

INSPECTION REPORT

DOWDALES SCHOOL

Dalton-in-Furness

LEA area: Cumbria

Unique reference number: 112383

Headteacher: Mrs L Moffatt

Lead inspector: Mr J Clark

Dates of inspection: 18 – 21 April 2005

Inspection number: 269605

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive
School category: Community
Age range of pupils: 11 to 16
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 1018

School address: Nelson Street
Dalton-in-Furness
Cumbria
Postcode: LA15 8AH

Telephone number: 01229 897911
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Appropriate authority: Governing body
Name of chair of Mrs E Whittaker
governors:

Date of previous 29 November 1999
inspection:

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Dowdales School is situated in the small town of Dalton-in-Furness, Cumbria. It has 1018 pupils on roll. Numbers have steadily increased in recent years and the school, which is about the same size as other secondary schools, is now oversubscribed. The school draws most of its pupils from Dalton and the surrounding villages. Though mixed, the area is broadly one of social disadvantage. Only a tiny minority of pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds and all pupils have English as their first language.

The attainment of pupils on entry is broadly average. The number of pupils with special educational needs is average. The school is a specialist school for the Performing Arts and an Ambassador School for Gifted and Talented pupils. In September 2004 the school was granted Leading Edge status given to enable the best schools to play a leading role in promoting improvement in other schools. It is also the High Achieving School in a local Excellence Cluster of schools.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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15678	Mrs J Radford	Team inspector	English Drama English as an additional language
21866	Dr D Tracey	Team inspector	Science
14841	Mr M Duffey	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
32329	Mr A Stafford	Team inspector	Art and design
10308	Mr J Paddick	Team inspector	Design and technology Special educational needs Work-Related Learning (WRL)
23926	Mr D Howorth	Team inspector	Geography Applied Leisure and Tourism
4355	Mr F Earle	Team inspector	History Religious education
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Dowdales is a very good school. Results are above average and rising faster than results nationally because teaching and learning are good. Current standards are above average and pupils are achieving well academically and outstandingly well in their personal development. Much of the provision is either excellent or very good because of the outstanding leadership of the headteacher. The school provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Excellent curriculum provision in the performing arts has had a dramatic effect in raising standards of achievement in drama, music and dance, reflecting the school's specialist status as a Performing Arts College.
- Pastoral care is outstanding and as a result, pupils' attitudes are excellent and their behaviour is very good.
- Links with the community and other schools and colleges are excellent; the school is firmly established at the heart of the Dalton community.
- Provision for special educational needs (SEN) pupils is very good; intervention to support pupils with dyslexia is innovative and highly effective.
- Achievement is excellent in drama and very good in science, citizenship, dance and work-related learning (WRL); however, it is only satisfactory in art and design and information and communication technology (ICT) where pupils could use computers more to support their learning in other subjects.
- Leadership, management and governance are very strong and focused on pupils achieving the highest possible all-round standards.
- Support and guidance procedures for pupils are excellent; their progress is assessed, tracked and monitored systematically and consistently as they move up through the school.
- Pupils' learning is underpinned by a highly effective curriculum and supported through a very good programme of extra-curricular activities.

Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Standards have improved both at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Teaching, learning and assessment have all improved as has pupils' personal development. There have also been improvements in the care the school takes of its pupils, in the curriculum, resources, careers and governance. The school has acquired specialist school status and there has been a substantial programme of new building and refurbishment. Because of recent staffing difficulties in ICT, the use of ICT to support pupils' learning in all subjects is not as good as previously.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2002	2003	2004	2003
	B	B	B	B

*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.*

Achievement is good for all year groups. Pupils obtain above average results compared to the country as a whole and compared to similar schools. Attainment on entry to the school is average and pupils' achievement, including that of gifted and talented pupils is good. SEN pupils achieve very well. Boys achieve very well compared to boys nationally. Standards of work seen in both Year 9 and Year 11 are above average. They are well above average in science and drama. Standards of achievement in ICT and art and design, although satisfactory, are not as high as in other subjects. In the national tests taken in Year 9 in 2003, results were above average in English,

mathematics and science. GCSE results in 2004 were above average. Results in Year 9 and Year 11 are improving at a faster rate than nationally. The school met its Year 9 2003 target, but not its 2004 GCSE target (5 or more A*-C grades) because of weak results in ICT, French and geography.

Pupils' personal development including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. It is reflected in pupils' excellent attitudes and very good behaviour and the excellent quality of relationships that exist in all aspects of the school's work. The standard of school uniform is exemplary. Attendance is well above average and punctuality to school and to lessons is very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Pupils learn well because **teaching and learning** are good. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen and the proportion of lessons judged to be very good or excellent was above average. Teachers know their subject very well. They use their expertise skilfully, planning and setting tasks that are interesting, well matched to pupils' prior attainment and which challenge pupils to achieve their best. They have very good relationships with their pupils which gives pupils confidence, and provides encouragement for learning. Teaching and learning are very good in science, WRL, citizenship, drama and dance; and for Years 10 and 11 pupils, in English and history. In ICT and art and design, where there have been staffing difficulties, teaching and learning, although satisfactory overall, are not as effective as in other subjects. Assessment overall is very good; for SEN pupils it is excellent. The curriculum is very good because it provides a very effective programme of subjects and courses to match the needs and aspirations of all groups of pupils. Work-related learning is very well developed and careers guidance is excellent; however, applied GCSE subjects in ICT and leisure and tourism only have half the recommended time. Very good opportunities exist for pupils to extend their learning through extra-curricular activities. The care the school takes of its pupils is excellent. Links with parents are very good and links with the community and other schools and colleges are excellent.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are very good. Governance is very effective. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and a purposeful sense of direction. A strong and effective senior team supports her well. At subject level, leadership and management are good. They are good or better in every subject except ICT and art and design, where they are satisfactory. The governing body is very effective and makes a significant contribution to the work of the school. Finances are very well managed with funds allocated prudently to help the school achieve its educational priorities. All statutory requirements are met except for providing a daily act of collective worship.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents have a very high regard for the school and support it fully in matters of uniform and discipline. At the pre-inspection meeting, and through the questionnaire, parents indicated that the school is very approachable, actively seeks and listens to parents' views and invariably acts upon them. Pupils have great confidence in the school - they pride themselves on being "Dowdaliens" - and value the regular canvassing of their views on a wide range of important issues.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The school has no significant areas for improvement. However, it could:

- raise standards of achievement in ICT and art and design;
- improve the use of ICT to support pupils' learning in all subjects and areas of the curriculum;
- provide a daily act of collective worship.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Achievement in all years is good. Current standards of work are above average in Year 9 and Year 11. All groups of pupils achieve well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results are improving at a faster rate than results nationally.
- Boys' achieve better than boys nationally.
- Throughout the school, standards are well above average in science and drama because of very good teaching in these subjects.
- Numeracy skills show good improvement as pupils move through the school.
- Achievement in ICT and art, although satisfactory, could be raised further.
- Pupils with SEN achieve very well; pupils who are gifted and talented achieve well. Standards of achievement in the performing arts subjects of drama and dance are excellent and very good respectively as a result of extra curriculum time and very good teaching.

Commentary

1. Pupils' results in national tests taken in Year 9 in 2003 were above average in English, mathematics and science, representing good achievement given their average starting points. No national test results for English have been published for 2004. 2004 results were above average in science and mathematics. Results overall are improving at a faster rate than results nationally and the school successfully met its target for 2003. Boys achieve well above average results in mathematics and science and above average results in English at the end of Year 9 and do better than boys nationally. Compared to the results they might have been predicted to achieve given their Year 6 test results, pupils' achievement was unsatisfactory. No clear explanation for this divergence of evidence emerged during the inspection. However, current achievement in these three key subjects in Years 7 to 9 is good overall. It is very good in science, and good in English and mathematics.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.1	33.4
Mathematics	37.1	35.4
Science	34.9	33.6

There were 169 pupils in the year group.

2. Current standards of work in Year 9 are above average representing good achievement given pupils' average starting points in Year 7. Standards have improved since the previous inspection when they were average. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds make good progress as they move up through the school. Standards of achievement in drama are excellent, and in science, citizenship and dance they are very good. In these subjects pupils learn very effectively because of

the very good teaching they receive. In English, mathematics, history, geography, music, personal, social and health education (PSHE), design and technology, French, German, physical education (PE) and religious education, standards of achievement are good. Pupils' literacy skills improve from average to above average due to the very strong emphasis teachers give to developing basic skills and the

successful adoption of the National Literacy Strategy. Writing skills are a strength. Numeracy skills are average, indicating an improvement on their below average starting points. As they move up through the school, pupils improve their accuracy in the four rules of number and in the use and manipulation of data, for example, the use of graphs for illustration. ICT skills are average and are used at least satisfactorily in all subjects though greater use could be made of computers in science, geography, music and leisure and tourism.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	59 (62)	52 (52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	98 (97)	89 (88)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	300	282.5

There were 169 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. GCSE results in 2004 were above average. From 2001 – 2004 results were consistently above average. The trend of improvement over the last five years is above the national trend. When compared with similar schools' results, pupils achieved very well. When compared to their Year 9 test results, pupils' achievement was good. In 2004, results were average in English and mathematics, where staffing difficulties adversely affected results, and above average in science. Results were well above average in religious education and above average in design technology and drama. In PE and art and design, results were average. Results were below average in ICT and history and well below in geography and French.
4. Between Years 9 and 11 pupils maintain their above average standards and continue to achieve well. By Year 11, achievement in science, history, citizenship and dance is very good and in drama it is excellent. Standards of achievement in English, mathematics, geography, music, French, German, PSHE, PE, leisure and tourism and RE are good. In ICT and art and design, achievement is only satisfactory because teaching is not yet good enough to raise it to the level of most other subjects.
5. Pupils with SEN make very good progress as they move through the school. This is largely due to the very good quality of help that they receive from the team of dedicated staff, particularly the learning support assistants and teachers assigned to them. Great emphasis is placed upon overcoming weaknesses in reading and writing, enabling all pupils to become genuine GCSE candidates by the time they reach Years 10 and 11. Examination results are impressive, given many pupils' relatively weak literacy skills on entry to the school. The very good work-related learning (WRL) programme is providing pupils in Years 10 and 11 with the opportunity to experience success of a practical nature through work placements which often lead to permanent offers of employment at the end of Year 11.
6. How well higher attaining pupils achieve was a particular focus of the inspection because in the 2004 GCSE results, only in English, English literature, mathematics, science, music and history did pupils achieve A* or A grades and even in these subjects the proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades was below average. An analysis of pupils' attainment on entry indicated that although attainment was broadly average, the proportion of higher attaining pupils who joined the school in Year 7 in

1999 was significantly below average and a likely reason why fewer than average pupils obtained the higher-grade results. There is a very effective programme for gifted and talented pupils, recognised by the awarding of Ambassador School status, and inspectors judged that standards of achievement for this group of pupils is good.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are **very good** overall. Their personal development and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **excellent**. Attendance is well above average.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attendance is well above the average.
- Pupils are very enthusiastic about their school and have a high regard for it.
- They make very good progress in becoming mature and responsible.
- Provision for pupils' social, moral and cultural development is excellent.
- Provision for spiritual development is very good.
- Statutory requirements for the collective act of worship are not fully met.

