasis is placed on the recognition and celebration of their achievements and many of them are justifiably proud of the progress that they are making. The pupils and students are well supported by a range of agencies such as Connexions and these contacts help them to develop the key skills for the transition from school to work.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING,

SUBJECTS AND COURSES

AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE

Provision in the Foundation Stage is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for children's personal, social and emotional development, creative development and physical development is good.
- The situation whereby various staff teach these children at different times means it is difficult to ensure consistency in work and assessment across the areas of learning.
- Opportunities to work in a range of settings are good.

Commentary

35. There are few Foundation Stage children on roll at present. Only one is of reception age and is successfully taught alongside pupils in a Year 1 to 4 class. The four part time nursery age children have a range of complex needs and several are fairly new to the school. As a result, it is not possible to make a judgement about achievement, although the children make satisfactory and sometimes good progress in lessons. They are, however, taught in a variety of settings. This supports their introduction to education well and gives staff opportunities to assess which environment will be the best for their needs. All spend time gaining a range of experiences in the purpose built, high quality Early Learning Centre (ELC). This is boosted by the many opportunities to work alongside pupils in Years 1 to 4 in lessons such as swimming, personal development and aspects of creative development which take place outside the ELC. Two children also spend time learning alongside children in a local primary school and this effectively supports their social skills.

36. The **personal, social and emotional development of children** is good because staff work hard to make sure that activities are aimed at fostering self help skills and independence. Staff have very good relationships with children and also demonstrate very appropriate social skills during the morning greeting session. This supports the acquisition of these skills by children very well. There is a big emphasis on children learning to choose and on turn taking which helps them to become aware of other children and staff. Independence is encouraged through feeding programmes and during activities where children learn to tidy up by, for example, putting their apron away, moving their chair and getting out and putting back resources such as skittles. They learn quickly to do this and enjoy the motivating range of activities.

37. Progress in **communication, language and literature** varies but is generally satisfactory. When children work with more experienced staff, progress is good and sometimes very good. This is because these staff know the children very well. Very good co-operative working with the speech and language therapist ensures that staff acquire skills to demonstrate signs well. Experienced staff also use a good range of often sensory resources which aid children in beginning to communicate. Tasks are very well matched to individual needs and all facets of communication including symbols, signing and switches are used to reinforce learning. The use of a visual timetable helps children to know what will happen next. Picture exchange systems are used particularly successfully with one more able child who uses this effectively along with single words to make short sentences, choose activities and signal change of tasks. Children listen carefully to stories such as *Dear Zoo*, attempt to predict, match animals to those in the book and use switches for repetitive phrases. They begin to make marks on paper and are keen to learn. However, when children are taught by less experienced staff, work is not always appropriate and sessions go on too long on the same theme. Staff do not consistently use a good range of communication and work does not always extend learning.

38. Progress in **mathematical development** is satisfactory. This is because there is less emphasis on this area of learning so children do not get a great deal of reinforcement. Children compare foot sizes, tap out one and two with their hands, listen and gesture to counting songs such

as one, two, buckle my shoe and five frogs. They match two out of a choice of three and recognise colours when asked to pick up the blue bean bag during a game of skittles. More able children match 10 puppies and count backwards by taking one away while singing *Roll Over*.

39. A suitable and wide range of activities ensure satisfactory progress overall in **knowledge and understanding**. Children cut, stick and use glue, tape and string while constructing models. They feel textures, show delight by gestures or single words and gain an understanding of hot and cold. They look at lights in a dark room, ice cakes, use sand and water and smell perfume. They make visits to the local environment such as to the fire brigade and a farm. They use switches to make toys move, plant seeds and recognise pictures of familiar places and activities. Children learn to use the touch screen and use programmes such as *Ace Letters* and an art package. However, some opportunities are lost to use ICT to reinforce work so children are not as confident with this as they could be.

