

# INSPECTION REPORT

**BIRKBECK SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY ARTS  
COLLEGE**

Louth

LEA area: Lincolnshire

Unique reference number: 120653

Headteacher: Mr G P Loveridge

Lead inspector: Mrs J Tracey

Dates of inspection: 4 – 6 October 2004

Inspection number: 269604

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Modern (non-selective)  
School category: Community  
Age range of pupils: 11 – 16  
Gender of pupils: Mixed  
Number on roll: 291

School address: Keeling Street  
North Somercotes  
Louth  
Lincolnshire  
Postcode: LN11 7PN

Telephone number: 01507 358352  
Fax number: 01507 358404

Appropriate authority: Governing body  
Name of chair of governors: Mr J Stevens

Date of previous inspection: 1 June 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Birkbeck is a modern, non-selective school, situated in a rural setting near the Lincolnshire coast. The school gained Specialist Arts College status in September 2003. It is much smaller than other secondary schools with about 300 students on roll. Numbers are rising. Students come from a wide catchment area. The school provides transport because of its geographically isolated position. The proportion of students joining or leaving the school at other than the usual times is about average. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The accommodation is clean, bright and cheerful. A new art block is currently being constructed. The facilities for physical education are cramped for the range of sporting activities on offer. A Lifelong Learning Centre for adults is an integral part of the school. Attainment on entry to Year 7 is below average because a proportion of the age group is selected for grammar school education at eleven year of age. The school received a School Achievement Award in 2002 for raising students' attainment over time. The proportion of students with special educational needs is above the national average. The proportion with statements of need is well above the national average. The majority of these have moderate learning difficulties. Others have social, emotional, behavioural or physical disabilities. Almost all students are of white ethnic origin. The proportion for whom English is not the first language is low.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

| Members of the inspection team |                    |                | Subject responsibilities  |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|---|
| 20270                          | Mrs J Tracey       | Lead inspector |   |
| 13762                          | Mr N Shelley       | Lay inspector  |   |
| 30996                          | Mrs A Higginbotham | Team inspector | Mathematics   |
| 30941                          | Mr K Brammer       | Team inspector | English<br>English as an additional language                          |
| 21866                          | Dr D Tracey        | Team inspector | Science   |
| 27803                          | Mr J Clark         | Team inspector | Information and communication technology<br>Special educational needs |
| 23418                          | Mr R Yates         | Team inspector | Art and design  |
| 32122                          | Mrs J Straw        | Team inspector | Citizenship<br>Religious education<br>Work-related learning           |
| 23709                          | Mrs A Powell       | Team inspector | Modern languages  |
| 32225                          | Miss C Hough       | Team inspector | Physical education  |

The inspection contractor was:

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

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**Birkbeck is a good school** that provides well for students' well-being and personal development. Students achieve well from their starting point in Year 7 because they respond very positively to the good teaching. The school operates within a selective system whereby a significant proportion of the age group attend the local grammar school at age 11. Overall, standards are below average for students' age in Years 9 and 11. The school is well led and managed. It provides good value for money. Inadequate indoor facilities for physical education are a barrier to students' further physical development.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- the outstanding leadership of the headteacher in promoting the school and in motivating students and staff to strive for the highest levels of achievement
- the very good provision throughout the school for English and information and communication technology (ICT), and for art and design in Years 10 and 11
- students do not wholly fulfil their potential in science, particularly in Years 7-9; test results are not as good as those in English and mathematics
- the high level of care extended to every student and the good range of opportunities provided for students to interact with other schools and the local community
- governors do not monitor and evaluate the school's work thoroughly enough ; they are too reliant on information provided for them by the school
- the good provision for work-related learning (WRL)
- subject leaders do not monitor teaching regularly enough within their departments; this is a priority for further development in the school improvement plan
- information from assessment procedures is not used consistently across all subjects to provide students with a clear overview of their progress
- provision for religious education is unsatisfactory.

The school has made good improvement since the previous inspection in 1998 although it still does not comply with the requirement for religious education in every year group. The most significant improvements are: the quality of teaching and learning, leading to better results in external examinations; the innovative blend of traditional and vocational courses in Years 10 and 11; the stimulating environment that draws attention to students' achievements and the better provision for ICT and art and design.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

| Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with: | all schools |      |      | Similar schools |
|---|-------------|------|------|-----------------|
|   | 2001        | 2002 | 2003 | 2003            |
|   | D           | D    | C    | A               |

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

**Students achieve well throughout the school** taking into account the much higher proportion of lower-attaining students than in schools taking the full range of abilities. This is reflected in students' well above average performance at GCSE in 2003 compared with schools with similar prior attainment in Year 9. GCSE results were broadly average in 2003. Students' results at five or more A\*-C improved further in 2004. They were above the national average. Overall standards are below average for students' age in Years 9 and 11. Standards

in art and design and ICT are well above average in Year 11. Students with special educational needs achieve well because teaching builds up their learning methodically, step-by-step. Throughout the school, students achieve better in English and mathematics than in science, particularly in Years 7-9. The most able students in these year groups are not working at their full potential in science. Students achieve very well throughout the school in English and ICT. **Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is very good.** It is marked by their very good attitudes and behaviour. The very good relationships in the school helped to provide support and comfort for students and adults in the aftermath of the tragedy last year. There was a substantial improvement in attendance last year, from below average in previous years.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education provided by the school is good.** The curriculum is well-devised to cater for students' different needs and interests but the school is not meeting the requirement to provide for religious education. The school is committed to the development of vocational courses and WRL; students are responding well to the extensive opportunities provided in Years 10 and 11. A high proportion of students participate in the good range of extra-curricular activities although there are few of these in music and drama. Provision for students with special educational needs is good, as is indicated by their success in external tests and examinations. **Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good.** Teaching is very good throughout the school in English, French and ICT. It is characterised by students' active involvement in their own learning and a thirst for success. Teaching is satisfactory rather than good in science because expectations are not high enough and students lack the incentive to achieve as well as they could. Students' learning, based on gains in knowledge and transfer of skills from one subject to another, indicates that most know what is expected of them and seek to achieve their targets. The teaching of basic literacy skills is very well focused in English lessons. The school takes very good care of its students. Their personal development is given high priority.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are good.** The leadership of the headteacher and leadership team is good. It is successful in identifying where improvement is needed and raising aspirations. Management is good; the school runs smoothly on a daily basis. Teachers and students are challenged, which has a direct bearing on the improving standards. Another factor is the high focus on teaching methods in professional training sessions. Governance is satisfactory but governors are too dependent on information passed on to them by the school.

## **PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

Comments at the parents' meeting and responses to the questionnaire indicated parents' satisfaction with the quality of education provided by the school and the individual attention given to their children. Most think that all students are treated fairly. A few expressed concerns about behaviour. Discussions with students indicated that they are proud of the school. They are pleased with the range of courses on offer and with the opportunities provided to take responsibility in school and within the community. Their main concern is the insufficient indoor facilities for physical education.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- improve standards in science, especially in Years 7-9
  - use information from assessment procedures more consistently across all subjects to provide students with a clear overview of their progress
  - involve all subject leaders in the monitoring of teaching and learning
- and
- governors need to monitor and evaluate the school's work more rigorously in order to challenge it more effectively.