Commentary

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.9	School data	0.1
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

7. Pupils speak highly of their school and value very much the teaching and support they receive. They enjoy the numerous opportunities and experiences that are arranged for them and participate in large numbers. Their excellent attitudes are reflected in their level of attendance, which is well above the average for secondary schools, and the very good standard of punctuality. Pupils are conscientious and very well motivated to achieve well.
8. Behaviour is very good in and out of lessons and the school's approach to promoting good behaviour is very effective. The number of exclusions is justified by the nature of the offences and the school's insistence on high standards and is less than the average for secondary schools. Pupils get on very well together and are co-operative and mutually supportive, yet competitive when appropriate. There is scarcely any bullying and when it occurs it is effectively dealt with. Pupils voluntarily take on responsibilities for others such as being a buddy. They show considerable care and initiative in the work they do for charitable causes.
9. The attitudes of pupils with SEN are excellent. They enjoy coming to school. Even where they exhibit difficulties relating to behavioral and emotional characteristics, the very good quality of the support that they receive enables them to overcome problems and work in an atmosphere of calm and industry. They relate very well to the staff who look after them in lessons, in small groups and in extra-curricular activities. Relationships with the SEN staff are particularly strong and productive. Pupils value the attention that they are given and usually make great efforts to follow instructions and improve their work.

Ethnic background of pupils**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	796	41	1
White – Irish	3	0	0
White – any other White background	5	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	1	0
Mixed – White and Asian	2	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	207	40	0

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

10. Pupils' spiritual development is very good. Though the requirements for collective worship are not fully met, assemblies are well-planned, engage pupils' interest and attention and are linked with significant events in the life of the school and the wider community. These include the celebration of harvest, the marking of Remembrance Day and a pupil presentation about the dangers of global warming and the likely effects on the Dalton coastline. There are good links with the parish church and several other religious groups. Pupils have opportunity to participate in the Christian Union and to consider significant questions of value and meaning at philosophy club meetings. In many lessons pupils are encouraged to reflect on their experience and to give creative and aesthetic expression to their beliefs. This feature is particularly strong in dance and in drama, and imaginative opportunities are given in mathematics and religious education. Overall, the school has successfully created an ethos in which pupils can grow and flourish.
11. Pupils' moral development is excellent. The school is a moral community where pupils are clearly taught right from wrong and encouraged to develop strong moral principles and commitments. They respond with excellent attitudes and very good behaviour. They are developing a clear understanding of the importance of moral behaviour, have many opportunities to consider ethical questions and are learning how they can contribute to harmonious and healthy community life by their own conduct. They are sensitive to the needs of others and their extensive and generous support for a range of local and national charities shows that they fully understand the need to put ethical principles into positive moral action.
12. The social development of pupils is excellent. They have many opportunities to contribute to school life and to exercise responsibility. A particularly significant feature of this is the role of "Senior Pupil" to which a great many Year 11 pupils aspire. Through the School Council, year representatives, form captains, mentoring programmes and the "Pupil Voice", many pupils enthusiastically take up the opportunities for involvement in school life and are developing mature and responsible attitudes. This is evident in their conduct in many lessons, in their respect for school property and particularly in their relationships with each other and their teachers.

13. The cultural development of pupils is excellent. Since the previous inspection the school has worked very hard at increasing opportunities to develop awareness of cultural diversity. An exchange programme has been set up with Glenunga International High School, Adelaide, and imaginative partnerships established with local and regional schools of diverse religious,

ethnic and social mix. These include links with local specialist schools. Some subjects, such as religious education, modern languages and English make a distinctive contribution to this aspect of pupils' cultural development. The overall cultural development of pupils is enriched by a wide variety of extra-curricular activities and many opportunities for the enjoyment and expression of creative work through visits, the work of visiting artists and participation in many cultural events the school itself generates.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Pupils learn well because teaching is good and assessment is very good. The curriculum is very good. The school takes excellent care of its pupils. Links with parents are very good. Links with the community and other schools and colleges are excellent.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the school. Assessment is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching throughout the school results in all groups of pupils making good progress and is the major reason why standards are rising at a faster rate than nationally.
- Teaching is very good in science, drama, citizenship and dance resulting in very good achievement.
- Teachers are very skilful at using the good knowledge they have of their subjects to plan interesting lessons that challenge and stimulate pupils to want to learn.
- Assessment practice is very good, particularly in English, science, geography, history and French; it is outstanding for SEN pupils.
- Weaknesses in teaching in ICT and art and design prevent pupils reaching better than average standards in these subjects.
- The teaching of basic English skills to SEN pupils in withdrawal groups is very good.
- Although the use of ICT across subjects is satisfactory overall, the lack of computers restricts greater use particularly in ICT in science, music for pupils in Years 7 to 9, and leisure and tourism. The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the previous inspection.

Commentary

14. Teaching is good overall. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection and the proportion of very good or excellent lessons seen was above average. Teaching is at least good in the vast majority of subjects. Consequently pupils learn effectively and standards of achievement in Years 9 and 11 are good. In science, drama, citizenship and dance, teaching is very good; it is also very good, for pupils in Years 10 and 11, in English and history. Teaching in these subjects and for these groups, is characterised by teachers setting particularly challenging, interesting and exciting work that inspires and encourages pupils to want to learn more. Consequently their learning is very good.

15. Overall, teachers know their subject well. Their expert knowledge of the curriculum promotes a confident, authoritative approach that inspires confidence and enables them to set challenging but achievable tasks. They convey to pupils an enthusiasm for learning. Pupils respond very positively and cooperate fully in learning new skills, developing their ideas and acquiring new knowledge and understanding in the subjects they study. Planning is very good. Teachers work hard to plan lessons that are interesting but challenging and help move pupils on to the next stage of learning. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good the pace of learning is slow and there is a lack of challenge in the tasks teachers set; this was evident in some art and design lessons. Occasionally, as in ICT, teachers' knowledge of the subject is insecure and the tasks set do not extend pupils' learning to the full. Homework is used effectively in the vast majority of subjects to build on and extend work done in class.

16. Although the use of ICT to support pupils' learning is at least satisfactory in all subjects, and in design and technology and the performing arts computers are used very well, in some subjects the lack of computers restricts the opportunities pupils have to improve their learning through the use of new technology. This is a short-term issue however, as the provision of new computer resources is in the pipeline.
17. How well pupils in Years 7 to 9 are taught and how well they learn was a particular focus for the inspection because the previous inspection found teaching to be less good in these three years than in Years 10 and 11. Inspectors found teaching overall to be equally good throughout the school. The proportion of very good lessons seen overall improved by almost a third and there was no unsatisfactory teaching. Teaching in English and history is better in Years 10 and 11 because it is more focused on examination criteria.
18. The school provides pupils with SEN with teaching of good quality. This enables them to adapt the work so that it is fully accessible even to the pupils with weak literacy skills. Examples of this good practice occur regularly. Learning support assistants and teachers working with individuals and small groups all provide pupils with very good quality support for their learning. They ensure that pupils concentrate fully and prompt and challenge them, often with great skill. In mixed ability mathematics classes, pupils with SEN often find that the work they are set is either too difficult or too easy. In withdrawal groups, quite exceptional progress is made in the development of reading, writing and number. This is evidenced in the strong gains that pupils make in reading ages and numerical skills. The teaching of pupils with dyslexia is very good.
19. The assessment and marking of pupils' work is very good and has improved since the previous inspection. Marking is particularly good in English, mathematics, science, French and geography, where it is effective in helping pupils improve their work and giving teachers a good understanding of where pupils are at and what they have to do to improve. In GCSE PE, marking is not very helpful to lower attaining pupils in showing them how to improve their work and in ICT a lack of written work generally prevents teachers diagnosing where pupils are in their learning. Assessment procedures are very good in English, science, French, geography, history and citizenship, and good in mathematics, design and technology, drama and leisure and tourism. Pupils' ongoing performance is very well monitored to identify both strengths and weaknesses, provide incentives and set targets for improvement. In religious education targets for improvement are set but are not sufficiently focused on what pupils have to do to improve. The assessment of progress and need for SEN pupils is particularly strong and effective. Marking, especially of spelling, is very good in withdrawal groups. It identifies errors and directs further practice at weak areas.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 126 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
8 (6%)	37 (29%)	55 (44%)	26 (21%)	0	0	0

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

The curriculum

The curriculum and the opportunities for enrichment are very good. Curricular provision is reviewed frequently in the light of pupils' needs and changing requirements. As a result it meets all statutory requirements. Staffing, accommodation and resources are good overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has enriched and extended its curriculum by taking full advantage of its specialist performing arts college status so that there is a very good range of subjects throughout the school.
- Almost all pupils take part in a very extensive range of extra-curricular activities.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- Work-related education is very good overall despite the short time given to two of the dual award applied GCSE subjects.
- PHSE provision is good.
- The breadth and depth of the course in religious education in Years 10 and 11 is limited by the short time allocation.
- Accommodation is very good.