40. Progress in **creative development** is good because as well as experiences within the ELC, the children gain other experiences through, for instance, music with a specialist teacher and art activities alongside a group of pupils. Children paint using a brush and their hands, make collages with a variety of textures and use play dough imaginatively. Music, particularly songs, is often used to enrich different areas of the curriculum and to signal new activities. Children match pictures to instruments, choose a rhyme, blow whistles in music, paint with hands, use play dough imaginatively and carefully handle large paint brushes.

41. **Physical development** is good because there are many opportunities to develop this area both in lessons and through play. This is particularly important as most of these children spend a great deal of time in wheelchairs and standing frames. Children are supported effectively while moving around in the ball pool. They practice physical exercises targeted to their needs during MOVE sessions with staff including the physiotherapist. Songs are used to encourage movement. During very good individual swimming sessions to develop water confidence, children experience the sensation of water when kicking their legs and floating, showing high levels of enthusiasm. Ambulant children balance on benches first with teacher support and then try on their own. They bounce up and down on a large ball and concentrate while throwing bean bags at skittles.

42. Co-ordination of the subject including leadership and management is satisfactory. However, this area is not as good as it was at the last inspection and improvement is only satisfactory. This is because two teachers, one of whom is temporary, share the teaching along with several other staff who take children for activities such as music and physical development. Although in some respects this is helpful because it aids children in getting to know a range of adults, the present co-ordinator does not teach in the Foundation Stage. This means there is no consistent overview, although the co-ordinator has supported the temporary member of staff with planning. There is limited co-ordination between the three teachers to ensure children have a good balance of experiences. Despite this, children do gain a good range of skills in a variety of settings. While assessment is in place using P scales, and there are care plans and individual education plans, the quality of written observations vary and are not used consistently to inform planning. This means skills are not consistently recorded in enough detail to be useful and staff rely on their good knowledge rather than detailed evidence on what children know and understand when planning. Teaching is satisfactory overall but very uneven with some examples of very good teaching where staff are experienced.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 1, 2, 3 and 4 and Post 16

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching enables pupils to make effective gains in all aspects of English, particularly communication skills.
- Very effective teamwork among all staff ensures that pupils learn well during lessons.
- Assessment is not used as well as it could be.
- Leadership of the subject is good but the monitoring of teaching and schemes of work lacks rigour.
- Teachers do not make enough use of ICT resources.

Commentary

43. Pupils achieve well in all years and make good progress as they move through the school. In 2004, eight Year 11 pupils gained entry-level qualifications at levels two and three and current Year 11 pupils are working at a similar standard. Most Post-16 students gain NSP and ALL qualifications in communication.

44. Pupils make particularly good progress with the development of communication skills. Younger pupils, many of whom have complex needs, are given good opportunities to make choices and respond to stories. They are helped to use switches to move the story on or to provide sound effects. Pupils also benefit from the work of the speech and language therapist who supports their communication development well. This is accomplished by working with individuals and groups of children using and reinforcing signing and symbols so aiding communication. Post-16 students with more complex needs make a good range of gains in basic literacy skills because work is based on practical activities matched to their age, often out in the community, and communication overall forms an important part of all activities.

45. For more able pupils, achievement in speaking and listening is at least good. In Years 3 to 6 they listen very attentively to stories from big books and many can answer questions clearly. As these pupils move through the school they become confident speakers and Year 9 pupils, for example, discuss extracts from the plot of *Macbeth* with understanding. Some Post-16 students develop sufficient confidence to give formal talks to the class about their relatives and friends. In a short, moving performance of extracts from the musical *Cats*, these students showed poise, maturity and an ability to use basic drama techniques very effectively. Parents, teachers and other students watched and listened in awe.

46. Pupils' good progress with reading is effectively supported by the recently introduced daily reading groups which stimulate pupils' interest in reading. Those with more complex needs gain pre-reading skills through enjoying stories by being helped to feel textures and artefacts. They are assisted in turning pages of story books and a few begin to recognise some letters. They extend this through making short repetitive sentences using symbols. In Year 6, higher attaining pupils begin to sequence stories in words and pictures. Some older pupils develop independent reading skills and use their knowledge of letter sounds to work out the meaning of more difficult words.

