

INSPECTION REPORT

OAKLANDS SCHOOL

Montgomery Way, Winsford

LEA area: Cheshire

Unique reference number: 11504

Headteacher: Mr K D Boyle

Lead inspector: Mr J Morris

Dates of inspection: 10th – 12th January 2005

Inspection number: 272971

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Special
School category: Community
Age range of pupils: 11 – 16
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 117

School address: Montgomery Way
Winsford
Cheshire
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Telephone number: 01606 551048
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Appropriate authority: Governing body
Name of chair of Mrs A Parry
governors:

Date of previous 6th December 1999
inspection:

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Oaklands School serves the whole of the county of Cheshire. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs with moderate learning difficulties stated to be their most significant difficulty. However, a small number of pupils also have severe learning difficulties, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties or speech or communication difficulties. There are slightly more boys than girls. Nearly all the pupils are from white British backgrounds and none have English as an additional language. In line with their learning difficulties, the attainment of pupils is well below that expected for their age when they enter the school. There are two classes in each of the five year groups from Year 7 to Year 11 and these are organised by academic ability.

The school is an active member of the Winsford Education Partnership and is involved in the Young Enterprise initiative. In 2004 it received a Diana Princess of Wales Silver Award and National Lottery Awards for All.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
23696	Mr J Morris	Lead inspector	Information and communication technology Art and design Design and technology French
9348	Mrs M Le Mage	Lay inspector	
10099	Mrs S Lewis	Team inspector	English Geography History
20165	Mr A Lemon	Team inspector	Science Religious education Music
17681	Mr R Sharples	Team inspector	Mathematics Physical education Personal, social and health education and citizenship

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective school, which is much improved since its last inspection. This is largely because of the positive impact of the very good leadership of the current headteacher. Leadership of other key staff and management are good. Teaching and learning are good. Consequently, all pupils achieve well. The school provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Pupils achieve well in most subjects because of the school's determination to raise standards, the growing range of accreditation opportunities and the provision of individualised learning programmes;
- Pupils underachieve in science in Years 7, 8 and 9 because of weaknesses in the teaching and curriculum;
- The headteacher very effectively steers and supports the work of the school and there is good teamwork;
- Pupils' attitudes to school, their behaviour and their personal development are all very good;
- There are some very good features to the teaching which result in pupils being highly motivated in most lessons;
- The curriculum is enriched very well by additional learning opportunities, particularly in the arts;
- There are very good links with the community;
- The arrangements to assess what pupils know, understand and can do, do not result in clear individual pupil targets;
- Teachers do not develop the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) well enough through other subjects.

Improvement since the last inspection in December 1999 has been good. There have been very significant improvements with regard to the identified issues related to leadership and management. Attendance is much improved. There are now no exclusions when there was a large number previously. There has been satisfactory improvement in relation to the school's provision for pupils with additional special educational needs and assessment but these remain areas for development. Partnership with parents has improved well. There have been considerable improvements to the accommodation although it is still only just satisfactory overall. The number of support staff has increased significantly. All of these improvements have had a positive effect on pupils' academic and personal progress.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

All pupils achieve well overall. They achieve well in English, particularly in speaking and listening, mathematics, ICT and religious education. Achievement is unsatisfactory in science in Years 7, 8 and 9 but very good in Years 10 and 11. All pupils achieve very well in

personal, social and health education and citizenship. There are very positive indicators in art and design, French, music and physical education. This achievement results from the very good leadership, good quality teaching and good learning opportunities. Pupils are highly motivated to learn and appreciate their own and others' successes. The school is providing an increasingly wide range of opportunities for pupils to achieve recognised accreditation, including GCSE, and the results compare favourably with those of schools of this type nationally.