Commentary

20. In Years 7 to 9, the breadth of the curriculum is very good. Pupils study both French and German in Years 8 and 9. In addition to the National Curriculum subjects and religious education, all pupils take PSHE, drama and dance. The curricular provision in the performing arts, dance, drama and music, is excellent reflecting the specialist status of the school.
21. The breadth of the provision in Years 10 and 11 is very good because it meets the needs of pupils seeking mainly academic courses and those whose aptitudes lean towards vocational and work-related learning. Pupils have a very wide choice of subjects from four options, which in addition to their compulsory subjects means that most take eleven GCSEs. A growing proportion are now taking performing arts subjects and these link effectively with advanced level courses at the local sixth form college.
22. The curriculum has some shortcomings arising from some inappropriate time allocations. For example, the breadth and depth of the course for core religious education in Years 10 and 11 is constrained by the short time for teaching this subject. Another anomaly is the different time given to the applied GCSE courses that are dual award subjects. Engineering extends across two options and has adequate time but ICT and leisure and tourism are only allocated half of the time usually given to these new vocational subjects. This restricts the opportunities pupils should have to extend their learning through links with industry.
23. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good and they have full access to the National Curriculum and other courses. This is due to the very good quality of support that they receive when they work with teachers or learning support assistants. The school pays particular attention to the improvement of reading and writing, enabling all pupils to produce work of GCSE standard in several subjects by the time they reach Years 10 and 11. Provision for dyslexic pupils is of a very high order. Pupils facing challenges connected with visual or hearing impairment or emotional or behavioural difficulties all receive very good support, enabling them to make the same good progress as other pupils.
24. The provision of personal, social and health education is good and includes an effective sex and drugs education. The provision is well planned and taught. Careers education is excellent. At pre-inspection meetings with parents and pupils, both groups rated careers provision as outstanding, not only in the way pupils were prepared for post-16 opportunities in further education and employment, but also in their preparation for Year 9 options when pupils are encouraged to think of the long-

term implication of their subject choices. Citizenship provision is very good. It is well established in all year groups and good links have been forged with other subjects, particularly PSHE and the humanities.

25. Curriculum enrichment is exceptional in performing arts and very good overall. Pupils benefit substantially from a very good and wide-ranging programme of extra-curricular activities and enrichment opportunities. Parents are pleased with this provision, and pupils appreciate the time teachers give to these activities. The range of performing arts related opportunities is excellent and sporting opportunities feature very strongly, but the overall programme is extensive. This work does much to enhance pupils' learning experiences and is also helping to raise standards, as does the very broad programme of study support, including homework clubs, holiday courses, and community-based activities.
26. Overall, there is a good match of teachers and support staff to the curriculum. The induction of new staff is very good and newly qualified teachers receive very good support and mentoring. The school is an excellent provider for initial teacher training. Resources for learning are satisfactory overall. All subjects are well resourced to deliver the National Curriculum. The range and quantity of musical instruments is excellent. The number of computers is below the national average for a school of this size - though new computers will be in school soon - and more computers are needed to support pupils' learning in geography and mathematics.
27. Accommodation is very good. There have been significant improvements since the previous inspection. The school now has an excellent performing arts block with specialist facilities for drama and music, including a state of the art technology suite. Other new buildings provide English, modern and foreign languages, history and religious education (RE) with very good teaching rooms, while the rolling refurbishment of science laboratories to a high standard is impacting positively on teaching in that subject. The school has extensive and very attractive grounds that are safe and well maintained. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour when using the premises during breaks and after school are exemplary. They are orderly and respectful of the environment. There is no graffiti or litter.

Care, guidance and support

The quality of care, guidance and support is excellent. Procedures to monitor pupils' personal and academic progress are excellent. Pupils' views are taken seriously. The school listens to them and takes them into account when decisions are made.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of relationships throughout the school is exceptionally good.
- Transition arrangements from primary school are excellent and pupils join the school in a most confident and informed manner.
- Assessment is used very well to track and monitor pupils' progress.
- The advice and guidance that pupils receive about the next stage of their education and preparation for further education and employment are particularly impressive.
- SEN pupils are very well cared for.

Commentary

28. Pupils feel safe, valued and supported because of the trusting, constructive and mutually respectful relationships that they enjoy with their teachers and helpers. Pupils are very well motivated to achieve well and are confident to request help when needed. The school goes to considerable lengths to meet the needs of pupils and

families. The procedures for health, safety, child protection and looked after children are fully in place and very well implemented. Very good arrangements are in place for all aspects of pupils' welfare including the services of specialist agencies.

29. The school has excellent procedures to monitor pupils' progress and to identify any areas where progress could be more rapid. Pupils review the progress they are making towards their targets at regular intervals with subject teachers and senior staff. This contributes very effectively to pupils' awareness of how well they are doing and whether improvements are needed in any subject.
30. Assessment, marking and reports are used very effectively to inform pupils about their progress so that they have a clear understanding of their achievement, predicted examination results and, importantly, how to improve. A wide range of extra help is available such as catch up classes, booster sessions, workshops, homework club, mentoring and revision work. The support for pupils with special education needs is excellent. Musicians benefit from peripatetic input and performers enjoy superb assistance and coaching from professional theatre companies. Very good systems are in place to monitor pupils' personal and academic progress.
31. Pupil involvement is strongly encouraged and includes form representation, self and peer evaluation, considerable charity activities, organising events in the community, assisting in primary schools and consultation. Surveys of pupils' views are carried out twice per year and are acted upon.
32. The school's concern for its pupils is typified by its links with primary schools. The transition process starts years before through visits to infant schools and to Years 4, 5 and 6 in primary schools. The school and its prospective pupils know each other extremely well before transfer. The taster days and, when actually starting, the induction programme and linking with older pupils make for the best possible start for the pupils.
33. The school ensures that pupils are thoroughly prepared for each new phase of their education and development as they move through the school. In Year 9, for example, comprehensive presentations are given about each subject area to help pupils to choose the most suitable subjects that they should follow. Careers education, preparation for employment and the advice, guidance and practical assistance provided by the Connexions service are excellent.
34. The school provides extremely well for the welfare of the pupils with SEN. Their needs and targets are defined very well in their individual education plans. The team of professionals working with them is extremely caring but firm when necessary. It provides them with very effective support on an individual basis and in small groups, enabling them to reach their potential. Pupils with weak literacy skills or dyslexia have their reading and writing capability monitored regularly. Those facing emotional and behavioural challenges are particularly well supported. These characteristics are monitored rigorously and challenging but achievable targets are set for the pupils who display them.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's partnership with parents is very good. Links with other schools and the community are excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Transition and curricular arrangements with primary schools are highly developed.
- The school plays a leading role in many community matters.

- The school enjoys the respect and confidence of its parents.
- SEN links with primary schools are excellent.

Commentary

35. Parents have a high regard for the school and are very pleased with the quality of education and care that is provided. Communications, information and reports for parents are frequent and of a very good standard. The school and parents work well together in the interests of the children and the home/school contract is used constructively as a practical framework that all subscribe to. Parents are very supportive, including through the parents' and teachers' association, although there is very little parental involvement during the school day. Parents attend performances and other events in large numbers and the majority attend the annual consultation meetings about their children's progress. Parents' views of the school are regularly surveyed. Advice about how to help their own children is provided and the school is currently considering how to develop this aspect further.
36. Pupils transfer from primary schools in a highly informed manner and with complete confidence because of the far-reaching arrangements that are in place. Every subject department is in contact with the partner primaries and the programme of curricular work is extensive, resulting in continuity of education between schools and excellent use of the final half term of the school year. The school provides a vast amount of assistance to its primary partners and also works extremely closely with a special school and its secondary school partners to promote a cohesive and mutually supportive group. The school has joint provision arrangements for dance and music with a sixth form college and receives very good support from it and a college of further education for transition purposes. Pupils enjoy and benefit culturally from their contacts with schools in Europe and Australia.
37. The school plays a most important role with the county council and development agencies in planning and providing for the future of the area. It is also involved in county wide educational initiatives in an authoritative role. Links with employers are extensive and pupils particularly benefit from these with relevant work experience, mock interviews and careers talks. Many of the employers give Dowdales pupils the opportunity of apprenticeship placements before other applicants. A community development centre occupies the same site and provides year round adult education courses. The Furness Music Centre provides extensive opportunities for people of all ages to rehearse and perform in a wide range of locations. Theatre visits and work with professional groups contribute much to the quality of pupils' learning. Subject departments use very well the wider community for out of school experiences that give an extra dimension to class work. Visits to Normandy beaches, Australia and a Buddhist monastery are typical examples. Pupils also play a part in their community for example by providing entertainment and hospitality to elderly people and by imaginative and highly successful fund raising activities to support charities.
38. There are excellent SEN links with primary schools and induction procedures are exemplary. Very effective contacts with parents are formed at the time that pupils with SEN begin the transfer process from primary schools to Dowdales. These links are maintained as the pupils move from Years 7 to 11, and are instrumental in supporting their academic and social progress. Parents are fully involved in reviews of formal statements of SEN. Exceptionally good links with a local special school provide extra consultancy when needed, together with benefits for pupils when they work and socialize with others faced with very considerable challenges.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. Leadership of the school by the headteacher is outstanding and the leadership of key staff is very good. Management of the school is very good. Governance is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The clarity of vision, sense of purpose and high aspirations of the headteacher have promoted a school with several outstanding features.
- Key managers are effective and committed to pupils' achieving high standards.
- The management of provision for SEN pupils is excellent.
- Governors play a major part in the school's success.
- Highly effective financial management systems are in place which help the school achieve its educational priorities.