To meet statutory requirements the school should:

- provide for religious education in Year 8-11.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS**

#### **Standards achieved in subjects and courses**

Standards of work are below average for students' age in Years 9 and 11 but students achieve well from their starting point on entry in Year 7. Students of all abilities and backgrounds, including those with special educational needs, achieve equally well.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve very well throughout the school in English and ICT because teachers' planning is very clearly focused on the progressive development of skills, year-on-year.
- Students achieve very well in art and design in Years 10 and 11 because they work on individualised learning programmes.
- Although students achieve satisfactorily overall in science, there is the potential to do better, especially in Years 7-9.
- Students with special educational needs achieve well because their work is well co-ordinated by teachers and teaching assistants.

#### **Commentary**

1. Students' overall attainment on entry is below average for their age because the local education authority operates a selective system whereby a significant proportion of the age group is selected for the local grammar school at age 11. In some year groups, for example the current Year 11, attainment on entry was well below average.

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

| Standards in: | School results | National results |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| English       | 31.4 (34.9)    | 33.4 (33.3)      |
| Mathematics   | 33.0 (33.8)    | 35.4 (34.7)      |
| Science       | 32.0 (33.3)    | 33.6 (33.3)      |

*There were 54 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

2. Students' results in national tests taken in Year 9 in 2003 were below the national average in English, mathematics and science. Compared with schools with similar prior attainment in Year 6, the results were above average in English and well above average in mathematics and science. This year group achieved well overall taking into account their well below average attainment on entry in Year 7. The trend in the school's average point score over the past few years is below the national trend, mainly because the results dipped in 2003. In 2004, results rose in English and mathematics. In mathematics, there was a substantial improvement in the proportion exceeding the level expected for their age. Results declined in science. Significant factors in the improved results in English and mathematics were the rigorous implementation of national strategies, the application of a wide range of teaching methods that suited students' individual styles of learning, and good use of information from assessment procedures. In science, the rate of progress in each of these aspects was much slower. In the current Year 9, standards are above average in ICT. They are average in English, art, French and physical

education and below average in the other subjects inspected in detail - mathematics, science and citizenship. No judgement is made about standards in religious education because the school has only just introduced it into the curriculum (September 2004 - for Year 7 only at the present time). Taking into account students' attainment on entry, they achieve very well in English, ICT and French. Achievement is good in mathematics and physical education. It is satisfactory in science.

3. The school consolidates the development of students' literacy and numerical skills in Years 7-9 but basic literacy skills are still below average for students' age in Year 9. By Year 11, literacy and numerical skills are average; ICT skills are above average.

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

|   | School results | National results |
|---|----------------|------------------|
| Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades  | 46 (45)        | 52 (50)          |
| Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades  | 93 (89)        | 91 (91)          |
| Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades  | 93 (96)        | 96 (96)          |
| Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects) | 32.3 (32.0)    | 34.7 (34.8)      |

*There were 46 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

4. The trend in students' average point score at GCSE over recent years is similar to that found nationally. In 2003, students' GCSE results were close to the national average at five or more A\*-C grades; they were above the national average at five or more A\*-G grades. Results improved further in 2004. They were the best GCSE results ever achieved by the school. The proportion of students gaining five or more A\*-C grades rose by 11 per cent, from 46% to 57%, and there was a significant number of the higher grades A\*-B. The results met the target set by the governors. The school is pleased with these results, especially so considering that they were achieved against a background of trauma and emotional upheaval. In the current Year 11, standards are well above average for students' age in art and design and ICT. They are average in English and child development and below average in other subjects. Students achieve very well in English, ICT and art and design. They achieve well in mathematics, French and citizenship. Achievement over time in the main physical education lessons in Year 10 is unsatisfactory because students do not have a sound background of knowledge and skills from earlier years.
5. Students with special educational needs achieve well. Most gain success commensurate with their ability by the time they leave the school. They achieve creditable grades in a range of subjects in GCSE, GNVQ and other external examinations. The small number of students for whom English is not the first language achieve equally well. They are well integrated into all aspects of the school's work and activities.
6. Girls' performance in tests and external examinations is marginally better than that of boys in comparison with the difference found nationally. The gap is lessening in subjects where teachers choose materials and resources that are specifically relevant to boys' experience and interests.

**Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

Students' attitudes, values, behaviour and personal development are very good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Attendance improved significantly in 2003/04, from below the national median in 2002/03.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students have a very strong sense of responsibility towards each other and the school.
- Students of all ages take advantage of opportunities to work in and with the community, with good effect.
- Students are keen to succeed and respond well to the guidance they receive.

### **Commentary**

7. Students say that they are proud of their school. They are very happy with all aspects of their education, are keen to do well and value very much the teaching and support they receive. The rates of participation in the various activities and clubs are high. Attendance was below the median for secondary schools in 2002/03. It improved significantly in 2003/04, which is remarkable under the circumstances. The school's support strategies and input from the education welfare and support services, including the psychology service, indicate that the way students were treated and comforted at a time of emotional turmoil for the school contributed to the improvement in attendance. Punctuality to school and to lessons is good.
8. Students' behaviour in and out of lessons is very good overall. Students are polite and considerate. The higher than average number of exclusions last year was due to exceptional circumstances and relatively few students were involved. The strategies introduced via the new behaviour policy are effective in promoting respect and good conduct.
9. Relationships between students and between students and staff are very good, and in some ways exceptional. Mutual respect and understanding for each other's needs and feelings are unusually well developed. Most students get on very well together and are very tolerant. Parents, students, staff and school records confirm that incidents of alleged bullying are few and that they are effectively dealt with.
10. The attitudes of students with special educational needs are good. They generally show a willingness to learn, can sustain concentration throughout the whole one-hour lesson and rarely give less than their best. They co-operate with their teachers, mix well with other students and are fully integrated into the daily life of the school.
11. Students relish opportunities for responsibility. The School Council is thriving. It is effective in developing students' understanding of democratic processes and acceptance of the outcomes. On a more individual basis, older students make good use of the training they have received to provide a 'listening ear' for younger students. Students enjoy acting as hosts to visitors and mixing with the community, for example, through regular hospitality to senior citizens and help with football coaching at a primary school.

#### ***Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (92.6%)***

|                    |
|--------------------|
| Authorised absence |
|--------------------|

|                      |
|----------------------|
| Unauthorised absence |
|----------------------|

|               |               |
|---------------|---------------|
| School data   | 6.8           |
| National data | Not available |

|               |               |
|---------------|---------------|
| School data   | 0.6           |
| National data | Not available |

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 |
|---|
| White – British                             |
| White – any other White background          |
| Mixed – White and Black Caribbean           |
| Mixed – White and Asian                     |
| Asian or Asian British – Indian             |

| No of pupils on roll |
|----------------------|
| 284                  |
| 3                    |
| 2                    |
| 1                    |
| 1                    |

| Number of fixed period exclusions | Number of permanent exclusions |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 42                                | 0                              |
| 0                                 | 0                              |
| 4                                 | 0                              |
| 0                                 | 0                              |
| 0                                 | 0                              |

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

12. Provision for students' spiritual and self-awareness is very good. It has developed well, especially over the past year. The whole staff, together with the local clergy, promote amongst students a shared concern and compassion for others and their beliefs. Hence, mutual care and support are very strong. This was demonstrated in the number of students who wanted to write letters to the survivors of the recent school siege in Russia. The school provides for a daily act of collective worship in the spirit of statutory requirements.
13. The promotion of students' moral and social values is very good. It is fundamental to the ethos of the school. Students know right from wrong and the importance of tolerance, respect, trust and accountability. Students work very well together and are fine ambassadors for the school, both in the local community and in their visits further afield. Students' support for their peers and people locally, and the many regular fund-raising events, are part of everyday life. They demonstrate students' willingness to give up their time freely to help others of all ages.
14. The school is active in encouraging students' cultural development, which is good. It pervades the work of all departments, and is experienced through a good programme of extra-curricular activities, especially those associated with sport and art. Students learn about the traditions and cultures of other nations and races but there are few opportunities for students to gain regular first-hand experience of the range and richness of cultural diversity to be found amongst people of different ethnic backgrounds from their own. The school has an effective Racial Equality Policy that is monitored properly.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The school provides a good quality of education that is underpinned by the commitment of staff, their knowledge of each student's potential and a strong awareness and response to national initiatives relating to the continuity of provision in the age range 14 - 19.