Pupils' qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good. Because lessons and other activities are well organised and capture their interest, pupils have very positive attitudes to school and behave very well. They make very good progress in their personal development. Attendance and punctuality are good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is good. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have high expectations that pupils will succeed in their work and behave well. Assessment is satisfactory. The grouping of pupils in each year group into two classes based on ability is effective and the teachers know the pupils well. However, there is no whole-school system to provide clear individual targets which are known and understood by the pupils. The curriculum is good and it is enriched very well particularly in the arts. The care provided for the pupils is good. The introduction of a School Council and school prefects is having a positive impact on pupils' involvement in the life of the school and their sense of responsibility. Partnership with parents is satisfactory and this is a significant improvement. Partnership with the community, through joint working with a wide range of other services, is very good and partnership with other schools and colleges is good. Given that the school serves the whole of the County of Cheshire this is to the great credit of the staff. The accommodation is much improved but is still just satisfactory and the staff have to work imaginatively to try to overcome the deficiencies, particularly with regard to the library and physical education.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good overall. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. He has played a major role in the considerable improvements in the past three years. The leadership of other key staff and management are good. There is a strong sense of teamwork and common sense of purpose in the school. Governance is good. Statutory requirements are met.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents have very positive views of what the school provides for their children and the progress that their children make. Pupils are very positive about school.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Raise standards in science in Years 7, 8 and 9;
- Develop a systematic whole-school approach to assessment and individual target setting;
- Develop a more rigorous approach to the reinforcement and extension of the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT through other subjects.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Pupils' achievements during their time at the school are good overall. All pupils make good and sometimes very good progress and a small but significant group achieve standards close to others of their age in mathematics, English and art.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make good progress and achieve well in almost all subjects because of the good teaching and the relevance of the learning opportunities provided.
- Achievement is strongest in speaking and listening and in pupils' personal and social skills because of the very good use of probing questions, very strong relationships and very good role models provided by staff.
- The school has recently extended its opportunities for recognised accreditation to offer a wider range of qualifications for both less able and more able pupils.
- Value added results and the school's own data demonstrate the school to have improved standards considerably over the last two years.
- Achievement in science is unsatisfactory overall because of limitations in the teaching, assessment practice and management of the subject in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- The accommodation limits what can be learned in some subjects, particularly physical education.

Commentary

1. Pupils achieve more in most subjects than at the time of the last inspection because of the number of key improvements in the school's work. Pupils' achievements were previously judged as satisfactory and are now good overall. Previously, weaknesses in leadership and management and in responding to pupils' special educational needs reduced the effect of the good teaching and limited the progress that some pupils made. Except in science, pupils' achievements have been considerably strengthened and in a number of subjects achievement is now very good. This improvement is because of:
 - the good teaching and learning, with some very good features;
 - the very good knowledge that most teachers have of the pupils;
 - the improvements in the curriculum and in the assessment of pupils' needs;
 - good development of most subjects through improved subject leadership;
 - stronger monitoring of all aspects of the school's work.
2. In English, mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT) and religious education pupils make good progress and achieve well, including in their award bearing courses. Many pupils achieve the higher levels in their Entry Level Certificates and in 2004 30 per cent of pupils gained a GCSE pass grade in mathematics. This is because of a high degree of staff expertise and the school's careful grouping of pupils and planning of work. The National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy have been integrated well into programmes and teaching approaches. Good consideration is currently being given to the Key Stage 3 Strategy and the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is particularly well adapted to the needs of the pupils. The recently published value added data supports inspectors' views that standards achieved have, and are continuing

to, improve since the last inspection and particularly since the new headteacher has arrived. It demonstrates pupils to be making good and sometimes very good gains during their time at the school. However, even more could be achieved if there was a more whole-school planned approach to the development and use of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in other subjects.