47. Staff have worked hard to ensure that writing skills are being well developed. At the initial stages of writing, teachers enable pupils to make marks in sand or paint as well as on paper. Year 6 pupils develop their ability to copy patterns and letters and a few write short shape poems to describe objects of their choice. By Year 11, several pupils are able to write more lengthy sentences and short poems, using a good variety of vocabulary in very neat handwriting.

48. Teachers manage classes very well, for example when moving children from one activity to another, so that lessons are taught at a good pace. Teachers plan lessons well so that teaching assistants can work very effectively with groups and individuals, ensuring that they are fully involved

in lessons. Overall, teachers organise a good variety of activities to motivate pupils and make sure teaching assistants know what is expected during the lesson. In Post-16 lessons, teamwork between teachers and assistants is particularly impressive, allowing students with a wide range of needs to participate in lessons together. Pupils of all ages respond willingly and behave very well; this is a significant factor in their good achievement.

49. Procedures for assessing pupils are developing but teachers do not use information about pupils' attainment as precisely as they could. For example, lesson objectives are not specific enough to ensure that work is suitable for all pupils. One result is that they do not make enough use of ICT resources to enhance pupils' learning, such as the use of word processing to draft work or individual programmes to meet specific needs in reading and spelling. Teachers do, however, use a variety of resources to engage pupils' interest, such as in a Year 9 and 10 lesson when they wore costumes to represent characters from *Macbeth*.

50. English is well led, especially by the head teacher, who has established clear areas for development following careful evaluation of existing provision. The recent introduction of daily reading groups and a policy for assessing mark making and writing is already improving standards. Management of the subject is satisfactory. However, the sketchy schemes of work require further development and teaching is not monitored closely enough to ensure that work builds on previous work so ensuring as much progress as possible. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Resources, especially for reading, have improved. The assessment of pupils' work is also improving but the information is still not used well enough to plan for different levels of attainment in lessons.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

51. Although this is satisfactory overall, there is good use by teachers of signing and symbols to aid communication for those who need it. Staff use songs and rhyme well to reinforce the meaning of words in many subjects. In all lessons, teachers encourage the development of speaking and listening skills very well. However, for more able pupils, although teachers identify key vocabulary in their planning in all subjects, little reference is made to this in lessons. This is especially so with older pupils, where teachers do not pay enough attention to the teaching of subject specific vocabulary. Writing is developed in different subjects through good encouragement of mark making for pupils with more complex difficulties and the use of writing frames for higher attaining pupils.

French

52. The school's work in French was only sampled during the inspection. It is not, therefore, possible to form judgements about provision or teaching and learning. However, two lessons were observed and planning was scrutinised. A discussion was held with the subject co-ordinator who has been responsible for making sure that this school year French is back on the timetable for all pupils in Years 7 to 9.

53. In the lessons seen, teaching was satisfactory for a group of older pupils with complex needs and good for a group of younger more able pupils. Pupils in both lessons were enthusiastic because activities were practical, kept them interested and staff were using the French language as much as possible. The younger pupils recalled their previous learning well and were keen to add to their vocabulary, showing high levels of concentration. They had enough confidence to practice their spoken French in front of the class. There has been a good start to planning with a long term scheme of work based on the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) guidance and which is carefully adapted to meet the varied needs of pupils. Although the subject has only recently been developed and it is still early days, good progress has been made in making sure pupils have a suitable programme of French activities, including a French day.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is confident teaching of mathematics and this ensures pupils and students are keen to learn and achieve well at all stages.
- Although assessment is not used as well as it could be to support learning, lessons are well organised and structured so that all pupils make good progress.
- Very good leadership has resulted in a great deal of successful subject development.
- There are limited opportunities for using ICT to support learning in mathematics lessons.

Commentary

54. There has been very good improvement since the time of the last inspection when mathematics was a key issue. Pupils and students now achieve well due to the good teaching and well planned learning activities that provide challenges appropriate to their abilities.