### **Teaching and learning**

Teaching and learning are good overall. Assessment procedures are satisfactory but information from them is not used consistently across the school.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good quality of teaching throughout the school in almost all subjects leads to steady progression in students' learning and rising standards.
- Expectations are not high enough in science, particularly for the most able students.
- Good teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants provides lower-ability students with the well-targeted, individual support they need to move them on.
- Some subjects do not make enough use of data from assessment procedures to target underachievement or inform students how to improve their work.

## Commentary

15. The development of teaching and learning was central to teachers' professional training last year. The effect is evident in the improved test and examination results in 2004 and students' good achievement compared with their prior attainment. Their good attitudes and response to the good teaching are significant factors in the rising standards. All the lessons observed during the inspection were at least satisfactory, many were good or better. Common features of the very best lessons were the challenging but realistic expectations and students' active involvement in their own learning. Students knew what knowledge and skills they were expected to acquire and understood how the tasks set would consolidate their learning. In practical subjects, such as art and design and ICT, this was backed up by good one-to-one discussion with the teacher that usefully incorporated recall and review of previous work and consideration of how it could be improved further. Teachers' good subject knowledge frequently activates students' enthusiasm, for example, in French. Teachers use praise well to raise students' confidence and self-esteem. Most teachers are conscious of the need to encourage students to anticipate and take risks. This helps them to learn from their mistakes. In science, where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, there is not enough challenge. Students do not have a clear understanding of how to improve their work and some lack the incentive to achieve as well as they could. Exceptions are in the single science groups in Years 10 and 11 where students have a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and seek to overcome them. Homework in science is too often in the form of projects in the younger age groups. It does not consolidate or complement the work done in class. The school has identified the need to raise the standard of teaching in science to that of other subjects by drawing on the expertise of external advisers to work alongside staff.
16. Students with special educational needs are taught well. They are well managed and little time is wasted getting down to work. Relationships are very supportive; they encourage students to want to learn. Lessons are well planned and make use of a suitable range of teaching methods and resources. The teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is good. It provides valuable and effective support for individual students.
17. The English department and teachers of SEN pupils are driving forward the development of students' basic literacy skills. Other subject teachers often draw students' attention to speech, vocabulary and grammatical points in written work but there is no whole-school approach to the consistent promotion of literacy skills. Students' numerical skills are used satisfactorily by teachers of other subjects in conjunction with teaching methods used in mathematics. Students' confident use of ICT as a 'tool' in their learning is a reflection of the way teachers have incorporated ICT into their teaching methods.

18. The school systematically collects and analyses information from the assessment of students' work. Its use by subject leaders and other teachers to detect and respond to underachievement is inconsistent. This is a priority for further development in the school improvement plan. Some very good practices are already in use, for example in English, which are being used successfully as a model for other subjects. The very good use of assessment in English, a core subject, is a contributory factor to the students' higher standards and better overall achievement in English than in mathematics and science.

### **Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 50 lessons**

| Excellent | Very good | Good     | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Poor   | Very Poor |
|-----------|-----------|----------|--------------|----------------|--------|-----------|
| 1 (2%)    | 15 (30%)  | 22 (44%) | 12 (24%)     | 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.*

19. One outstanding lesson was observed, in French. It was characterised by the very fast pace and tenacity with which the teacher kept the students working towards ever higher goals. Teaching is very good in art and design in Years 10 and 11 and overall in English, French and ICT.

### **The curriculum**

Overall, the curriculum is good but it does not meet statutory requirements for religious education. The wide range of courses in Years 10 and 11 is a strong feature. A good programme of additional activities enhances the taught curriculum and contributes well to students' personal development.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school provides a very good range of vocational and work-related courses in Years 10 and 11 that prepare students well for employment and further education.
- The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sport, but opportunities to engage in musical and other performing arts are more limited.
- The provision for personal, social and moral education (PSME) is very good. It complements students' work in other areas of the curriculum.
- The school is not meeting statutory requirements to provide religious education in Years 8 to 11.
- The lack of a sports hall is hampering further expansion in physical education.

### **Commentary**

20. The curriculum is well planned, closely monitored and regularly reviewed. It meets the needs of students of all abilities and backgrounds except for the provision of religious education, which is unsatisfactory. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is innovative. It is enriched by a very good range of vocational and art courses and the good provision for WRL. All students work towards the Employability Graduation Award, which is promoted and supported by the local education authority. The course is intense. It is directly targeted at understanding practices in the work place and the community. Most importantly, students see its relevance to their personal development. It successfully underpins their growing maturity as young adults, and their independence, as is clearly evident from the individual portfolios submitted for the award. The school is developing

its curriculum and provision in the spirit of challenges outlined in the Key Stage 3 National Strategy 2004-05.

21. Provision in English and ICT throughout the school is very good because teachers have successfully adapted teaching methods to suit students' styles of learning. Provision is also very good in art and design in Years 10 and 11 because teaching is very good and students follow individualised learning programmes.
22. Provision for students with special educational needs is good. They have full access to the National Curriculum and all other activities provided by the school. Good provision is made for the reinforcement of their basic literacy and numerical skills. This accelerates students' progress, enabling them to gain from, and contribute more to, lessons in other subjects. They benefit significantly from using ICT to work through individual learning programmes in English and mathematics because they gain confidence from measuring their own progress, step-by-step.
23. Careers education and guidance is good. It is an integral part of the PSME course in all year groups. Relationships with external services are effective, especially with Connexions, which assists with the organisation of individual and group programmes for all students, including those on the register of special educational needs. The careers library is small but it is well used and is accessible to all students. The school is proactive in making information available about opportunities at 16+. Students value the advice about careers, finding it reliable and helpful.
24. The school provides good opportunities to support learning outside the school day. Additional classes that boost students' confidence and attainment in academic work run alongside a good variety of clubs with wide appeal. The daily provision of sessions in ICT, art and a wide range of sports is very good; the level of student participation is high. Opportunities for involvement in the performing arts are more limited; there is a school choir but very little opportunity for group work with instruments. The good programme of planned visits includes theatres and art galleries, both locally and in London, and regular educational visits abroad to France and Spain. Many opportunities are provided throughout the year for students to become involved in community events and projects.
25. There is a sufficient number of suitably qualified teachers and teaching assistants to provide for the curriculum, except in religious education. The accommodation is satisfactory overall but is only just sufficient for the growing numbers in the school. It is bright, clean and well-maintained, providing a good environment for learning. A new art block is under construction but the cramped and unsuitable accommodation for music is a barrier to learning. Provision for physical education is managed well but the joint use of the hall for sport and other events is a disadvantage because there are times in the year when there is no indoor facility for physical education. Resources for learning are good, particularly in design and technology and ICT, but the library is inadequate as a learning resource and research facility because there are not enough suitable books or computers.

### **Care, guidance and support**

Students are very well cared for. They receive good guidance and support. Students are encouraged to express their views about matters affecting their personal development and progress.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students respond well to the opportunities provided because they understand the school's systems and feel that their opinions are valued.
- Teachers satisfactorily monitor and guide students' progress in individual subjects but channels for informing students about their overall progress are inconsistent.
- Good, and varied, provision is available to help students with special educational or other needs to overcome academic or personal difficulties.