3. In science the pupils achieve less well. Although pupils make very good progress in their last two years at the school because the teaching is expert and programmes are made interesting and relevant, they achieve too little during Years 7, 8 and 9. This is because the teaching is not planned well enough and is not informed by any meaningful assessment of what pupils know and understand and now need to learn.
4. Pupils achieve very well in their personal development and some have started work on a citizenship award. There are very positive indicators for pupils' achievements in art and design, French, music and physical education. Very good teaching and very well designed experiences highly motivate and challenge the pupils. A small group of pupils take GCSE art and this suggests very good achievement by, and a high level of commitment from, these pupils. Similarly the school is extending its range of award bearing courses for both less able and more able pupils to ensure that it is challenging itself and pupils as much as it can. In all other subjects standards achieved are at least sound and often good. Achievement is particularly strong in speaking and listening. Very good support by teachers and teaching assistants, in all subjects, challenges pupils to use more mature and appropriate vocabulary and to take account of their listeners' needs. Pupils make much progress in the ways in which they respond to and present their own points of view. This impacts very well on their personal and social skills, attitudes and behaviour in which they also achieve very well. However, the limitations of the accommodation and particularly the library and the hall mean that in some aspects of their learning, pupils do not achieve as much as they could, because they cannot have as broad a range of opportunities as others of their age. For example, they have limited independent learning opportunities because of the smallness of the library and some aspects of physical education have to be modified or are not taught.
5. There is no difference in the progress and achievement of different groups of pupils. Those with additional special educational needs achieve well because of the very strong relationships and knowledge teachers have of pupils. The strong personal support from teachers and teaching assistants and the careful grouping of pupils promote their achievement well. However, the current format for and use of individual education plans are not effective in raising standards further. Targets are often considerably wide ranging and do not always make clear enough to teachers what pupils should now be learning. Similarly, aspects of the school's accommodation limit pupils' achievements despite the very good ways that some staff try to find to support library and personal study skills and aspects of the physical education curriculum.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The attitudes that pupils show to their learning and their behaviour both in and out of school are very good. The pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is very good overall. Attendance and punctuality are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils put a great deal of effort into their work and are really interested in the learning activities the school offers.

- All the pupils are treated with respect and are provided with every encouragement to express their ideas and opinions and this has a very positive effect on behaviour.
- The opportunities for the pupils' cultural development, their understanding of moral issues and chances to develop their social skills are very good and those for spiritual development are good.
- Attendance has improved well since the last inspection.

Commentary

6. Improvement since the previous inspection, when all the major judgements in this area of the school's work were good, has been good. Because of the effective planning of interesting activities in lessons and the good quality of the teaching, the pupils show a high level of enthusiasm for learning and concentrate very well on their work. They try their best to complete their work in lessons independently and are very keen to complete additional work at lunchtimes and at home. The pupils are very willing to listen to the opinions of others in their group and are encouraged to give well-thought answers to the challenging questions that are effectively posed by the staff. They work very sensibly and are accepting of the advice they are offered.
7. Relationships between the pupils and the staff are very good and there is a very welcoming and secure feeling in the school. The school sets high expectations for acceptable conduct and these expected standards of behaviour are consistently applied by all the staff. Any minor disagreements between pupils are dealt with immediately and effectively. Consequently, pupils' behaviour is very good in lessons and around the school. The success of the school's current approach to promoting good behaviour is demonstrated by the fact that there were no exclusions in the year prior to this inspection. In contrast, at the time of the previous inspection the rate of exclusions was unacceptably high.
8. Although the School Council has raised bullying as an issue there was no evidence of this during the inspection and many pupils stated how happy they were in school. The school has very good systems in place to ensure that all the pupils' contributions are valued and that they have somebody to talk to in confidence.
9. There are good formal and informal opportunities throughout the day for pupils to develop their personal and social skills appropriately. For example, in dance sessions pupils gain self-confidence through working with a partner. Pupils are polite and co-operative in lessons and around school. They are reminded constantly of the need for good manners and are set a very good example by the staff. The pupils have a very good understanding of right and wrong and are very aware of the needs of others. This awareness is reinforced through the support that the school provides for a number of national charities and organisations in the local community. For example, a group of pupils assisted in the design and construction of a pond dipping area for people with physical disabilities at a local country park.
10. There are plenty of learning opportunities planned to enhance cultural development, particularly through music and art activities. Links with a school in South Africa, via the Winsford Education Partnership, provide the chance to develop an understanding of life in a different country. Assemblies make a good contribution to the pupils' spiritual development through the celebration of the achievements of others and by providing opportunities for reflection. At times pupils demonstrate considerable sensitivity for

others and amazement at their own achievements, such as during a Year 10 English lesson when they watched a video of themselves performing in a play.