Commentary

39. The outstanding leadership of the head teacher, ably supported by a very good senior leadership team as well as strong academic and pastoral managers, are important factors in the school's success. The headteacher has a vision for the school that is predicated in pupils achieving the highest possible standards, both in their academic work and personal development. Pupils' personal development is now excellent but the staffing turbulence of the last two years, now stabilised, has slowed the rate of progress towards academic excellence. Leadership is very ambitious. Goals are relentlessly and successfully pursued, for example, achieving Specialist School status. National recognition has been achieved in the award of Leading Edge status. A climate of continuous self-evaluation has been created and where this throws up inadequacies, for example, weaknesses in teaching, vigorous action is taken. Leadership has inspired pupils and parents to be wholly committed to the school's aims; numbers have increased steadily year on year so that the school is now oversubscribed.
40. The quality of leadership throughout the school is good. Subject heads are committed to pupils achieving high academic standards and pastoral heads to the pursuance of excellence in pupils' attitudes and behaviour. Leadership in drama is excellent. It is very good in English, science, history, religious education and dance. Only in ICT and art is leadership only satisfactory, largely because it is new and untested, and the quality of teaching and learning are not as high as in other subjects.
41. Very good management systems are in place to enable the school to fulfil its vision and strategic objectives. All aspects of the school's work are monitored systematically, with the overarching priority of making teaching and learning as good as possible in order to raise standards of achievement. Results of national examinations are carefully analysed to ensure pupils are achieving as highly as possible and targets are set for improved performance. Performance management is used effectively to bring about improvement, and arrangements for the induction and development of newly qualified teachers and arrangements for all teachers' professional development are very good. The school welcomes external views of how well it is doing and has commissioned external consultants to audit, in great depth and considerable detail, how well it is doing and what it might do to improve further. Subject management is good overall with excellent or very good practice in English, science, citizenship, drama, dance, WRL and history.
42. The leadership of the school's SEN provision is enthusiastic, knowledgeable and exemplary. Management is excellent. This is clearly demonstrated by the very smooth running of all the procedures connected with this aspect of the school's work. Excellent documentation and review procedures ensure that teachers and assistants

are constantly seeking to improve provision. There is a real sense of purpose and achievement in the department and staff morale is high. All statutory requirements are met and very good improvements have been made since the previous inspection.

43. Governance is very good. Governors are dedicated to the school and have its best interests at heart. They are concerned for it to meet the needs of its pupils and to be financially viable. They have taken relevant training and offer informed support to the head teacher and her

team. They play an appropriate role in the planning processes and challenge the school's proposals and practices in a number of ways. Each governor is attached to a specific department in order to question and support its work. They are aware of the main strengths and weaknesses of the school and, with the exception of providing a daily act of collective worship, have ensured that statutory requirements are met.

44. Expenditure is very well planned and controlled and very good use is made of the funds available to achieve the best value possible. The school successfully attracts voluntary donations and earns extra income by premise lettings. A very large proportion of the end of year surplus is already accounted for and the actual surplus is very low. Despite its specialist status funding, the school operates at a cost per pupil that is below the national and county averages. In view of the quality of education provided and the pupils' academic and personal achievement, the school is deemed to give very good value for money.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,298,758	Balance from previous year	259,756
Total expenditure	3,281,266	Balance carried forward to the next	277,248
Expenditure per pupil	3,488		

WORK-RELATED LEARNING

The school's provision for work-related learning (WRL) is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school provides a good range of vocational courses for Years 10 and 11.
- There is insufficient time provided for the vocational course in leisure and tourism.
- Arrangements for providing work placements and guidance on careers are excellent.
- There are frequent opportunities for pupils to make links between their studies and WRL.

Commentary

45. The school provides WRL in accordance with all statutory requirements and recently won a county award for its business links, which are highly regarded and seen as an exemplar. It is very well led and managed, has a high profile, and is successful in raising attainment. Between Years 7 and 9, pupils are presented with increasing amounts of information and advice about careers and changes in the labour market. They have excellent guidance on possible future careers as they move towards choosing their Year 10 and 11 courses through the option system. This enables them to make properly informed decisions about whether to follow vocational courses or not. Pupils have the opportunity to follow a traditional academic course or to spend a good proportion of their time on vocational studies. They all have the opportunity to qualify for a recognised business certificate. Recently, some of the school's gifted and talented pupils redesigned the 'Evening Mail' website.
46. All pupils benefit from work placements, which are extended for those following vocational courses. These give them a clear insight into the expectations of

employers. The programme provided in advance of the placements is excellent. It enables pupils to apply formally for their placement, and covers aspects such as equal opportunities, legal rights, pay, labour market changes and discrimination. Following the placements, it is quite common for pupils to be offered work or apprenticeships. During the placement, pupils keep a log of their progress and achievements and at the conclusion they benefit greatly from a debriefing with their

employers. The school provides well for pupils at risk of disaffection with academic work. These pupils in Years 10 and 11 benefit from extended work placements, which often hit individual career targets in the form of offers of employment.

47. Pupils benefit from a good range of vocational courses, for example, double award GCSE leisure and tourism, engineering and ICT. Pupils value the school's provision of vocational courses because they see them as providing a clear pathway to higher qualifications and employment. They also really value the careers advice, which they regard as being of excellent quality. On the vocational courses, pupils are normally fully engaged, genuinely interested and achieving well. As part of the engineering course, pupils have placements with local manufacturers and many links with local engineering personnel. These give them a full insight into the opportunities offered for future careers in this sector. This excellent provision is not fully replicated on the leisure and tourism course, which does not have enough curriculum time to explore similar links with the local employers.
48. Managers have effectively researched opportunities to fully integrate WRL into the teaching of all subjects. The success of this work is there for all to see in the classroom. For example, in design and technology, pupils design mini-lights for batch manufacture. They then compete against each other in teams to make products of the best quality and at the lowest price. This work provides them with the opportunity to experience teamwork at an intense level and to make and cost batches of products of really good quality.

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

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Overall, provision for English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are rising because of very good leadership and stability in staffing.
- Pupils enjoy the subject and achieve well.
- Very good systems of assessment enable pupils to improve their work.
- Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to plan interesting and enjoyable lessons
- Occasionally, teachers give pupils too much time to complete routine tasks.

Commentary

49. In the Year 9 national tests in 2003, results were above average. Results in 2004 were not quite as good but no national comparators are available for these results. In the GCSE examinations in 2004, pupils gained higher results in English literature than in English. The proportion of grades A*-C was above average in English literature and average in English. Girls achieved better than boys. Staffing upheavals in recent years have had a negative impact on results but there is now a stable team of committed teachers and standards are rising throughout the school.
50. Overall, current standards in Year 9 are above average. Both girls and boys express themselves reasonably clearly in discussions and listen attentively to the teacher and to other pupils. They read aloud expressively when given the opportunity. Higher attaining pupils successfully identify layers of meaning in texts and comment knowledgeably on language and themes. Strengths in writing include a firm understanding of how to write for different audiences. However, there is a weakness in reading and writing under test conditions. Pupils lose marks because they do not read the questions carefully and fail to give full answers. Standards in Year 11 are above average. This is because pupils have made very good progress over recent months in response to very good teaching and are achieving well. Pupils of all levels of attainment have a good grasp of the main themes in the literature that they study and express this understanding clearly. They use technical vocabulary confidently and accurately and they know how to set out their knowledge when answering examination questions. Higher attaining pupils produce very good written responses at impressive speed.
51. Teaching and learning throughout the school are good overall and consequently pupils achieve well. Pupils with SEN achieve very well because they are very well supported. The main strengths of the teaching lie in teachers' very confident command of the subject, well planned lessons, and a very good rapport between teachers and pupils resulting in pupils enjoying the subject. In Years 7 to 9, the quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons generally cater well for the different needs of pupils, and

pupils respond very positively to the good opportunities to develop their skills of speaking and listening, reading and writing. They usually work well in individual and group tasks, producing responses quickly and accurately. Behaviour is generally very good. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good it is because there is not enough direct questioning to ensure that all pupils make sufficient progress in the lesson. Opportunities are missed in some lessons to give pupils practice in reading aloud and the absence of time targets for tasks results in gossip and a lack of

concentration. However, the strengths of the teaching outweigh the weaknesses and in all years there are examples of teaching and learning that is very good and sometimes excellent. Teaching and learning are very good in Years 10 and 11 because there is a very strong focus on improving examination techniques such as understanding the particular purpose of the question and responding accordingly. Pupils of all levels of attainment and those who are gifted and talented are progressing very well because they know the requirements for the different GCSE grades and they develop their knowledge and understanding through working very hard on a range of very challenging tasks and using structured support to good effect in writing. Their achievement is good. Marking is a particular strength as it pinpoints weaknesses and gives very clear advice on how to improve the quality of the answer. The use of ICT is satisfactory. Pupils' work is often word processed and the Internet used for research.

52. The systems for assessment are very good. Teachers have a clear indication of pupils' strengths and weaknesses because there is now a very detailed and comprehensive record of pupils' attainment as they move through the school. Pupils know what level of attainment they have reached, and what they need to do to reach their targets.
53. The subject is very well led and managed. There is now a very clear vision for development. The recently appointed head of department has accomplished a great deal in a very short time and is a very good role model. Revised programmes of study are now in place, together with good quality resources. New methods of assessment help teachers in their planning and extension work is being developed for higher attaining pupils. Pupils benefit from a stable teaching team, with staff working together in a very positive way. The good links that the department has developed with the local primary schools are having a positive impact on achievement, and standards are rising in Years 7 and 8. There has been good improvement after a period of difficulty. Morale is high and the department is now very well placed for further improvement.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

54. Pupils use their language and literacy skills well across the curriculum. The successful introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in Years 7 to 9, together with a very clear policy for the development of skills across the subjects, has had a direct impact on the raising of standards. Pupils demonstrate good speaking and listening skills in subjects such as English, drama, leisure and tourism and religious education. They are confident in the use of subject specific vocabulary in most subjects because of the importance placed upon key words and the use of resources such as glossaries in history and dictionaries in English. However, in physical education the acquisition of technical language does not have a high enough profile, and key words are not identified in ICT although pupils have good literacy skills. Most pupils read with reasonable fluency and can extract relevant information from a wide range of sources. Writing is a strength throughout the curriculum. Pupils write at length in a variety of styles and compose poetry in mathematics, science geography and English. Year 8 pupils produce creative writing on Aborigine art. There is a reasonable degree of accuracy in spelling.