## Commentary

26. Evidence from the inspection and information provided by parents, members of staff and the community, the local education authority and officers of external agencies indicates that the school's care for its students is good. The school has gone to great lengths to seek out and meet the personal and emotional needs of all students in the aftermath of the tragic event last year. Despite bearing their own sense of shock and grief, members of staff have given selflessly of their time and comforting support to the students. The senior management team, with representatives of the local education authority, provided support and protection, for example by arranging back-up from a range of specialist services such as bereavement counsellors and deciding how to manage the attention of the general public and media. The overall experience has had a profound effect on the school and the community. Amongst the students and members of staff, a unique sense of mutual trust, respect and understanding has emerged that is very evident in the quality of relationships and sense of community that prevail in the school.
27. The pastoral support structure has developed further in the past year. A trained 'student support team' of adults, all known to the students, has been established. Hence, there is a quick response to individual student's concerns or worries. Ongoing support from some specialist agencies, such as educational psychology, is very good. The programme for personal, social and moral education includes relevant and helpful matters, such as the management of stress. The school nurse, vicar and health worker are accessible to students on a regular basis. Procedures for health, safety, child protection and children in care are in place. A breakfast club is open early each morning, which provides well for students who live a distance from the school. The weekly bulletin that is circulated to all students is informative. It contributes very well to a sense of community as well as ensuring that everyone knows what is happening and what they can participate in.
28. Procedures for identifying, testing and tracking the progress of students with special educational needs are good. Individual education plans (IEPs) are of very good quality, but they are not used consistently in the classroom to help students achieve their targets. Teachers and teaching assistants are very good role models. Encouragement and praise increase students' self-worth and motivate them to achieve even more. The school identifies students with specific talents and is developing suitable activities to nurture them.
29. Form registration periods are not used consistently at present to help students review their progress across the whole range of subjects. The school is in the process of reviewing and refining its systems. For instance, an annual target setting day, to include students and their parents, has been incorporated into this year's calendar, replacing the traditional parents' evening.

30. Students are very well prepared for transfer from their primary school. 'Taster days', in which older students play hosts, and the induction programme, that includes learning skills sessions, help to ensure a well-informed and smooth start in Year 7. The summer school for prospective students also assists their integration at 11+. Additional support for older students is readily available to assist them in their studies for tests and external examinations. The daily homework club is very popular.
31. Students receive good impartial guidance regarding their subject choices in Years 10 and 11. The involvement of a careers advisory service and employers enables them to make well-informed choices about opportunities at 16+.
32. Students' views are represented very well through the School Council. Students are keen to point to instances where their suggestions have resulted in action.

### **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

The school has a good partnership with parents. Its links with other schools are good and with the community are very good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents express very positive views about the school. Relationships between the school and parents are good.
- The school's involvement with the local community is a strong feature of its work.
- Local employers contribute very well to students' WRL.

### **Commentary**

33. Parents have a high regard for the school and are confident in it. They described to inspectors how very impressed they were with the school's conduct regarding the tragedy that occurred during the previous year and how its outreach had worked to support the whole community. Comments at the parents' meeting and responses to the questionnaire indicated parents' satisfaction with the quality of education and care that is provided. A few parents expressed concerns about behaviour. Inspectors judge that behaviour is very good and that teachers deal promptly and effectively with any inappropriate behaviour in line with the school's disciplinary code.
34. Parents are well informed about their children's progress and the life of the school. Their views are valued and taken into account when decisions about school matters are being considered. For example, in response to recent requests, improved arrangements have been agreed regarding opportunities to discuss students' progress towards their targets. Parents support meetings and school events well, particularly when they involve their own children. The Coursework Evening for parents to learn about the procedures and importance of coursework for GCSE examinations is especially helpful. Many parents make good use of the students' planners to check homework and exchange information with the school. Parents of students with special educational needs are kept well informed about their children's progress. They are fully consulted and involved in termly and annual reviews. Parents are supportive of their children's involvement in school activities, which is particularly important when transport is needed outside the normal school hours because of the school's rural location.

35. Students transfer to the school with relative ease and confidence because of the very effective arrangements with partner primary schools. The school supports these schools well, for example, by sharing resources and engaging in curricular work in art and physical education with some of them. Equally effective arrangements are in place with colleges of further education for students to investigate and plan for the next stage of their careers. The school and local employers work well together to provide work experience for students. Some of the arrangements usefully extend over two years when students choose work-related learning as one of the options in their programme of studies in Years 10 and 11. Students throughout the school benefit from links with the local and wider communities. The recent visit by American students is a typical example. Students and parents considered this to be an excellent cultural experience. Local residents and groups contribute to the life and work of the school, making a valuable contribution to the programme for citizenship. The Lifelong Learning Centre based in the school is a very good example of provision for the community. It is used by adults throughout the school day and beyond.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The overall quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher's leadership and his vision for the strategic development of the school are outstanding. Governance is satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher is innovative and forward-looking. His leadership is motivating and challenging.
- Governors do not monitor and evaluate the school's work thoroughly enough. They are too reliant on information passed on to them by the school.
- The senior management team and staff have gained students' trust and respect through the example they set and the quality of support they provide.
- The monitoring of teaching is inconsistent. It is one of the priorities in the school development plan.

### **Commentary**

36. The headteacher joined the school in 2003. He quickly identified areas for development and set about planning for change in the school's provision. His policy of openness and frank discussion embraced the views of students, staff, parents, governors and the extended community. The murder that occurred in the school in November 2003 overrode much of the action that had been planned. The school did not lose sight of its improvement plans however; effective action was taken to raise standards through the use of a wider range of teaching methods and scrutiny of students' work in each subject to determine how best they could be helped to improve. The headteacher and staff supported students and each other with sympathy and understanding in the aftermath of the tragedy. The school continued to set about its main business, albeit in a subdued manner that reflected the enormity of the effect of the loss of a student.
37. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching, particularly by middle managers is a priority for further development this year. Some good practices are already in use but they could be shared more widely. The headteacher challenges staff and students to account for their actions, which in turn leads to self-criticism and improvement. This is evident in the

regular monitoring, by the school and an external adviser, of the work in science. The senior management team analyses students' performance well, and in detail. Subject leaders are increasingly making more use of this information to influence long-term planning. Staff morale is high. The school is buoyant and positive about crafting its own future in collaboration with other schools and the local community. It considers its smallness to be an attractive feature because students' individual needs are nurtured by staff who know them well. The rising school roll supports the school's confidence in this aspect of provision.

38. The management of the school is good overall. Teachers and other staff take on numerous responsibilities. They give generously of their time with obvious concern for the students' welfare and progress. The full integration of all students is paramount in the school's planning. Provision for students with special educational needs is well managed and positively promoted. Administration procedures and record keeping are satisfactory. Teaching assistants are managed effectively but there is insufficient monitoring of how well students are meeting the targets in their individual education plans on a lesson-by-lesson basis. Links with external agencies are very well managed. The school seeks the highest level of appropriate support for its students.
39. The governing body fulfils its statutory responsibilities except for the provision of religious education. This was a key issue at the time of the previous inspection. Only now, in September 2004, has action been taken. Governors are fully involved in planning the school's strategic direction. They are kept well informed by the headteacher, which enables them to make rational decisions based on sound information. However, because many are recent appointments to the governing body, they lack training in the monitoring and close evaluation of the school's work and students' progress. The governing body works satisfactorily through a committee structure. Recommendations are closely linked to the school development plan and the budget.
40. Day-to-day management of the school is very good. The administrative and maintenance staff make a significant contribution to its smooth running and efficiency. Financial planning is well-focused on students' immediate needs and on forward planning for the school as a whole. Financial control is tight. Careful management has resulted in the reduction of a £35,000 deficit at the time of the headteacher's appointment to £10,000 in the past year. This was achieved alongside good progress in the areas targeted for development. Spending is prudent and well-targeted. It is soundly based on consideration of 'best value'. Its effectiveness is successfully measured by its impact on students' work in the classroom.
41. Parents say that they have confidence in the school and its leadership. Taking into account the funding, standards of work, students' achievement and the good provision overall, the school provides good value for money.

***Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004***

| Income and expenditure (£) |           |
|----------------------------|-----------|
| Total income               | 1,024,440 |
| Total expenditure          | 1,034,502 |
| Expenditure per pupil      | 3,391     |

| Balances (£)                        |         |
|-------------------------------------|---------|
| Balance from previous year          | -35,580 |
| Balance carried forward to the next | -10,062 |

## What is the effectiveness of work-related learning?

Provision in WRL is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- All students in Years 10 and 11 work towards the attainment of the Employability Graduation Award.
- All students in Year 8 take part in 'Take Your Child to Work Day'.
- Good quality work-experience is provided.
- All students take at least one vocational course.

### Commentary

42. Opportunities for students to engage in WRL activities are good. All students in Years 10 and 11 work towards the Employability Graduation Award which involves health and safety, the development of basic communication skills, participation in two weeks work-experience and some form of community service. The WRL activities complement well the work in citizenship. Achievement is good because students gain in confidence from the various aspects of the compulsory course and see it as relevant and useful to their future employability. A small group of students, of mixed ability, chooses a work-related course as an option subject. These students benefit from two years work-experience for one-day each week.
43. All students take at least one vocational course in Years 10 and 11, chosen from a good range of subjects. These are being added to year-on-year to broaden students' opportunities. They lead to vocational GCSE and GNVQ qualifications.
44. The quality of teaching and learning is good with some variations between the different aspects. The range of activities and courses provided is comprehensive. WRL activities are available in Year 8 when all students take part in 'Take Your Child to Work Day', which is followed up by study in the classroom. Careers education is integral to the PSME curriculum in all year groups. Work-experience is well-planned and organised and draws very positive responses from both students and employers. Many students find their own placements and the school offers good support for those who need extra help. Links with employers are thus very effective.
45. Leadership and management of WRL are good. The school was part of the LEA pilot scheme for WRL begun 5 years ago and so is well ahead with procedures for effective delivery of this element of the curriculum. Several key staff are involved in the management of WRL. Together they make an effective team.

# **PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES**

## **SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4**

### **ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

#### **English**

Provision in English is **very good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards in national tests and at GCSE are rising.
- Highly focused teaching is making a significant contribution to students' very good achievement.
- Students with special educational needs receive very good support.
- The library provision is inadequate. It is not being used to support initiatives in literacy or to encourage students to access technology systems for research.

#### **Commentary**

46. In 2003, students' results in national tests taken in Year 9 were below the national average but were above average compared with schools with similar prior attainment in English in Year 6. Results at level 5, the standard expected for students' age, improved further in 2004 (from 60% to 65%). Girls tend to achieve better than boys, as they do nationally. GCSE results at grades A\*-C in English were close to the national average in 2003. They were below the national average in literature. In 2004, students' results in literature rose significantly (from 51% to 62%); the English results were similar to the previous year. The improved results throughout the school are a direct consequence of focus on the use of teaching methods that meet the exact needs of individual students. Standards of work in the current Years 9 and 11 are broadly average for students' age. Students are achieving very well bearing in mind the below average, and sometimes well below average, attainment on entry in Year 7.
47. Students' speaking skills are average. They develop well because of the frequent opportunities to discuss, collaborate and explore ideas in every lesson. Although most students can read aloud competently, some have problems understanding the content because of poor vocabulary and their failure to recognise implicit meanings. In all year groups, creative writing is lively and entertaining, though some critical writing in literature and media tends to be descriptive rather than analytical. By Year 11, the most able students write cogently and accurately: lower ability students have difficulty sustaining argument and their vocabulary, punctuation and spelling are weak.
48. Students of all ethnic backgrounds and abilities achieve equally well. This is as a result of students' very positive response to the very good teaching and their personal desire to succeed. All regularly use computers to improve their writing, research and presentation skills. Opportunities to enrich the learning of the talented students are being developed satisfactorily through a range of additional activities; students with special educational needs receive high quality individual support. Students needing extra help with literacy in Year 7 make rapid progress through the use of specially designed units of work that are used in support lessons. All students make sufficient progress throughout the school to be entered for both English and

English literature at GCSE. Almost all leave the school with grades in both subjects, which is a considerable achievement.

49. Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school. Lessons are very well planned so learning is rewarding and enjoyable. The department has successfully researched students' learning styles and methods for encouraging boys to achieve better. There are choices and challenges and, when necessary, lower-attaining students receive well-designed prompt sheets to help them to structure their writing. Teachers use information from assessment well to plan appropriate learning experiences and to identify students who are underachieving. They share learning objectives with students and work very well with teaching assistants to support lower-attaining students. They also make very good use of the new interactive whiteboards to enliven lessons and involve students in the use of technology. Provision in the school library does not fully meet students' needs. The range of resources is too narrow to promote students' interest and independent learning.
50. Leadership and management are very good. There is a shared vision and philosophy of English teaching. Commitment and teamwork are strong and teaching assistants are thoroughly involved in the work of the department. Assessment and marking are well monitored. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Teaching and achievement are now very good, but the regular use of drama has declined.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

51. Standards of literacy are below average on entry to Year 7; in some year groups, including the current Year 11, they were well below average. Speaking skills are stronger than reading and writing. This is because students use talk well to discuss, share and refine ideas in many lessons. However, some middle and lower-attaining boys do not listen carefully. Reading for information is well promoted, but students' deductive skills are not as well developed, which affects their comprehension. Writing is the weakest aspect of literacy.
52. Teaching assistants and the SEN department provide very good support for literacy both in class and through the use of ICT. Students gain confidence by working on computers on individualised programmes that respond immediately to their level of understanding.
53. Although literacy skills are well taught in English, they are not regularly reinforced in all subjects. Overall, the teaching of literacy skills is satisfactory. There is good practice in some departments, particularly in citizenship, mathematics and design and technology. All departments ensure that students know and use their subject's specialist vocabulary, but not all identify opportunities for developing literacy skills in their planning.

### **French**

Provision in French is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- GCSE results improved very significantly in 2004 due to effective and well-targeted teaching. Standards are rising quickly in Years 7-9 for the same reason.
- Students have very good attitudes, enjoy the subject and are keen to make progress.

- The good management of the subject is based on a realistic vision for its future development.
- Students do not pay enough attention to accuracy in their written work.