11. Attendance at the school is good and has improved significantly since the last inspection. Pupils feel comfortable and secure in the school and this contributes greatly to their levels of attendance. The school monitors attendance closely and is rigorous in its classification of unauthorised absence. There are a range of initiatives in place to encourage good attendance and high quality support is given to pupils who find regular attendance difficult to sustain.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	4.9	School data	1.6
National data	8.2	National data	1.8

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is good overall. Teaching and learning are good, with very good features. Assessment is satisfactory. The curriculum is good and enrichment is very good. The care provided for pupils is good. Partnership with parents is satisfactory, with the community is very good and with other schools and colleges is good.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good overall. Assessment is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Nearly all lessons are characterised by good teacher knowledge of the subject and the pupils' needs and there is a high level of pupil motivation and participation.
- The support staff are making an increasingly important contribution to pupils' learning.
- The teaching and learning in science are unsatisfactory in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- There is no whole-school system to involve pupils in understanding their key targets.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 46 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
2 (4%)	17 (37%)	18 (39%)	7 (15%)	2 (4%)	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.

12. Teaching and learning are good overall. This is in accord with the findings of the previous inspection and recent local education authority monitoring visits. However, the percentage of lessons judged to be very good or excellent has increased slightly. This is an indication of how the considerable improvements in other aspects of the school's work have had a positive impact on the quality of the teaching.
13. Teaching and learning were good or very good in all subjects inspected in depth apart from science where there was a marked difference between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. In Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning in science are unsatisfactory because not enough attention is given to individual pupils' needs and the delivery of experimental and investigative activities does not result in pupils learning effectively. Examination of longer-term planning shows a lack of a systematic approach and pupils' work shows that they have not made sufficient progress over time. In sharp contrast, teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are very effective in meeting the different needs of pupils of different abilities and enables them to successfully solve problems on their own and with others. Tasks are challenging but understood by the pupils and consequently they work hard and with purpose.
14. The common strengths of the many lessons graded good or better are the teachers' very good knowledge of the subjects they teach, the very good relationships and the pupils' involvement and interest. Because the staff have high expectations of both work and behaviour, pupils are enthusiastic and hard working. Furthermore, teachers know pupils well and match tasks well to different pupils' needs. Consequently, the pupils understand the tasks set and successfully complete a good amount of work in most lessons. The very good lessons in English, mathematics, science in Years 10 and 11, ICT, French, music, physical education and religious education were all characterised by the teachers involving all pupils in whole class discussions.
15. At the time of the last inspection there was a very small number of support staff and they were employed predominantly in Years 7, 8 and 9. The headteacher and governors have successfully persuaded the local education authority of the value of support staff to

all pupils attending a school of this type. Increased funding has resulted in a recent significant increase in the number of support staff who now work throughout the school. This is having a positive impact in many lessons. For example, support staff made significant contributions to pupils' learning in lessons in English, mathematics, ICT, design and technology and art and design during this inspection. However, in a small number of lessons, particularly those judged to be satisfactory, teachers did not make best use of this important resource.

16. The procedures to assess what pupils know, understand and can do and the use of the resulting information to plan what pupils will learn next is satisfactory and has improved since the last inspection. However, this arises from the teachers' knowledge of the pupils and the effective grouping of classes by ability rather than a systematic whole-school approach. The individual education plans, which arise from the pupils' annual reviews, are not used as an effective tool on a day-to-day basis. Pupils do not always have a clear and accurate understanding of what they need to do next to improve. Teachers, in the main, clearly explain this to more able pupils in Years 10 and 11 following GCSE courses. However, this is not always the case for less able pupils. Pupils have good targets specific to English. However, not all teachers are aware of these targets so they are not able to use this important information in developing literacy skills through their subject.

The curriculum

The curriculum is good and is very well enriched through many additional activities. The accommodation and resources to support the curriculum are satisfactory overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school provides pupils with a wide range of learning opportunities, which are well suited to the capabilities, needs and interests of all pupils.
- All the extra opportunities for learning, in school and beyond, positively support pupils' achievement and personal development.
- Although satisfactory overall, the school's approach to the development of key skills through other subjects is not sufficiently well developed to maximise the pupils' learning.