Modern foreign languages

French was the main focus subject for the inspection. **German** was sampled. Two lessons were seen in Years 7 to 9 and two in Years 10 and 11. Teaching and learning are good throughout and all groups of pupils are achieving well. Pupils worked productively and

made good progress in acquiring different skills; for example, in acquisition of vocabulary and in speaking. GCSE results at A*-C in 2004 improved from below average in 2003 to above average in 2004.

FRENCH

Overall, provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are good.
- Interesting teaching and pupils' positive attitudes enable pupils to achieve well.
- There are weaknesses in writing.
- Very good use is made of assessment to monitor pupils' progress.
- The department contributes very well to pupils' cultural development.

Commentary

55. On entry to the school in Year 7, all pupils study French as the main language in mixed-ability classes. All pupils then learn German in addition as a second language for the next two years. Standards in Year 9 in French are average, and pupils achieve well given their below average starting points. Understanding of the foreign language is sound, and pupils complete matching-up exercises successfully. Pupils are generally confident speakers and pronunciation is satisfactory. Higher attaining pupils use different tenses well. GCSE results in French in 2004 were well below average as a result of staffing difficulties in Year 10 that had disrupted continuity. The inspection showed an improving picture. Standards in Year 11 are average and pupils are achieving well in relation to their prior attainment. Pupils have a good awareness of different tenses, which are consolidated and checked regularly, and they acquire the relevant vocabulary, constructions and opinions for coursework. Writing of some pupils in all years, from 7 to 11, would benefit from greater accuracy, particularly in copying. Pupils with special educational needs are well provided for and achieve well because teachers match the work to their needs well and support is good.
56. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are efficient linguists and plan their lessons well. Pupils know at the outset of each lesson what they have to learn. Lessons include different activities and skills in order to interest and motivate pupils. Teachers' expectations are high, and many lessons contain challenging tasks. At times, however, opportunities to challenge higher attaining pupils further are missed. Pupils work productively and co-operate very well with each other in pairs or groups. Their attitudes are conducive to good learning and they enjoy the different games. Resources are used well.
57. The department is led and managed well. Teachers work as an effective team. Teachers' marking of pupils' work is very thorough, and they use assessment very well to set targets and monitor progress. Foreign language assistants provide good support, and are used effectively in lessons. Very good links have been established with feeder primary schools. The department makes a significant contribution to pupils' cultural development with its various trips abroad, links with foreign schools and clubs in school. The new accommodation is outstanding, and is enhanced by informative and interesting displays. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching is resulting in good achievement.
- The department is developing new teaching approaches through effective curriculum development.
- SEN pupils are very well supported and make good progress.
- A wide range of enrichment activities supports pupils' learning.
- Marking and assessment practice are good and help pupils improve.
- Teachers make regular and effective use of ICT, but use by pupils is less frequent because of the shortage of computers.

Commentary

58. National test results at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were above average and compared well with those in similar schools. Results in 2004, although still above average were not quite as good, but were higher than in English or science. Current standards of work in Year 9 are above average overall and pupils' achievement is good. Pupils can recognise reflections and rotations of shapes, but lower attaining pupils are unable to explain where a rotated image should be. Most pupils can order numbers and recognise fractions, but lower attaining pupils are unable to simplify fractions. GCSE results in 2004 were average. However, the early entry of a set of pupils from Year 10, all of who gained grades A or B and are now following a post-16 A/S level course, has ensured that results this year will be considerably better and current standards are above average. Higher attaining pupils can recognise algebraic terms and deal with surds, but middle and lower attaining pupils have difficulty with manipulation and dealing with negative numbers in algebraic contexts, or recognising the n th term of a sequence. Pupils make good progress from Year 9, and their achievement is good. Gifted and talented pupils achieve well throughout.
59. Teaching is good overall and pupils learn well. Work set throughout the school is challenging and enables all pupils to make good gains in knowledge, skills and understanding of number and algebra, shape and space, and data handling. Curriculum developments are informing good practice. For example, in Years 7 to 9 the recommendations of the National Numeracy Strategy have been implemented and are helping to raise standards. Lessons are carefully planned with reference to the national framework, and in order to increase the challenge for all pupils, the scheme of work is based on content from a year higher than is recommended. Lower attaining and SEN pupils receive very effective support from teaching assistants and make good progress. Occasionally, however, the work set does not take into account their particular needs and progress in these lessons is only satisfactory. Teachers use ICT and other resources well. They provide a range of interesting activities to increase motivation and to relate mathematics to the real world. The curriculum is enriched with a range of extension activities, including mathematics challenges and booster classes. Relationships, behaviour and attendance and punctuality are very good. The good range of work done is evident from the particularly interesting mathematical displays in the mathematics rooms and corridors. The use of ICT by pupils is satisfactory. Difficulty in accessing the ICT rooms has limited the opportunities to use computers, although graphic calculators are available and used at times. Assessment of learning is good. Teachers' marking is well done with thoughtful comment, and pupils receive regular feedback about how they are progressing towards their targets.
60. Leadership and management are good. Department performance is effectively monitored through lesson observation, scrutiny of pupils' work and detailed analyses of examination results. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The department is now challenging higher attaining pupils more and has established a system for tracking pupils' progress against agreed targets and sharing these with pupils. Resources have improved.

Mathematics across the curriculum

61. Standards of numeracy are below average on entry but by the end of Year 9 they have risen to average. By Year 11 they are above average. This is an improvement since the previous inspection, and reflects the emphasis given to the development of numeracy in the school and in feeder primary schools. However, more frequent opportunities in all subjects for pupils to do mental calculation would help to raise standards further. Pupils apply a range of mathematical ideas in other subjects, for example, proportion in art, measurement and costing calculations in design and technology, coordinates and graphical work in geography, and calculations and data handling in science.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and pupils learn very well as a result.
- Pupils' very positive attitudes underpin their very good achievement.
- Assessment of pupils' work is very good and is a key factor in improving standards.
- Leadership and management are very good ensuring effective team work within the department.
- Computers could be used more frequently to support learning.

Commentary

62. In 2004, overall results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were above average. Test results are improving at a faster rate than that seen nationally. Current standards of work in Year 9 are well above average. This represents very good achievement and is the result of improved teaching in this age range. Pupils' grasp of scientific concepts and theories is very good and enables them to develop new ideas very well. For example, they are able to look at scientific evidence for the increase of the population of bed bugs in the environment and evaluate whether different scientific theories about this increase, was supported by this evidence. As a result their scientific enquiry skills improved at a very good rate. The 2004 GCSE science results were above the national average for grades A*-C. The proportion of pupils obtaining A* and A grades was below the national average. Results are improving faster than the national rate. Standards in the current Year 11 are well above average and pupils achieve very well. These standards represent an improvement on the most recent GCSE results, due to the cumulative effect of improved teaching. For example, higher attaining pupils have a very good understanding of the wave nature of light. They can give sophisticated explanations of why light changes direction when it passes from one substance to another. Middle and lower attaining pupils are able to explain why light and sound waves have different types of properties. SEN pupils make very good progress in their lessons as a result of the very good support they receive from teachers and learning assistants. Gifted and talented pupils achieve very well because they are clearly identified and work is well matched to their needs.
63. Teaching and learning are very good across all age ranges. Lessons are very well planned so that the use of time and resources is very good. As a consequence pupils learn very well. Work is challenging for all levels of capability with the result that pupils sustain their levels of interest and concentration very well. Teachers have a very secure command of their subject area and their clear explanations of scientific

theories and concepts helps improve pupils' learning considerably. The marking and assessment of pupils' work is very good and the 'blue sticker' strategy gives them an up to date picture of how they are performing and what they need to do to improve. Pupils acquire the skills, knowledge and understanding of science at a very good rate due to their very good application, commitment and productivity.

Expectations of pupils are high and pupils respond well. They work hard and display considerable interest in the subject. They feel they are doing well and this increases their motivation to succeed. Although pupils get some experience of ICT in their science lessons, they would benefit from a more 'hands on' approach, for example, by individual data logging experiments.

64. Leadership and management are very good. There is a very effective team of teachers and support staff and the main focus is on raising pupils' achievement. For example, new and more effective schemes of work have been developed for delivering the science curriculum. Since the previous inspection improvement has been very good, particularly in the quality of teaching and learning and how well pupils achieve.

Information and communication technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Basic skills are well taught.
- Pupils apply their literacy skills well in creating and editing documents.
- Staffing difficulties have yet to be fully resolved.
- Higher attaining pupils have good design skills.
- Specialist teaching is resulting in good achievement in some classes; however, where teachers lack a secure knowledge of the subject, achievement is only satisfactory.

Commentary

65. Although teacher assessments in 2004 at the end of Year 9 indicated that standards were above average, due to the lack of specialist knowledge by inexperienced, temporary staff, the levels awarded were over generous. Standards on entry vary greatly due to pupils' differing experiences in using ICT in their primary schools but overall standards are average. Current standards of work seen in Year 9 are average and achievement for all groups of pupils is satisfactory. Pupils use their good literacy skills to good effect in completing tasks in word processing and in creating power point presentations. They are able to use simple formulae in spreadsheets and can sequence procedures using control software. However, only higher attaining pupils can create good quality presentations and utilise the more advanced features of software, for example, when using spreadsheets for advanced modelling. GCSE results in 2004 were below average and significantly lower than in 2003. Girls achieved slightly better results than did boys, but no pupils achieved A* or A grades. The main factors contributing to these results were major disruptions in staffing, a change from GNVQ to GCSE courses and the limited time allocated for teaching a dual award GCSE. Current standards seen in Year 11 are average overall and achievement is satisfactory. In classes where staffing is stable and specialised, standards are above average. Design skills are good and pupils can work independently of the teacher, applying a range of skills across several software applications. Standards in other classes, where design skills are not so well developed, are average. The extra support which teachers are making available to pupils – including at weekends and holidays – is helping raise standards of achievement.

66. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Despite the use of non-specialist and supply staff during a period of staff turbulence, satisfactory standards have been maintained because of the very good behaviour, motivation and attitudes of pupils in all years and the very structured nature of the materials and tasks pupils are set. Non-specialists and supply staff are provided with very good support by specialist staff. Examples of very good and good teaching were seen during the inspection, where specialist teachers demonstrated a very good understanding of the importance of focusing upon pupils developing appropriate skills as well

as knowledge and understanding. However, because of the lack of secure knowledge in non-specialist teaching, teachers too often set tasks that are undemanding and do not stretch pupils to the full. Very good use is made of interactive whiteboards and teachers make good use of the teaching space available to instruct pupils away from the computers.

67. Leadership and management are satisfactory and have improved significantly since Easter with new appointments. There is now a clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve standards. Good teamwork and high expectations are already improving teaching. However, there is not yet a full complement of specialist teachers in the department.
68. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Accommodation and resources have improved. All pupils now take GCSE in Years 10 and 11.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

69. Overall, pupils have average ICT skills which they use competently in their other subjects when given the opportunity to do so. Their use of a range of resources including digital technology and film editing equipment is very good in performing arts. Year 10 and 11 pupils make very good use of composition software in music; Year 7 to 9 pupils use keyboards well for sequencing. Pupils in design and technology use computers very well for design and manufacturing, particularly in engineering and resistant materials. The use of computers in art and design is unsatisfactory. In English, mathematics, geography, French, religious education, PE and citizenship, the use of ICT is satisfactory but more could be achieved if the school had more computers. In the main, pupils use computers for research and for word processing although in some departments some teachers encourage the use of e-learning for homework and revision. In mathematics there is good use of graphical calculators. Projectors and interactive whiteboards are being used to enhance teaching in those classrooms which have the technology.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision in geography is improving in response to new leadership and very good teamwork.
- Marking and assessment are very good and show pupils what to do to improve.
- Current standards are improving, but GCSE results in the last two years have been low.
- The use of computers and development of fieldwork skills are not well established; consequently few pupils reach above average standards.
- There are very good relationships in all lessons; as a result pupils are confident learners and respond very well to a wide variety of teaching methods.

Commentary

70. Standards in Year 9 are average. Given pupils' below average attainment in geography on entry to the school these standards represent good achievement for all groups of pupils. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the

relationships between physical and human geography, but only higher-attaining pupils use terminology well to explain the formation of coastal landforms. Middle and lower attaining pupils draw accurate climate graphs but their sketch maps and diagrams are untidy and lack annotation. There are too few opportunities for pupils to improve their fieldwork techniques and too few opportunities for

pupils to use computers; consequently few pupils reach the highest standards of achievement. In 2004, GCSE results were well below average. Current standards in Year 11 are average overall and have risen significantly in a short time because of new leadership and the successful drive to improve coursework. All pupils, including gifted and talented pupils and SEN pupils, are now achieving well in response to good teaching. They describe and interpret photographs accurately and use them alongside maps to identify the pattern of land use in towns. In work on physical geography, pupils collect and use data competently to construct graphs to show the relationship between height and rainfall. The work of middle and lower-attainers is less detailed. For example, they do not fully describe how people in countries of different levels of economic development respond to natural disasters.

71. Teaching and learning are good. The best teaching uses a wide range of methods and resources that are well matched to pupils' different needs to engage their interest and enhance their learning. These factors, combined with high expectations, appropriate challenge and clock-driven pace, occasionally result in excellent teaching and learning. There are very good relationships in all lessons and pupils trust and respect their teachers and each other. This creates an atmosphere in which pupils have the confidence to ask and answer questions and to contribute to discussions. Their very good attitudes underpin their good learning and achievement in all lessons. Marking and the use of assessment is very thorough so that pupils know exactly how well they are doing and how to improve their work. Teaching is least effective, though not unsatisfactory, where worksheets are too simple and teachers' explanations are too long so that pupils are less involved in their learning.
72. Leadership of the subject is good and there is a clear vision and plan for further improvement. Since the previous inspection the GCSE results have declined, but the provision is now improving rapidly in response to new leadership. Overall, improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Geography is well managed. Teaching is monitored and good practice is shared effectively; this has created very good teamwork. The subject has the capacity for further improvement. However, a significant barrier to this is that there are insufficient ICT resources in the subject area and the availability of the school's specialist rooms is restricted.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good and focused on raising achievement.
- Pupils have a very positive attitude and work hard.
- Teaching is consistently good in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11 it is very good.
- In some lessons in Years 7 to 9, over-long teacher explanations reduce opportunities for independent work by pupils.
- Assessment is very good and helps pupils improve their work.

Commentary

73. GCSE results in 2004 were below average at A*-C and below the good results of the previous year. This was because the performance of pupils in one of the two groups entered was significantly below prediction. Staff have analysed these results carefully

and a programme of training and teaching review has been put in place. Results from the other group were significantly above average, especially those of boys, with more than three-quarters gaining an A grade.

74. Standards in Year 11 are above average. The coursework of higher attaining pupils is well-above average. They write in a mature style and draw upon a wide range of sources. The majority of pupils have good subject knowledge, organise their written work well and write clear and accurate narratives of historical events. They are weaker at supporting their conclusions with convincing evidence. The achievement of the great majority of pupils, who started the course with below average standards, is very good.
75. Standards in Year 9 are above average overall and those of higher attaining pupils are well above. Most pupils have good knowledge of the themes and periods they are studying. They write clearly and can explain the significance of key events and individuals. They are weaker at explaining how events may be interpreted in different ways from the sources and giving reasons for this. On entry most pupils are average. They make good progress throughout Years 7 to 9 to above average standards. Their achievement is good.
76. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is good overall and on occasion very good. In Years 10 and 11, where there is a strong focus on examination criteria, it is very good. Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to plan effective lessons which advance pupils' knowledge of the past and their ability to take relevant information from sources. Good support in literacy helps pupils to develop good essay writing skills. Pupils are very positive in their attitude to the subject and classroom behaviour is very good. They are interested and often raise their own questions in lessons. This positive attitude makes a significant contribution to the effectiveness of lessons. In some lessons in Years 7 to 9, teachers explain more than they need and there is less emphasis on pupils finding out for themselves. Assessment is very good across all Year groups and helps pupils identify what it is they have to do in order to improve their work. SEN pupils are very well supported by teaching assistants and make good progress.
77. Leadership and management are very good. There is a clear focus in raising standards of achievement. Developmental planning is detailed and sets out objectives for improvement very clearly. Procedures are in place, including staff development, to improve teaching and learning. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. All the good features noted at the previous inspection have been maintained and accommodation has improved significantly.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership has raised the status of the subject significantly in the esteem of pupils.
- The subject is making a distinctive contribution to pupils' personal development through a wide range of extra-curricular enrichment activities.
- Teaching and learning are good though in some lessons the teacher's input is too long.
- Although assessment is satisfactory overall, targets for improvement are not clear enough.

Commentary

78. Standards in Year 9 are average. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are above average. Most pupils have a sound knowledge of the teachings of the religions studied and can make sensible links between beliefs and conduct. They are weaker at giving good reasons for the personal views they express. Higher attaining pupils give thoughtful answers to questions posed in lessons and their attainment is above average. Pupils enter the school with very varied levels of prior knowledge of the religions studied but overall standards are below average. The majority of pupils, including SEN pupils, are making good progress in understanding the main features of religious traditions and their achievement is good.

79. Results at GCSE in 2004 were well above average; all but one of the twelve pupils entered gained a pass in the grades A-C. Pupils did better than predicted, though numbers are too small to make significant comparisons between the performance of boys and girls.
80. Standards in GCSE classes in Year 11 are well above average and achievement is very good. Pupils have good knowledge of the main teachings of the religions they study and can describe how these traditions respond to contemporary ethical questions. They are weaker at supporting their views with good reasons and at discussing alternatives to their own beliefs. Standards for the majority of pupils in Years 10 and 11, who do not take a GCSE course, are above average and they are achieving well. They confidently express their own opinions and beliefs and can relate the moral questions they discuss to their own experiences.
81. Teaching and learning are good overall and on occasion very good. Lessons are carefully planned to encourage pupils to think for themselves. This approach enables pupils of all abilities to play an active part in lessons and many do so with interest and enthusiasm. Specialist teaching is marked by very good subject knowledge and lessons in Years 10 and 11 are planned in such a way to help pupils understand complex ideas and to reflect on their own responses. In a small minority of lessons teachers' contributions are too long, pace slackens, reducing the time planned for pupil activity and for more independent work. Assessment is supportive and encouraging but targets for improvement are not clear enough to help pupils tackle the shortcomings in their work.
82. Learning is enhanced by a variety of very good extra-curricular activities. These include a residential visit to a Buddhist monastery by all Year 10 pupils, a joint environmental project with Muslim pupils from a Bradford school, regular meetings of the philosophy club, the marking of Holocaust Memorial Day and visits from members of religious organisations.
83. Very good, enthusiastic leadership has successfully raised the profile of religious education throughout the school. Management is good. Effective support is given to non-specialist teachers and there is a clear focus on raising standards. Assessment, whilst satisfactory overall, needs further development to help pupils raise their standards of achievement.
84. This is a good department, making a distinctive contribution to the personal development of pupils and the ethos of the school.