## **Commentary**

54. In 2003, GCSE results were poor. They improved dramatically in 2004. A substantial number of students took the examination. All attained a grade in the range A\*-D, two thirds being at C and above with three at A\*/A.
55. Standards in Year 9 are average for students' age. This represents very good achievement over time because students entered the school with below average attainment. Students with special educational needs achieve equally well because they are well supported by the teacher who gives individual attention to their exact needs. Throughout the school, students listen and respond with confidence and show a fair understanding of grammar but written work lacks sufficient attention to accuracy, especially spelling.
56. No lessons were on the timetable in Years 10 and 11 during the days of the inspection. Numbers in Year 11 are very low and standards seen, judged on written work only, are below average for students' age. This is because the formation of verbs and the use of tenses are quite weak, vocabulary is sometimes inappropriate and spelling errors are frequent. However, given this year group's well below average attainment on entry and the severe disruption to their learning in the past year, standards seen represent good achievement. In Year 10, where numbers are much higher, standards in written work are already closer to average, reflecting the improvement in teaching and learning in French that is working its way upwards through the school.
57. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. It has improved significantly in the last two years. Students' very good conduct and attitudes contribute well to their very good rate of learning. Teaching is very lively. It actively engages students throughout the whole of the lesson because the pace is fast and expectations are very high. Students respond extremely well because the teacher's enthusiasm for the subject is infectious. In an outstanding Year 7 lesson, in which students learnt to use the French alphabet, the teacher's instructions were so clear and her use of mime so effective, that soon the whole class was clapping and singing with increasing confidence and correct pronunciation. By the end of the lesson boys and girls were vying with each other to respond orally to the teacher's questions. The fact that the whole lesson was conducted in French was a remarkable achievement given that these students have only been learning French for one month. As well as developing each skill, students gradually build up their knowledge and understanding of grammar and, because they are encouraged to see patterns and to work things out for themselves, they are starting to apply rules more accurately. The use of information from assessment is good. Marking is regular but the department needs to develop strategies whereby students learn more effectively from their mistakes. Opportunities for students to use ICT to enhance their learning are satisfactory.
58. The subject is well managed. Improvement in the last two years under the new leadership is good.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- New strategies and more adventurous teaching practices are leading to improving standards of work in Years 9 and 11.
- Higher-attaining students, particularly boys, could be challenged more to reach their full potential.
- The use of information from assessment procedures is increasing students' awareness of what they need to do to improve.
- Sometimes there is too much dependence on the textbook and not enough variety in the activities.

### **Commentary**

59. Students' results in national tests taken in Year 9 in 2003 were below the national average. They were well above average compared with schools with similar prior attainment in Year 6 in 2000. Boys and girls performed similarly. The proportion of students reaching the level expected for their age in 2004 was higher and there was a significant increase in the proportion exceeding this level. Students' results in GCSE examinations in 2003 were well below the national average at grades A\*-C but all of those entered gained A\*-G grades. There was a very significant improvement in the proportions gaining A\*-C and the higher grades A\*-B in 2004. Girls' results were significantly better than the boys in both years.
60. Overall standards of work in Years 9 and 11 are below, but close to, average for students' age. This represents good achievement taking into account that attainment on entry is below, sometimes well below, average. Students with special educational needs make similar progress to other students because they are well supported on an individual basis by teachers and teaching assistants. Work seen in lessons and in the students' books throughout the school was at the expected level for many students and often better than the test and examination results indicate in Years 10 and 11. Poor retention of knowledge prevents the students' performance in tests and examinations from being as good as it might be. GCSE coursework is of a good quality at all levels; this was a contributory factor to the improvement in GCSE results in 2004. The connection between basic operations and the use of fractions, decimals and percentages is well understood by most students. However, many students find difficulty in dealing with negative numbers, which impedes their progress in work on several topics, for instance, simultaneous equations. Information and communication technology makes a good contribution to the development of students' mathematical skills, for example, through the use of spreadsheets to check manual calculations from formulae.
61. Teaching and learning are good overall. All the lessons observed were at least satisfactory; most were very good. Lessons are well planned with clear learning objectives, which are shared with students. In the best lessons, expectations are high, the pace is good and a variety of tasks is used to challenge students of all abilities. For example, higher-attaining students in a Year 9 lesson planned and tested out their own hypothesis in a very mature way, reporting their findings confidently and competently to the rest of the class. Most lessons are introduced well, often using the interactive whiteboard to engage and enthuse students in exercises that recall previous learning. The endings of some lessons are very good because they summarise what has been learned and lead into the next session. Others, however, do not consolidate learning

sufficiently. Teachers make effective use of questioning, encouraging students to explain their answers and solutions to the rest of the class. Teaching was satisfactory rather than good in lessons where there was too much dependence on the textbook and not enough variety in the activities. The overall effectiveness of teaching enables most students to acquire sufficient knowledge and basic skills to work independently. Literacy skills are improved by the good displays of technical terms, the insistence of teachers on the correct use of mathematical language and the good oral work in lessons. Students have a positive attitude to mathematics, they behave very well in lessons and relationships between them and with their teachers are very good.

62. Leadership and management of the department are good. There is a clear vision of what needs to be done to raise standards even further. Improvement since the previous inspection is good, reflecting the department's positive response to the National Numeracy Strategy. Assessment procedures are good. Students are tested regularly; they are aware of their predicted levels and share in setting their own targets. Day-to-day marking is encouraging and informative. It helps students to move on.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

63. Students' numerical skills are satisfactory. The key features of the National Numeracy Strategy have been shared with all staff and aspects of mathematics have been identified in most schemes of work. Students use their mathematical knowledge and skills well in other subjects. Statistical analysis, graph-work, basic measuring and calculation are used competently in subjects such as geography, science, art and design and technology.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Strategies for improving standards are beginning to have an impact; GCSE results improved considerably in 2004.
- Assessment could be used more effectively to highlight students' strengths and weaknesses and show them how to improve.
- The style of homework in Years 7-9 does not reinforce and extend students' day-to-day work.
- Relationships between students and teachers are good, which is improving the atmosphere for learning.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning lacks rigour.
- A wider range of teaching methods is needed to move higher-attaining students on at a faster rate, especially in Years 7-9.

### **Commentary**

64. Students' results in national tests taken in Year 9 in 2003 were below the national average. Results were lower in 2004, contrary to the upturn in the two previous years. In the GCSE examinations, students' results in science in 2003 were well below average at grades A\*-C. None of the students gained the higher grades A\*-B but all those entered for the examination gained at least a grade G. Results improved considerably in 2004.
65. Students' attainment in scientific skills on entry is below average, sometimes well below average, compared with that found nationally. Current standards in Year 9 are below average for students' age. Many have a limited knowledge of technical vocabulary, which restricts their studies. However, the standard of work represents satisfactory achievement overall relative to students' starting point. Standards of work in the current Year 11 are below average for students' age. Given the well below average attainment on entry of this year group and the traumatic situation last year, achievement is satisfactory. Investigative skills in science are beginning to improve because the department is emphasising this aspect of the work.
66. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory throughout the school. Lessons are generally well planned so that it is clear to students what they are to learn. The use of electronic white boards is improving the delivery of science lessons and raising students' interest in the subject. Teachers are increasingly using initiatives in the National Strategy to encourage and engage students' interest but a wider range of methods is needed to move higher-attaining students on at a faster rate. In contrast, lower-attaining students in Years 10 and 11 make good progress because they are well supported in their learning by the teacher and teaching assistants. In general, the use of information from assessment is not being used well enough to respond to students' individual needs or to show them how to improve further. The use of homework is unsatisfactory in Years 7- 9. Too much of it is based on projects. This approach does not consolidate efficiently students' day-to-day knowledge and is a significant factor in the below average standards seen. Overall however students acquire skills, knowledge and understanding of science at a satisfactory rate. Teachers have established good relationships with students.
67. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall but the monitoring of teaching and learning lacks rigour. Good practices are not being disseminated and shared to extend learning further. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory but there is scope for further improvement in standards, particularly in Years 7-9.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve very well because their teachers set challenging work and have high expectations.
- Examination results and standards of work seen in Year 11 are well above average.
- Students make very good progress in acquiring new knowledge and skills.