Commentary

17. Improvement since the last inspection has been good because the curriculum now meets the needs of all pupils and it was previously only satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. The curriculum plans for what to teach pupils in each subject fully incorporate the programmes set out in the National Curriculum, including personal, social and health education and citizenship, and the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. These are well adapted so that there is a good breadth of learning opportunities in nearly all subjects, providing pupils with appropriate challenges. However, science is not developed sufficiently to ensure pupils in Years 7 to 9 are challenged enough by the learning experiences on offer. There is good careers education and sex and relationships education and a good programme of religious education, all making significant contributions to pupils' personal development. Each subject has sufficient time for teaching what is required and the timetable achieves a good balance of learning experiences each week and over a year. In general, the school's accommodation supports the demands of the curriculum adequately. However, the hall is too small to give sufficient scope for gymnastics and indoor games and the library does not provide effective support for independent learning.

18. The opportunities for pupils to improve their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are well provided for in English, mathematics and ICT lessons but to a limited extent in other subjects. The curriculum as a whole is not yet developed sufficiently so that these key areas of learning are supported, where appropriate, in a well-planned and co-ordinated way by all subjects. The lack of an agreed, systematic whole-school approach to planning means that teachers do not always see important cross-curricular links.

19. Teachers know their pupils well and in planning what is taught they give careful consideration to the different and wide-ranging abilities of their pupils. The good number of expert teachers available ensures there is the knowledge and skills to meet effectively pupils' special educational needs. Pupils' individual education plans provide very little in terms of meaningful targets for pupils to achieve and offer little practical help to their teachers. However, each year group is divided into ability sets, which results in most lessons being focused on meeting pupils' needs. This has helped ensure that by the time pupils are ready to leave they have had good opportunities to acquire an appropriate range of qualifications reflecting their capabilities and achievements. This includes well-planned work experience and college courses, which succeed in helping pupils to consider options for the future. The school has successfully responded to some pupils' individual needs with specially tailored programmes. In this respect, disaffected pupils are able to continue with their education, whereas in the past they may have faced exclusion.

20. Visits from groups and individuals to the school are well established and used very effectively to add greater interest and variety to what pupils learn during lessons. The curriculum for the arts, in particular, is very well served by visitors including dance groups, musicians and poets. This makes a considerable contribution to pupils' appreciation of arts from many different cultures, such as Caribbean steel band music and African and Indian dance. Many more opportunities take place for pupils to go out to places of interest. In art and design and music, for example, groups visit orchestras, theatres and galleries in Liverpool and Manchester. The number of visits to outdoor activity centres is on the increase and pupils value greatly the experience of living together and walking and climbing in rugged areas of the country. More locally, pupils have formed a group they call 'Community Kids' who have taken on projects such as making a garden and patio at a Social Services adult day centre and working to improve the environment along the River Weaver.

Care, guidance and support

The school provides a good standard in the care, welfare, health and safety of its pupils. It provides good support, advice and guidance for its pupils, based on the monitoring of their achievements and personal development. The extent to which pupils' views are taken into account is also good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of relationships between adults and pupils is very good, adding to the pupils' self-confidence and trust in staff and enabling them to develop well.
- Throughout the school, pupils receive good support to help them make progress in their personal development.
- Transfer to the next stage in pupils' lives is very well supported by the involvement with Connexions.

- The arrangements for pupils joining the school are thorough and sensitive, minimising any anxieties pupils may have.