TECHNOLOGY

The main focus of the inspection was on all aspects of design and technology in Years 7 to 9 and the double certification GCSE engineering course in Years 10 and 11. Other courses in Years 10 and 11 were sampled. In the sampled lessons, teaching and learning were very good in Year 10 electronics and good in Year 10 graphics. A scrutiny of work in textiles in Years 10 and 11 revealed that well above average standards have been maintained. GCSE results in design and technology subjects have improved considerably since the previous inspection. In 2004, they were above average overall and represented good achievement. Pupils did considerably better in design and technology than in their other GCSE subjects. Results were well above average in electronics and textiles, above average in engineering, food technology and graphics, and average in resistant materials.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are above average and represent good achievement.
- The school is a leader in the new field of GCSE engineering.
- There is a good range of design and technology options at GCSE.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are now all good in Years 7 to 9 and successfully promote good achievement.
- The routine teaching of drawing skills requires attention.

Commentary

85. Current standards in Year 9 are above average and have improved since the previous inspection. The school's Year 9 assessments broadly confirm these standards but occasionally they are generous. Boys' and girls' design and making skills are above average and represent good achievement over three years. Their ability to develop designs and evaluate products is also above average. Folder work is well organised. Competence in the use of hand-tools and machinery is above average as are making skills in terms of precision and finish. Drawing skills are average and not as well developed as other aspects of the subject. Pupils with SEN achieve well because teachers and learning support assistants provide them with effective support.
86. The school is an enthusiastic leader in the field of engineering. In the double award GCSE engineering course, pupils benefit greatly from relevant work placements and links with local industry. Standards are average in Year 11 and above average in Year 10. In the Year 11 groups, all pupils are producing work in the GCSE range A*-G. Half of them are on course to record GCSE successes in the range A*-C. This represents satisfactory achievement but standards have been somewhat depressed by temporary staff absence. Higher attaining pupils have well-developed coursework portfolios containing plenty of evidence of good quality design work. Most pupils have a good background knowledge and understanding of the design process, the use of tools and the properties of materials. They use computer-aided design software confidently to produce nets of products with dimensions. The best products are examples of toolboxes where quality reflects the requirements of GCSE grade A. Weaker candidates know how to design products but their portfolio work is brief and insufficiently developed. A resumption of normal staffing for this course is now enabling pupils to start to make up for lost time.
87. Teaching and learning are good with many very good features. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good and help to create a good learning atmosphere. In Years 7 to 9, lessons are well planned and explanations are clear so pupils know what is expected of them. Occasionally, teachers' oral presentation skills are less than compelling so pupils become slightly inattentive. The organisation of practical sessions is very good and results in an atmosphere of effort and industry. However, the routine teaching of drawing skills across the aspects of design and technology requires attention to improve overall standards further. Marking is very helpful to pupils because it shows them how to improve their work. On the GCSE engineering course in Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning are routinely good. Most pupils are really interested in their work and many are justifiably proud of the good standard of their products. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the engineering industry and of the requirements of GCSE. This enables them to teach with confidence and prepare pupils well for examinations.

88. Leadership and management are good. Morale is good and an air of achievement and success pervades the department. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. The use of computers has been very well integrated into all pupils' work and standards have risen significantly throughout the school. The number of options provides pupils with a very good choice of GCSE subjects. Assessment has improved also and is now good. The school has taken a leading role in the development of engineering at GCSE and is now working with great enthusiasm towards offering A-level work to colleges in the post-16 sector.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

The main focus of the inspection was on art and design, music, and drama. Work in **dance** was sampled. Following the school's successful bid for specialist performing arts status, dance has recently been introduced for all boys and girls in Years 7 to 9, and is now a popular GCSE course. In 2004, GCSE results were below average but represented very good achievement as pupils had started the course from a very low base. During the inspection, one GCSE lesson in dance was sampled in which Year 11 pupils (mainly girls, but including one boy) showed high levels of commitment and motivation to the course. Their standards were above average, and they were achieving very well in response to high quality teaching. Two other lessons were seen, one in Year 7 and one in Year 9. Year 7 boys and girls showed notable enthusiasm as they very successfully developed their basic skills in creating and performing their Lindyhop; Year 9 pupils were more inhibited, although still making very good progress in performing rhythmic sequences based around 'Stomp'. In both lessons, a key feature was the skilled, energetic, and very knowledgeable teaching resulting in very high standards of achievement. The provision for dance is very well led and managed.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are happy to work independently and take responsibility for their own work.
- Tasks set sometimes lack challenge.
- The scheme of work lacks cohesion.
- The tracking of pupils' progress is a strong feature of the department's work.
- The use of ICT for teaching and learning is insufficient.

Commentary

89. Teacher assessments in Year 9 in 2004 indicated average attainment. Standards in the current Year 9 are also average. Boys and girls in Years 7 to 9 achieve satisfactorily because the work is well matched to their capabilities. Pupils gain reasonable knowledge of the work from a selection of artists and cultures. All pupils acquire sufficient skills to express an understanding of a range of artistic ideas. Observational drawing skills are below average. The progress that pupils make in the classroom is supported well by homework. GCSE results in 2004 were close to the national average, as they were at the time of the previous inspection. Boys did not do as well as girls; boys also did less well in art than in their other subjects. Current standards in Year 11 are average and achievement is satisfactory. Pupils have a secure working method that starts with collecting research and preparation in sketchbooks. Pupils select ideas and refine them as final pieces are completed. Standards in observational drawing are weaker and are below average.
90. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers prepare lessons well and use good, clear illustrations and objects to show pupils what is required from them. This means pupils are able to start work promptly because they understand what to do. This includes pupils with special educational needs who also make satisfactory progress. Teachers across the department do not consistently set work that is hard enough, or challenging enough, to ensure that all pupils learn to their full potential. Pupils enjoy

the opportunities to work on topics in which they can express their own ideas and incorporate their personal interests. Pupils' very positive attitudes make this possible. Teachers show classes examples of good attainment at the end of lessons but do not give pupils the opportunity to reflect on what they have learnt. Teachers have undergone professional training in the use of computers for producing electronically derived artwork but this is not developed well enough to help raise standards. Teachers' records show that progress for all pupils is tracked well and that they are set achievable targets. Spoken and written comments tell them how to improve.

91. Leadership and management are satisfactory. New teachers are receiving good support from senior management during the head of subject's long-term absence. The department operates smoothly from day-to-day. There are aspects of the scheme of work that need reviewing to ensure that pupils' learning is sequential and that topics are taught to coincide with pupils' overall development. The subject makes a good contribution to the development of pupils' literacy skills, for example, through expressive writing associated with aboriginal art. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well because of good teaching and their own very good attitudes.
- Good relationships foster in pupils an enjoyment and appreciation of music.
- Extra-curricular activities, instrumental lessons and the additional work of the Furness Music Centre strongly enhance pupils' learning and provide for excellent personal development.

Commentary

92. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2004 indicated an above average number of pupils reaching level 5 but the number reaching the higher levels was below average. Standards in Year 9 currently are average and pupils' achievement is good considering their below average starting points. Most pupils play keyboards with accuracy and confidence and when playing together the majority count carefully, listen well and keep a good sense of ensemble. However, the standard of singing is very inconsistent. Most girls sing in tune but lack a firm tone. Boys find singing in tune very difficult. Pupils at this stage do not use ICT for composition.
93. In GCSE examinations in 2004, all pupils gained a pass and four pupils achieved a grade between A* and C. There were too few pupils to compare reliably with national averages. Pupils from across the ability range were able to study music because, for the first time, it was offered as part of the day time curriculum. As a result standards achieved were considerably lower than those noted at the last inspection when only experienced instrumental players studied after school. However, in 2004 all pupils did as well as expected and several did better. Two pupils achieved a grade higher than their challenging target. Standards in the current Year 11 are also below average, but pupils are achieving well as they began the course with well below average standards. Achievement is supported through pupils' hard work and good motivation. Pupils' recorded performances show technical control of their instruments. A few pupils use changes of volume and speed to play expressively. Others do not do this yet. Compositions using excellent ICT facilities are competent. Pupils understand the principles of shape and structure to provide coherence and variety in their compositions. One or two pupils are adventurous in their use of chords and harmony.
94. Teaching and learning are good overall. There are very good features in most lessons. Pupils enjoy very good relationships with their teachers and behave extremely well. They enjoy music. There are appropriately devised tasks which challenge all pupils including those with special talents and needs, but which allow all

pupils to play together in a performance. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are fully engaged with their work, sustaining their concentration when working on their own or in small groups. In some classes in Years 7 to 9, pupils find this more difficult to do even though the individual support given by the teacher is good.

95. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Leadership and management are now good and leadership has a purposeful vision for the department that all members of the department subscribe to and support. Excellent support and guidance is provided through the leadership and management of the performing arts faculty. Many pupils take part in a very interesting range of groups and over a hundred pupils learn to play instruments in school.

Furness Music Centre

Many pupils also take part in the activities provided by the Furness Music Centre that is housed in the same excellent accommodation. This has greatly enriched the musical provision not only for Dowdales but for the community and many other local schools. Pupils have the opportunity to work with professional bodies such as the Royal Opera House. Orchestras, choirs and groups perform locally and abroad, providing rich and excellent opportunities for pupils' personal development.

Drama

Provision in drama is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in Years 9 and 11.
- Inspirational leadership ensures very good teaching and learning so pupils are very well motivated and achievement is excellent.
- Pupils make excellent progress in developing their confidence and communication skills by taking part in a wide range of drama activities.