55. Most staff use a practical approach to mathematics which includes combining working in groups and as a whole class. This reinforces learning well, as pupils are keen to participate. In Years 1 to 6, more able pupils develop their understanding of number, shape, measurement and money. They use a range of denomination of coins to purchase items from a classroom shop. By the end of Year 6 they can add two digit numbers up to 100 and count in sequences of 2, 3, 5 and 10. Less able pupils experience number through number rhymes and songs and explore shapes and weights through touch and feel. By the end of Year 6, pupils experience weights and measures through practical tasks such as pouring fluids into different size containers.

56. Good planning means that as pupils get older work builds carefully on what has been learnt before and this gives them the confidence to try new work. For example, pupils in Years 7 to 11 progress effectively in their knowledge of number operations. Higher attaining pupils become familiar with presenting information in different ways using block graphs and pictograms. They identify equivalent fractions and calculate the perimeters of regular shapes. Pupils use a variety of metric units to measure distance, weight and capacity and they solve addition, subtraction, multiplication and division problems using whole numbers. Higher attaining pupils achieve well in entry-level. For example, in 2004, eight Year 11 pupils gained entry-level qualifications at levels two and three. Lower attaining pupils recognise some single figure numbers and can count up to seven using counters. Some pupils are able to name and sign colours. They work with and explore two and three dimensional shapes and are encouraged to feel them and use a communication switch to name them. Post-16 students' work is accredited through the NSP and ALL. They continue to develop their knowledge of number and aspects of mathematics in real life. For example, they use a TV guide to develop their understanding of the different parts of the day, such as when they go to bed. Pupils and students work productively and relationships between them and adults are very good.

57. Staff have good subject knowledge, prepare lessons effectively and good resources are available to support pupils' and students' learning. This is due to effective long term planning and careful support from the co-ordinator. Teaching assistants are successfully involved in providing very effective support for pupils' and students' learning because teachers make clear what needs to be done. However, the opportunities for using ICT to aid learning, such as individual number programs to reinforce and extend learning, are limited and opportunities for reinforcing key mathematical vocabulary are sometimes missed. The assessment of pupils' work has improved. Their progress is carefully assessed, although this information is not always used to plan work for individual needs. For example, sometimes learning objectives for pupils and students are not specific enough and opportunities for learning are sometimes not adequately extended.

58. The improvement in the provision results from the highly effective leadership of the subject co-ordinator who is fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the subject. There is a clear vision for its development and the co-ordinator has worked actively to improve the quality of

teaching and learning and has supported colleagues well through lesson observation, advice and training.

Mathematics across the curriculum

59. Overall this is satisfactory. For example, in a French lesson, pupils matched numbers and counted up to ten and said their age in French. In design technology lessons pupils practice measuring and weighing ingredients, while in ICT pupils work with spreadsheets and graphs. Although there are some good examples of the development of numeracy in other subjects, these are not always systematically planned for and opportunities to reinforce numeracy particularly are sometimes lost.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' response is good in science and achievement is particularly good by Year 11.
- Teachers work well with teaching assistants, plan effectively and work hard to teach lessons in an interesting and practical way.
- There is a lack of suitable accommodation for teaching the whole range of science.

Commentary

60. The school has made good progress in the teaching of science since the last inspection. The present syllabus for Years 10 and 11 provides a good range of learning in the three key areas of living things, materials and their properties, and physical processes. This has ensured Year 11 pupils are able to plan ahead and carry out experiments based on their predictions about what will happen. As a result, pupils work towards entry-level, and in 2004 six pupils achieved levels one and two.

61. Pupils in Years 1 to 3 learn about science through actively participating in practical experiences that help to reinforce their everyday learning about life skills. In this way they build up knowledge about the properties of the materials about them, and how they can change them through play activities involving exploration. In Year 6, pupils cover a wide range of topics during their investigations, but also achieve well through building on what they have learnt previously, for example, how colour relates to light and switches, and electricity. By Year 9, pupils, while learning about living things, are investigating why creatures adapt to their environments. They show pleasure and interest in the discussions around a topic and all are helped to participate by means of good deployment of teaching assistants during a lesson. Post-16 students with complex needs build effectively on their science understanding through multi-sensory work using, for example, observation, touch and smell when investigating what happens to fruit and vegetables left in water for a week.