- Raising standards even further is the overriding focus of the subject's leadership and management.
- Students rely too much on their teachers to show them what to do.

## **Commentary**

68. Standards in Year 9 are above average for students' age. This represents very good achievement given students' starting point in Year 7. Most students can create good quality presentations for particular audiences using above average skills in word processing and desktop publishing software. Students show good knowledge and understanding of data handling when using spreadsheets and databases. They create and retrieve information well, generating charts and graphs from the data. Students' use of design skills to create web pages is above average. Standards in Year 11 are well above those expected at this stage. Students continue to achieve very well in Years 10 and 11. Design is a strong feature in students' work. They demonstrate very good skills in planning ways of improving the efficiency of business enterprises by analysing problems and designing solutions using a range of suitable applications. GNVQ examination results in 2003 were well above the national average. Two out of every three Year 11 students were entered for this vocational examination. Half of the students entered gained four GCSE-equivalent grades at B or above; nine out of ten students entered gained four grades A\*-C. Results improved further in 2004. Students in all year groups have only average skills in finding things out for themselves; they rely too much on their teachers to show them what to do and how to do it.
69. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers know their subject well and can explain difficult concepts clearly and accurately. They provide demanding tasks and problems that challenge and extend students of all abilities. They insist on high standards of behaviour to which students respond well, showing positive attitudes to their work and handling equipment and software responsibly. Consequently, students learn new skills in the use of computers and how ICT can best be used to present and simplify information. Students' skills in finding things out for themselves would be enhanced if they had greater access to self-help resources.
70. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is a strong focus on all students achieving their full potential. The introduction of new vocational courses has been very successfully implemented. The courses make a significant contribution to WRL in Years 10 and 11. Improvement in the subject since the previous inspection is very good. The number of computers is well above average for the size of the school but the accommodation in the main teaching room is unsatisfactory because, although well appointed, it does not allow the teacher to see all the students from any one vantage point and is poorly ventilated.

## **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

71. Other subjects make effective use of computers to support students' learning. In English, mathematics and geography, computers are used well, both for research and to present information. In design and technology, students make good use of computers to model situations and for research. Satisfactory use is made of computers to present information in science but the use of data-logging equipment is unsatisfactory. Art, history, citizenship and French make satisfactory use of computers, encouraging students to use the Internet for research and to prepare for presentations in written and oral forms.

## HUMANITIES

Religious education was inspected in depth. Geography and history were sampled because it was not possible to observe a sufficient range of lessons in the short time available for the inspection of this small school. One lesson of geography was seen and books from students in Years 7, 8 and 9 were examined. Evidence from these and discussions with students indicate that standards are below those expected for students' age. This matches teachers' assessment of standards in Year 9. There are no geography groups in Years 10 and 11. Teaching and learning in the lesson observed were satisfactory. The lesson was planned effectively. Students were co-operative and showed a willingness to learn.

A fuller sampling of history was carried out. Standards of work in the few lessons seen were below average but students were achieving well because of their good behaviour and high levels of interest. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 confirm the below average standards. Results at GCSE in 2004 were the best for five years. They were just below the national average at grades A\*-C and above average at grades A\*-G. History is taught in an enthusiastic and dynamic way that appears to capture students' interest. Teachers have high expectations and expert subject knowledge. History is becoming increasingly popular as an option subject at GCSE.

### Religious education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school does not meet requirements to provide religious education for all students.
- Insufficient time is allowed for students in Year 7 to reach the standard expected for their age; teaching strategies have been adapted to make optimum use of the time allocated.

### Commentary

72. The school does not currently offer religious education to students in Years 8-11. It is aware that it is in breach of statutory requirements and is seeking to correct the situation. Religious education has been introduced into Year 7 from September 2004 and there are realistic plans to extend this provision in the next academic year.
73. Teaching and learning in the small amount of work seen in Year 7 were good. Students are following a well-structured course that incorporates learning about the major world faiths and from examples of religious experience. The course is well planned to ensure that maximum use is made of the limited time available. The subject makes a significant contribution to the development of students' literacy skills and also to their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Management of the course for Year 7 is good but leadership is unsatisfactory because legal requirements are not being met. This was a key issue at the time of the previous inspection so improvement is unsatisfactory.

## TECHNOLOGY

A good range of courses is offered in design and technology. Students have the opportunity to work with resistant materials, food, textiles, catering and construction. It was only possible to observe a few lessons in construction, textiles and resistant materials during the short inspection period in this small school. In these classes, students worked enthusiastically on a wide variety of projects ranging from hat making in textiles to siege engines in resistant materials. The good and very good teaching observed was characterised by well-crafted and clearly focused planning. As a direct consequence, students achieved well, produced work of a high standard and knew what to do to improve.

Standards in resistant materials in Year 9 are broadly average for students' age, which represents good achievement. Although the proportion of students gaining A\*-C grades in 2003 was below the national average, the overall quality of design and project work is very good. There is evidence that systematic teaching of skills leads to students' understanding of both process and product. The work in students' folders and in lessons shows that students achieve a good standard of finish to their work. Very high quality work on display in the main part of the school is an exemplar for younger students.

Leadership and management in design and technology are good. They react to students' aspirations, as demonstrated by the introduction of new courses in construction and catering. These provide good opportunities for students to get involved in pre-vocational training and make a good contribution to students' WRL. The quality of support provided by the technician is very good. It makes a significant contribution to the excellent relationships between students and staff and is a factor in the improving standards in the subject. Good progress has been made over the last two years due to greater focus on implementing teaching methods that raise students' aspirations.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

Art and design, music and drama are taught within this aspect of the curriculum. Art and design was inspected in detail. Music was sampled. Teaching and learning were satisfactory in the one lesson observed. Provision is made for students to learn to play instruments but there are very few opportunities for these students to play together as a group. Music-making does not play a significant part in extra-curricular activities. Drama was not on the timetable on the days when the school was inspected so it is not possible to make judgements on the provision or standards.

### **Art and design**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The standard of artwork is well above average when students leave the school because of the very individualised support they receive in Years 10 and 11.
- High quality displays of artwork make a significant contribution to the school's ethos and learning environment.
- There is not enough emphasis on the teaching and practising of specific skills in a small number of lessons in Years 7-9.
- Students' knowledge of their progress and understanding of how to improve are patchy in Years 7-9.

## Commentary

74. Students' art and design skills on entry are below those normally found in Year 7. In Year 9, standards are average compared with those expected for the age group. This is confirmed by the teachers' assessments in relation to levels in the National Curriculum. Overall, students' achievement is satisfactory in Years 7-9. Students' creative ideas are respected and developed but skills are not developed systematically. Some very good portrait drawings were seen in Year 9 but some of the work lacks quality control and challenge, especially for the more able students.
75. In Year 11, standards are well above average for students' age. Achievement is very good. In 2003, the proportion of students gaining GCSE grades A\*-C (89%) was high. The vast majority of the grades were in the range A\*-B. None of the students entered for the examination gained less than an E grade. In 2004, results were of a similar high standard. The increased range of media used and the individualised learning programmes steered by the teachers underpin the significant rise in GCSE results in recent years. Students' work in colour is a real strength, as are the lively collages on topics of their own choice.
76. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7-9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. In the best lessons, particularly in the older year groups, an extensive variety of materials and methods are available and students are encouraged to develop their work in individual directions. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, students worked in pencil, collage and oil pastel and thought beyond the usual sizes of drawings and paintings. Students were carefully guided to follow their personal strengths and interests and to build on them to create work in a variety of styles. As a result, learning was very good. In Years 7-9, where teaching is satisfactory, there was a lack of direct teaching in a small number of lessons. This lessened the pace of learning and the rate at which students acquired and practised new skills. Assessment of students' work is accurate and students are provided with opportunities to annotate and talk about their work, which encourages self-criticism. However, students in the younger age groups need more guidance on how to improve their work further. The use of ICT is satisfactory and improving. It opens up new avenues of exploration in art and design and helps students to visualise possible outcomes.
77. Leadership and management are good, providing clear and sensitive direction for both staff and students. The disruption caused by the new build and refurbishment programme is being managed well with minimal impact on standards. A good development plan for the newly acquired Community Arts College status outlines strategies for improving standards further. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership and management are generating enthusiasm for sport and greater participation.
- The wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities is encouraging students to engage in competitive sports.