Commentary

96. Pupils took an examination in GCSE drama, for the first time, in 2004. Results were above average as was the proportion of candidates gaining grades A*-C. Pupils' very good achievement was particularly commendable because lessons for the course took place after normal school hours.
97. Standards in Year 9 are well above average. This represents excellent achievement as pupils come into the school with overall standards that are well below average. Both boys and girls are keen to do their best, and their very positive approach to the subject makes an important contribution to their achievement. They work very effectively in pairs, groups and as individuals, using body language and facial expression very skilfully to portray different attitudes and emotions. Their speaking and listening skills are well developed and fully utilised. Judgements on performance are frank and knowledgeable. Standards are well above average in Year 11. In episodes from plays, and in short scenes they devise themselves, pupils achieve very high standards, producing sensitive interpretations with very good understanding of character and dramatic effect, and impressive spiritual awareness. Given their well below average standards at the beginning of the course, their achievement is excellent.
98. Teaching is very good and leads to very good learning which is well supported by pupils' excellent attitudes. Because teachers are experienced and enthusiastic they give pupils the incentive to tackle new learning with confidence. Lessons are very well

planned with challenging tasks and all pupils are thoroughly involved in the different activities. Time is used very efficiently and lessons move forward purposefully. Strengths of the teaching also include the very good relationship between teachers and pupils, which results in very prompt responses to teachers' instructions, and the development of pupils' critical awareness through regular, effective assessment of performance.

99. The subject is led and managed in an excellent way. Leadership has an impressive clarity of vision and a determination to enable pupils to discover and develop their talents in performance and production. Lesson activities are enhanced by a wealth of experiences that include large school productions, smaller projects and collaboration with other secondary schools. Improvement since the previous inspection is excellent. As a result of achieving specialist school status for the performing arts, drama is now a very successful subject in its own right with spacious purpose built accommodation and very good resources. All current pupils have drama lessons in Years 7 to 9 and the subject is a very popular choice at GCSE. Pupils have taken part in a national schools' festival organised by the Royal Shakespeare Company and performed in professional venues such as the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester. The subject makes an excellent contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well throughout the school because they are well taught and have very positive attitudes to physical education.
- Leadership and management are good.
- The work of the School's Sports Coordinator in feeder primary schools is raising standards on entry.
- Marking of GCSE work does not give enough guidance to lower attaining pupils on what they have to do to improve.
- Extra-curricular provision is a strong feature and is helping to raise standards.
- The marking of the work of lower attaining pupils in GCSE classes does not help them enough to improve.

Commentary

100. In 2004, GCSE results were average – all candidates successfully completed the course with half gaining A*-C grades. Results were an improvement on the previous year. The course is popular, especially with boys, and many pupils did better in physical education in 2004 than in their other GCSE examinations.
101. Until recently, pupils' standards in physical education when they join the school in Year 7 have been below average. In the current Year 7, however, standards are above average, reflecting the positive impact of the work undertaken by the School's Sport Coordinator (SSCo) in the feeder primary schools. Throughout Years 7 to 9, pupils of all backgrounds, including those with special educational needs, and gifted and talented pupils, achieve well. They make good progress because skilled, enthusiastic teaching stimulates their positive attitudes towards the subject. By the end of Year 9, overall standards are average. In Years 10 and 11, standards in National Curriculum physical education are above average and pupils are achieving well. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to choose from a range of activities, together with the chance to gain accreditation through the Junior Sports Leader award scheme; this maintains their interest and enthusiasm well. Participation rates of both boys and girls are good and support their progress well by ensuring continuity in their learning. Standards in current GCSE physical education are average overall, although stronger in practical work, such as basketball and athletics. Pupils show good

commitment to their GCSE studies and given their attainment at the beginning of the course are achieving well. Standards in the use of technical vocabulary are below average for all pupils.

102. Teaching and learning are consistently good throughout the school. Teachers are very knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and plan their work well with clear expectations of their pupils. Relationships are very strong and both boys and girls respond positively to the manner in which they are taught. In the most successful lessons, teachers ensure that pupils take responsibility for their learning, share clear learning goals so that they understand what they are learning and why, and regularly question them to check on their progress and understanding. Key strengths in these lessons are the high level of challenge and the strong focus on learning. Pupils of all abilities learn quickly and achieve well when the pace is purposeful, when challenging tasks extend them fully, and when well-focussed questions ensure that pupils recognise the key features of performance. Not all lessons are as effective – some are slow to get underway, and resources are not always closely matched to the needs of lower attaining pupils. In GCSE work, the checking and marking of most pupils' work is good, but expectations are not always consistent and the marking of the work of lower attaining pupils lacks rigour and provides too little guidance for improvement.
103. The subject is well led and managed, and there is a proper focus on improvement and development; however, systems for monitoring and evaluating subject and teacher performance require developing. Performing arts specialist status has added impetus to the school's overall provision for physical education and dance, and much needed improvement to facilities is imminent. Learning and achievement are enhanced by a very good provision for extra-curricular activities, reflecting the strong commitment of staff to their roles, and these are popular with boys and girls. Links with the community, and with local clubs and schools, are developing well, in particular, through the work of the School's Sports Coordinator. However, the lack of a suitable, dedicated base for theory work is hindering GCSE development. Since the last inspection, standards and the quality of teaching have been sustained effectively, and progress is satisfactory.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

The vocational focus for the inspection was leisure and tourism. Work in **Youth Award Challenge (ASDAN)** was sampled. One lesson was seen in Year 11. The course is well structured and is being effectively managed. Teaching and learning are good and pupils are achieving well.

Leisure and Tourism

Provision in applied leisure and tourism is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results and standards have been consistently above average and occasionally well above average.
- The inadequate time allocation restricts opportunities for work-related learning.
- Teachers' subject expertise and experience of course requirements enable pupils to produce coursework of good quality and achieve well.
- The use of computers in lessons to promote pupils' independent learning skills is not fully developed.

Commentary

104. Applied leisure and tourism is a new GCSE subject and the first examination results in 2004 were above average. At the present time overall standards are above average

and achievement is good for both boys and girls. Speaking and listening skills are above average. Higher attaining pupils achieve very well and the quality of their coursework on customer services and marketing is very high. These pupils demonstrate logical thinking skills in analysis and evaluation that enable them to explain in detail how industries like small airlines

can, for example, improve their customer services. Work of lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, is below average. Following their visit to the Aquarium of the Lakes their investigations were superficial and their conclusions were not sufficiently substantiated. Nevertheless, they achieve well bearing in mind their starting points. Only half the recommended teaching time is given to this subject; this is a barrier to pupils enriching their learning through vocational experiences, an essential component of the 'applied' nature of the course that distinguishes it from other GCSEs.

105. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The best teaching is very well planned, challenging and uses a variety of interesting learning tasks that fully engage all pupils. In all lessons very good relationships create a relaxed but very purposeful atmosphere so that both learning and teaching flourish. Assessment is used well, so that all pupils know exactly what they have to do in order to improve their standards. Case studies, simulations and role-play exercises are used well to replicate the lack of learning through vocational experience. Computers are rarely used in lessons to support pupils' independent learning because there are no resources in the department and access to the schools' resources are very restricted. This is a barrier to pupils achieving higher standards.
106. Leadership and management at subject level are good because the course is successful. There is a determination and constant drive to overcome the shortcomings of ICT resources and subject time by ensuring that pupils achieve well through good teaching.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

The main focus of the inspection was citizenship. It was not possible to see any lessons in **personal social and health education (PSHE)**, which is taught as part of the Life Course programme. An examination of workbooks, school policies and discussions with pupils and teachers indicated that it is well taught and statutory requirements with regard to sex and relationships education, drugs education and careers are fully met. PSHE makes a valuable contribution to pupils' personal development.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average, and pupils achieve very well because teaching and learning are very good.
- The citizenship programme is very well planned and led.
- Pupils' entitlement to National Curriculum citizenship is fully met, and their work is very well assessed.
- The school's rich tradition of school and community service provides many opportunities for active citizenship.

Commentary

107. Standards of work seen throughout the school during the inspection are above average overall. Pupils have a clear understanding of a citizen's rights and

responsibilities and are well aware of different ways in which views are formed and expressed. These standards are reached because teaching is very good; a very well planned teaching programme and a rich range of opportunities for active citizenship support pupils' learning well. As a result, all pupils respond very positively and make very good progress. The impact of this provision is clearly evident in the pupils' very positive attitudes, behaviour, and maturity – a strong culture of good citizenship is alive throughout the school.

108. In Years 7 to 11 pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, achieve very well because skilful teaching within the discrete programme combines with a wide range of other school experiences to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of citizenship very effectively. Within the programme, the three elements of the subject are drawn together coherently, for example, in topics relating to the local community, democracy, human rights, and political awareness. These are complemented by many opportunities for active participation, including the thriving form and school councils, and extensive charity work; the school's very busy agenda for school and community initiatives notably includes a very successful Tsunami appeal, a democracy day, and a focus on political literacy that included a contribution from a local M.P. These have provided both engagement and information for pupils, together with good opportunities to reflect on their actions as responsible young people.
109. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Within the work seen, pupils were challenged to work in small groups and independently to tackle practical problems involving real issues. Teaching is imaginative and the variety of approaches used, generate a high level of interest. Consequently pupils progressively develop their knowledge, understanding and skills as they become informed young citizens. The written work associated with each topic taught throughout the school reveals good depth of knowledge and understanding from pupils of all abilities. Work seen provided good opportunities for extended writing, and standards were above average overall, particularly for higher attaining pupils. Work is regularly marked with good guidance for improvement, and with particular sensitivity to the needs of the lower attaining pupils. Assessment procedures are very good and include pupils' portfolios that gather further evidence of their achievements in citizenship. An imaginative and very effective feature is the Citizenship Charter that links with the school's merit system, and is awarded for pupils' contributions to the life of their form, school, and community.
110. Leadership and management are very good overall, providing a very clear direction for the subject and its contribution to whole school life. The vision and planning for the development of the subject are very good as is the commitment to equal opportunities and pupils' personal development. The course is very well planned and resourced; teachers of citizenship are well supported and pupils' work is effectively monitored. However, the subject leader has too little opportunity to keep track of the quality of teaching and learning in lessons. Links with other subjects are well established, particularly with PSHE and the humanities. Excellent progress has been made in auditing contributions from other subjects; specific topics have been identified that support pupils' citizenship development, although this contribution is, at present, incidental rather than explicit.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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