62. The quality of teaching is good overall and this ensures good achievement. Teachers have effective subject knowledge and their planning and recording is carefully carried out. Lessons are taught in a stimulating and lively way, with particularly good use of questions and answers aimed at monitoring and extending learning. Materials are generally well prepared, and safety issues always addressed. Where necessary, the teacher reminds pupils about them as they work. However, in some lessons, worksheets are more suited to the mid range of attainment, and need further adaptation to meet all individual learning needs. Relationships are warm and positive, promoting a confident response from pupils, who enjoy their science lessons across all year groups in the school. Good support and organisation by teachers and teaching assistants ensures that all pupils, including those with severe physical disabilities, can experience the same learning opportunities as others. Intervention is careful, and staff check with pupils before making a record or judgement

about what they are doing so that understanding is promoted and pupils make their own decisions about an experiment or investigation.

63. Leadership is good. The newly appointed co-ordinator is developing plans and policies in a systematic way, currently managing provision up to Year 9, and is helped in this by close liaison with local authority advisory services. Management is satisfactory under the joint arrangement with the science teacher for Years 10 and 11, until the whole provision is brought under one co-ordinator for the school. Assessment is being refined still further for measuring progress for all pupils in the school so that work can be better planned for different levels of attainment in lessons. Inconsistent use is made of ICT resources and accommodation is unsatisfactory in that there is no designated specialist accommodation for the school. This is a particular problem for older, more able, pupils as they can do few experiments with heat. However, links are being forged with local schools with a view to sharing accommodation and resources where possible and, in the mean time, staff do their best to overcome this.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good leadership and management of the subject have facilitated very good improvement since the last inspection.
- Access to the curriculum for all pupils with additional needs is very well supported.
- Staff development is a priority and has led to more confident, well organised teaching and better achievement.
- The use of ICT within subject areas is inconsistent.
- Assessment is not used precisely enough to respond to individual needs.

Commentary

64. Improving the provision for ICT was a key issue at the time of the last inspection. The subject leader has worked very hard to redress this shortfall, not only in the subject itself but also by providing high quality training and support to colleagues. A thorough audit of staff needs and expertise has been conducted in order to prioritise, and in-house training has been developed from this. Subject development planning and programmes of work are now good and overall improved resources and accommodation have enhanced provision for the subject. This has resulted in very good improvement in the subject. The standards achieved are higher, teaching and learning are better and the curriculum now meets statutory requirements. The employment of a part time ICT technician and 'access' co-ordinator, has been a boost for the subject.

65. Achievement of pupils and students in ICT is good throughout the school. They are gaining in confidence with the technology and using it effectively, most notably in ICT lessons. As a result their competence is good in relation to their capabilities. For instance, 10 of the current Year 11 pupils are now working towards entry-level qualifications. Pupils with complex needs work on the EQUALS curriculum, whilst students in the Post-16 group work towards ALL and NSP accreditation. Pupils and students with additional and complex needs are assessed by a specialist co-ordinator and given every opportunity to access all subjects using a wide range of switches and other devices. This supports their learning well.

66. In ICT lessons, teaching is good because teachers have a good range of skills. They provide their pupils with a variety of activities, supported by appropriate resources, which build systematically on prior learning. Lessons are characterised by very good relationships and pupils' very positive attitudes and behaviour. Teachers are well prepared and organised and, therefore, time is used well in lessons. All of these features were evident in a lesson that enabled a group of Year 9 pupils to achieve well when developing a multi-media presentation for teenagers coming to the school. They began to design the show choosing appropriate images and text for this specific

audience. Pupils worked in pairs, co-operating very well together and celebrating each other's success. Support was readily at hand for less able pupils, but a good balance was maintained between adults' help and expectations of pupils doing things for themselves.