- Assessment lacks a sharp focus on how students can improve their own performance. Students do not systematically evaluate their work in lessons.

## **Commentary**

78. Students' physical skills on entry are below average for their age. Currently, standards in Year 9 are average for this stage of education; students of all abilities achieve well. Standards in the main physical education lessons in Year 10 are below average because students have not built up their skills progressively in previous years. For example, in one of the lessons observed, most students could not demonstrate consistent precision, control and fluency in the application of their skills in hockey, nor were they able to lead or plan their own warm-up exercises. In contrast, standards in the Year 10 GCSE group are average and students' achievement is satisfactory. In this class, students successfully related the principles of training to their own and others' practical work. The more able students were encouraged to make supplementary notes during the lesson; the less able made good progress towards understanding the concepts of the new course. No judgements are made about Year 11 because it was not possible to see their practical activities in physical education during the inspection.
79. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7- 9 is good. Students are confident and motivated in lessons and they work hard to apply what they have learned. Teaching is challenging and in the best lessons, the tasks set promote a clear pattern for the progressive acquisition of skills. In a good Year 8 football lesson, a series of clearly structured tasks enabled students to judge their level of progress and successfully apply different types of header in defence and attack. Although most students can identify the successful aspects of their performance they do not readily assess the level of their work during lessons. Teaching is good overall in Year 10. It results in good learning in the GCSE course because students are keen to achieve success. Learning is satisfactory in the main physical education lessons although it appears to have been unsatisfactory in the past. The good teaching seen during the inspection is improving learning but students have a considerable amount of ground to make from previous years. A new system of assessment is in place for all age groups that is focused on improving students' understanding of the levels at which they are working and how to improve.
80. There is a flourishing extra-curricular programme of competitive sport and recreational activities, which is supported enthusiastically by students from all age groups. The school manages the provision well considering the lack of adequate indoor facilities for physical education. Leadership and management of the subject are good; there is a clear vision for future development. Raising achievement and improving the quality of provision are clear priorities in the subject's improvement plan. Self-evaluation is rigorous and the deployment of both teaching and support staff is very effective. Staff work together as an effective team. Through the outreach work, the department is developing good links with local primary schools and sharing its expertise. Improvement since the previous inspection, especially in the very recent past, is good.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

The school provides a wide range of vocational courses such as leisure and tourism, business studies, ICT, child development, catering and construction. These provide applied and practical experiences that capture students' enthusiasm and interest. The teaching observed in these subjects was at least satisfactory, often better. Students successfully learn to work co-

operatively with each other and independently, thus taking responsibility for some of their own progress. These courses promote effective development of ICT skills and contribute significantly to the WRL curriculum.

## **Child development**

Provision in child development is **good**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The nature of the course and its form of presentation is appealing and a good preparation for parenthood in the future.
- Students make good use of ICT, which opens up wider scope for the collection and dissemination of relevant material.
- The assessment of course work is not sharp enough to provide students with a clear indication of their progress and target grades.

## **Commentary**

81. Standards of work in Year 11 are broadly average for students' age. Students' achieve well because they perceive the course as being relevant to their future and because it is presented in an interesting way that draws on their ability to work independently and to use their initiative.
82. Teaching and learning are good. Students acquire the appropriate knowledge to apply to the tasks set for them through forceful teaching that ensures students build on previous learning. The atmosphere in the Year 11 lesson observed was very productive. Students discussed amongst themselves, challenging each other's thinking, before coming to conclusions. Later, when working independently, they drew on the earlier work to decide which of the communication, memory, creativity, motor and emotional skills were developed through play with a particular toy. Students expressed surprise at the range of skills developed in early childhood. Some noted how useful this information would be when they became parents. Students make good use of ICT to research and present their course work. They use basic ICT skills competently and with confidence.
83. Leadership and management are good. They are well focused on presenting the course in a manner that appeals to students, both girls and boys. Marking provides students with a guide to their progress and how to improve but it does not focus clearly enough on predicted grades and targets.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

Provision for students' personal, social, health and moral education (PSME) is very good. It has a high profile within the school. The curriculum is relevant and useful. It is taught by enthusiastic teachers and with the involvement of many outside agencies such as the Positive Health Group and the 'No way Prison' Group. The school provides on-going training for all those involved in the delivery of PSME so leaders are well briefed on the very latest developments and national initiatives. All necessary policies are in place regarding sex and drugs education. The provision is well managed.

## **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Citizenship lessons in Years 7-9 are taught by a teacher with specialist subject knowledge.
- The School Council has a high profile and the students are proud of their achievements.
- Opportunities for active participation in citizenship are extensive.
- Marking and assessment are well established in Years 7-9 but not yet in Years 10 and 11.

### **Commentary**

84. Standards are currently below average throughout the school compared with those expected at each stage. They are rising rapidly. In Years 7-9, knowledge and understanding of citizenship is developed through a broad range of topics covering local, national and global issues. The emphasis is on discussion, debate and independent research. Information and communication technology is used effectively to involve students in their own learning. In one of the lessons seen during the inspection students were effectively comparing the experiences of school life of African children with their own experiences. Throughout the school, all students, including girls and boys, those identified as gifted and talented and those with special educational needs achieve well. In Years 10 and 11, citizenship is taught well through other subjects such as history, science and English as well as in separate lessons that are part of the PSME programme. Students have a good appreciation of the democratic processes that impinge on their lives. Work done in citizenship also makes a significant contribution to the WRL curriculum. Last year, some students benefited well from the opportunity to work on a special project with a free-lance journalist to create an interactive website.
85. Active participation in community work is embedded in the life of the school. The School Council is a powerful vehicle for change and fully develops students' skills of participation and communication. The students believe that they have an effective voice, which is listened to. Year 11 students are provided with good opportunities to manage their own affairs, for example, through their common-room committee, and take part an active part in 'democracy week'. There is an impressive range of opportunities for involvement in local and community projects. These include activities such as fund-raising, assisting at regular church lunch clubs, assisting elderly people in the community and sending representatives to the Youth parliament
86. Teaching and learning are good overall. Resources are used well to enhance learning. Lessons are well paced. They provide variety and challenge, although some work is too challenging for Year 7 students. The subject makes a significant contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development because it encourages students to view life from a wider perspective. Assessment is used effectively in Years 7-9 but it is not yet developed sufficiently in Years 10 and 11.
87. The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. Leadership is good because the subject is led by a specialist with enthusiastic and ambitious plans. There is a clear vision for future development, both medium and long-term. Management at this stage is satisfactory. The co-ordinator has only been in post since September 2004 and has not had sufficient time to fully implement some of this year's priorities.



## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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