67. Leadership in this subject has been impressive. The subject co-ordinator has clear vision and enthusiasm for ICT, supporting her colleagues through a period of rapid development by effective training. The co-ordinator recognises that assessment needs to be improved to provide up-to-date information that will enable teachers to plan for pupils to move on even further and reinforce gains across other subject areas.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

68. Overall, the application and use of ICT across the curriculum, although broadly satisfactory, is a weaker element. Whilst there is clear evidence around the school in displays that aspects of ICT are used in other curriculum areas to support learning, the range of applications is limited. Although the school has made good progress in developing pupils' skills in ICT lessons, the use of ICT to support learning across the curriculum is often inconsistent.

HUMANITIES

69. **Geography** is taught to all pupils up to Year 9 and then as part of humanities for pupils in Years 10 and 11. It was not a focus of the inspection and so no judgements can be made about provision. However, pupils' work was sampled and two lessons observed. Work is based appropriately on the QCA guidance with modifications and staff try to make activities as practical as possible. As a result, pupils gradually develop their awareness of their own environment through local visits to places such as shops, garden centres, the river and farms. As they move through the school, their focus changes to that of gaining knowledge and understanding of more global issues, for example by visiting a local replica of a rainforest environment. In Year 9, pupils experience a variety of artefacts from India and make Indian wood block prints. Higher attaining pupils develop an awareness of life in other countries. Some can explain why people in parts of France move from the countryside into towns. Older pupils are achieving well in their entry- level humanities course. This is because very good teaching enables them to develop their enquiry skills while, for example, questioning people about their use of a local shopping centre and analysing their views. As a result, they can explain how different people view the local environment.

70. No **history** lessons were observed so there is insufficient evidence to make judgement on provision. However, some pupils' work was sampled and work is appropriately based on the QCA guidance. History is taught up to Year 9 and then as part of humanities. Younger pupils complete practical work on homes and *When granny was a child* as well as how Victorians lived. Older pupils in Years 7 upward develop a basic knowledge of important historical events such as the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. Teachers make these more meaningful and enjoyable for pupils by helping them to build models such as the Bastille castle to represent the start of the French Revolution and pupils visit the local museum to complete research.

Religious Education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching takes account of all needs so pupils and students achieve well and enjoy lessons.
- Effective monitoring has helped to identify priorities and improve the subject.
- Lessons are carefully planned to be practical and promote interest in pupils.

Commentary

71. Teaching is good overall and has become more effective over recent years. This is because shared knowledge about using a sensory approach to learning has helped to successfully develop programmes for even the most complex of needs. As a result, teaching has become more focussed, aiding pupils' learning about fairly abstract notions in ways that are meaningful to their lives. For example, pupils in Years 2 to 5 were helped, by use of artefacts they could touch and feel, to think about Buddha as a real person who gave up many things in his life. In this way, the pupils were able to use their own experiences to think more clearly about a figure from the distant past and about examples of what it is like to give up something.

72. Lessons are lively, and in the best instances, pupils were engrossed in the atmosphere built up by the teacher. One very good example of this was where the teacher made extremely appropriate use of senses such as touch, smell, hearing and sight, to reinforce learning and understanding about elements of Christian worship, with a Year 5 and 6 class. Pupils showed clear enjoyment of the way the teacher skilfully paced the lesson using incense, candles, music and song, and musical instruments as a framework for a story about everyday church services. Overall, pupils are able to respond appropriately to questions, demonstrating their learning and achievement in the subject. The workbooks of pupils are neat and well presented at Year 6 and, by Year 9, older pupils' work shows a good range of examples demonstrating their awareness of Easter and its meaning for Christianity, with good writing skills as well as drawing and collage.

73. Leadership and management are good. The co-ordinator has monitored teaching recently, and carried out a full audit which has enabled her to identify priorities. For example, a recent priority has been to concentrate on helping teachers to adapt the locally agreed syllabus for pupils with particular additional needs, including profound and multiple learning difficulties. Other priorities are to further extend the application of the subject to real-life examples and increase the build up and use of resources. This careful attention to detail has meant that there has been a good improvement across the school, since the last inspection.

74. Pupils make good use of the locality to learn more about different religious faiths, and all pupils are able to go out to visit places of worship, most of which are highly accessible. The co-ordinator liaises with the local adviser and is currently discussing the possibility of networking between schools to further extend the learning opportunities for pupils within the school.

TECHNOLOGY

75. No judgement on provision in **design and technology** was made because this was not part of the main foci of the inspection. Examination of curriculum documents, pupils' records and displays, together with the two lessons observed, show that pupils have opportunities to experience different aspects of this subject. They are encouraged to use a variety of materials, to use tools safely and to make choices. They are helped to plan and to evaluate at appropriate levels. Many make items such as simple cars and games for younger pupils and there are a range of projects for older pupils including making cases for jewellery and periscopes. In food technology pupils successfully learn about food preparation and healthy eating. The curriculum is well developed with pupils taking entry-level qualifications in Year 11, but assessment systems require some improvement.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

76. No judgement on provision in **art and design** was made because the subject was only sampled during the inspection. However, two lessons were seen, one with a Year 2 and 3 class, and one with a Year 10 class, and both offered substantial evidence of good or very good teaching. Planning to support learning was good, and varied to accommodate the needs of different pupils. The younger pupils were learning about different materials and media, and using these to produce potato skin prints on T-shirts. The additional support in the lesson enabled pupils to succeed in a lively and productive session where all were fully occupied and enjoying themselves. Although

tasks were matched to needs, these were not sufficiently developed to enable targeted planning for assessment.

77. The Year 10 pupils were benefiting from very good planning for maximum use of time to promote their knowledge and understanding of the skills involved in using digital photography to produce grids to copy images for adaptation or painting. One group carefully took photographs whilst a second group analysed their previously taken images on the computer using Power Point. The pupils showed confidence in their use of the computer and the teacher acted as facilitator rather than instructor, building their skills further. The pupils took part in a very good discussion and analysis of their pictures, selecting their own choices, or editing them until they were satisfied with what they wanted for the next stage of the work, which was to grid the pictures for transfer to a different size. There was also very good evidence of teamwork and increased opportunity to help each other to make choices and decisions. There are some good examples of art around the school in a variety of media, although these could have been extended further as far as range and impact were concerned.

78. **Music** was sampled and as a result no judgement on provision was made. Pupils in Years 1 to 11 have one music lesson each week, during which they listen to a range of music, develop their skills on keyboards and play or experience percussion instruments. In one lesson, pupils from Years 5 and 6 enjoyed listening to extracts from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* and linking them with the story told by teacher. They were able to recognise the sounds of several instruments in the orchestra, such as harp and maracas. However, the lack of ICT resources means that pupils have few opportunities to record, alter and combine sounds. Many Post-16 students can sing expressively in tune, individually and in unison. Their performance of extracts from the musical *Cats* entranced the audience.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good subject knowledge supports pupils' learning very well.
- Physical education makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development.
- Pupils make good progress and their attitudes to the subject are very good.
- The physical education accommodation limits the range of activities that can be taught effectively.

Commentary

79. The provision for physical education has improved well since the last inspection as a result of the good leadership and management provided by the subject co-ordinator. Pupils achieve well, despite the accommodation difficulties because the quality of teaching and learning is very good and they have positive attitudes towards the subject.

80. The youngest pupils with the most complex needs make good progress in developing water confidence during well planned sessions in the school's swimming pool. Pupils demonstrate their enjoyment and show their trust in the adult supporting them. Pupils in Years 7 to 11 understand the importance of warming up before exercise. They demonstrate their improving jumping techniques in preparation for the school sports day. They take part in, and evaluate, their performance in a range of activities such as boccia, kurling and goalball in which all pupils can participate whatever their difficulty. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve well in their work towards the entry-level qualifications in physical education while Post -16 students complete work on leisure as part of ALL and NSP accreditation.

81. Lessons are well planned, consisting of carefully structured activities which provide pupils with the opportunity to improve their skills and understanding. Teacher's instructions to pupils are

clear and they give them good advice about how to improve their standards. The most effective lessons end with the teacher talking to each pupil in turn about how well they have done in terms of their behaviour and performance and each pupil is given one point to help them improve further.

82. Physical education makes a significant contribution to the personal and social development of the pupils. They are encouraged to support each other, turn take, begin to understand fair play and celebrate each other's achievements in lessons. Pupils can participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities and there are many opportunities for pupils to take part in competitive sports events against other schools. However, some aspects of the physical education accommodation, such as the small hall, limit the range of activities that can be taught effectively and opportunities to learn some skills are lost.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a well planned and wide ranging programme of PSHE for all pupils and Post-16 students.
- PSHE is successfully supported by a range of other activities outside lessons.
- Citizenship effectively supports personal development.

Commentary

83. Overall achievement and teaching are good in PSHE as they were at the last inspection. However, improvement since the last inspection is good because there is a wider range of activities available for pupils and students and effective links with citizenship. Work is now carefully planned to meet the needs of pupils and students who have more complex needs both in class and around school. For example, there are very effective feeding programmes for those who need them and a variety of lunchtime clubs which give pupils the chance to work co-operatively with those of different ages. The beginning and end of days are carefully managed so that pupils and students greet each other, turn take and reflect well on pertinent issues that successfully support personal and social development. Very well organised visits, a range of visitors and carefully focused behaviour and social targets help equip pupils and students so they understand what is expected in the way of relations with others while out and about. Personal and social skills are well supported by a range of special events and learning activities such as One World Week, learning through action, for example, 'Baby Sam' and assemblies on issues such as UNICEF and World Aids Day.

84. Work in PSHE in the classrooms is organised so that it is matched to pupils' and students' needs. Teaching assistants are very effectively used to support social and personal skills on an individual basis. For younger pupils work progresses through, for example, "myself and people in my community" to "personal safety". Tasks set often help to build up their confidence to discuss or communicate their own thoughts. For example, in one well taught lesson, a group of Year 4 pupils were confidently identifying dangerous situations and constructively stating what they should do. Relationships, health, healthy life styles and friendship are issues for older pupils. In one very well taught Year 11 lesson on stress, pupils very quickly understood that different things affect people in different ways. There is a strong emphasis on sex and relationships which is taught confidently. This is because all staff have very good relationships with pupils so they behave in a very mature manner which maximises learning as, for example, in a well taught lesson on sexually transmitted diseases with a Year 10 group. As a result, at the end of Year 11 last year, six pupils gained entry-level accreditation at the highest level in PSHE.

85. For students at Post -16, PSHE and citizenship play a very important part of both their ALL and NSP accreditation and is targeted to their needs. For example, during one lesson, students gave a presentation on people who are important to them, taking turns and listening well. They begin to acquire independence skills while out in the community, at college and on work experience.

They learn to follow simple instructions carefully, for example, when making hot drinks and simple snacks. Clear routines and very good management meant all were involved and listened carefully.

86. Citizenship is considered an important aspect of preparing pupils and students for life after school with the emphasis being on respect for others, diversity and working as a community. Work is carefully planned so that pupils start with local issues and progress to global ones and is effectively matched to age and needs. In Years 1 to 6, it is carefully linked to PSHE and pupils learn how to make informed choices, how their local community works and do what is right. Older pupils learn about conflict resolution, rights and responsibilities, diversity and decision making. Pupils and students who work hard can gain a citizenship award and enjoy attending a citizenship breakfast with the headteacher. The recently set up school council is also effective in supporting understanding of citizenship.

87. Leadership and management of PSHE are good. However, at present, there is some splitting of responsibility for PSHE between primary and secondary staff. This has led to an occasional lack of liaison, although the subject is monitored carefully so that work follows on and builds on previous learning. The school has the Healthy Schools bronze award and is now working towards a silver. Leadership and management of citizenship are good with some very good features because the co-ordinator is very knowledgeable, monitors well and has a very good overview along with good development priorities. Assessment is developing for both PSHE and citizenship but is not always used effectively to set learning objectives.

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	3
Pupils' achievement	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (Ethos)	2
Attendance	4
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
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	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	4
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	3

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

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