Commentary

21. Throughout the school pupils are almost unanimous in saying there is at least one adult in the school in whom they feel they can confide. This is a clear indication of the very good relationships between pupils and adults throughout the school. Adults are patient, kind and very supportive and pupils feel very secure and willing to contribute ideas in lessons. This has a very positive effect on pupils' feelings of self-worth, their attitudes to their learning, and school life in general. The consistent, supportive way in which the pupils are dealt with at all times underpins the quality of these relationships and enables pupils to make good progress.
22. Throughout the school, pupils are very well known by all members of staff. Adults have an in-depth knowledge of how the pupils respond, in terms of their personal development, to all opportunities presented to them. For instance, for every lesson, staff record the effort pupils have put in to the activity and their level of co-operation with other pupils and staff, as well as other aspects of their response. This enables patterns of behaviour to be spotted quickly, showing perhaps that a pupil does not try as hard in one subject as in another or responds less well at a certain time of day. From this analysis the school puts appropriate strategies in place to enable the pupil to improve further. There is a consistent focus on meeting the needs of each pupil, enabling them to make progress as individuals, significantly develop their social skills and engage in the process of learning. The School Council is in its infancy and as yet has had limited influence on school issues. However, the Council members are full of ideas and are becoming more involved in the development of the school in a regular, consistent way.
23. Advice and support are further developed by the involvement of two advisers from Connexions. They spend significant amounts of time in school running the Youth Award Scheme as well as group and individual advice and guidance sessions for the older pupils. They develop a sense of trust and security for the pupils which results in Connexions staff becoming a source of genuine support and guidance to the pupils preparing for life after they leave school.
24. The arrangements for pupils joining the school are very sensitive and thorough. New pupils are visited in their existing school and have several opportunities to spend time in Oaklands before they start. They usually meet their transport driver. Parents appreciate that they are involved in this process. Consequently, the staff have a clear picture of individual pupils' needs before they transfer. In some cases, however, the academic needs of the pupil are not so clearly known due to lack of information about the pupil's achievements at the previous school.
25. By ensuring that the care and welfare of pupils are given a very high priority, the school maximises the benefit pupils can gain from the educational opportunities offered. Effective child protection procedures are in place and all adults working in the school are aware of them. All incidents and accidents are recorded thoroughly and parents are fully informed. All statutory checks are undertaken and health and safety are given high priority in lessons and throughout the school day.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has satisfactory links with parents, good links with other schools and colleges and very good links with the local community.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school values the views of parents and responds positively to them.
- The school's links with the local community enhance the pupils' learning opportunities very well.
- Home-school diaries are used well to promote a full knowledge of pupils and ensure a consistent approach to their development.
- Very good support is given to pupils transferring from one stage of education to the next.

Commentary

26. There has been good improvement in the school's partnership with parents the last inspection. It was previously judged to be unsatisfactory but is now satisfactory overall and there are some good features. All parents who expressed a view during the inspection process are supportive of the school. They find it open and approachable and feel valued. These views are endorsed by the inspection. The school is responsive to parents who express concerns over their children and works with parents to resolve them. Where the school raises concerns, it informs and involves parents sensitively so they can work together for the benefit of the pupil.

27. The school actively works to discover parents' views and has, for example, carried out surveys using questionnaires. Parents are involved in the important initial meeting before their child starts at the school and, thereafter, have the opportunity to contribute further at regular reviews. Because the school serves a very wide geographic area, there is very little opportunity for parents to have casual, informal contact with the school. To address this, the school tries to attach meetings to events which will be well attended by parents, such as the Christmas Concert and Sports Day. This clearly demonstrates the value the school places on the views of parents. The school is working towards providing parents with more information about their child's daily life at school, such as the names of all staff in school and of their child's classmates, as an aid to conversation at home. At present, opportunities for parents to be fully involved in their children's learning at home are rather limited. Parents support the learning of their children through involvement in regular homework and support for fund-raising events, many for charity. However, the school has plans to develop information to enable parents to be more involved in their children's learning. The school always meets a parent's request to come in for any reason and, if necessary, members of staff visit parents at home.

28. Extensive use is made of the local facilities, services and organisations to extend and enrich the curriculum for all pupils. There are frequent visits out of school and visitors into school, which stimulate and broaden pupils' understanding. The school develops specific learning experiences for the pupils which also make a lasting contribution to the community. Recently, such projects have included the development of a garden at a Community Day Centre and a pond-dipping area in Weaver Parkway. The local business community supports the school very well by offering worthwhile work experiences and motivational work placements to pupils and also gives employment to former pupils of the school. It also offers advice to the profitable businesses run by older pupils as part of the Young Enterprise Scheme. The school leadership team is part of

'Take 5', an initiative whereby managers in business and various services are linked together to the benefit of both organisations.

29. The school has good links with other schools, particularly through the Winsford Education Partnership. This sharing of expertise and work on common areas for development benefits all pupils. Oaklands School is increasingly used, informally, as a centre of expertise by mainstream schools in the area who want advice on aspects of special education.
30. On a daily basis there is a good dialogue between parents and staff through the home-school diaries. The content is very individual and relevant to the needs and abilities of the pupil. Some diaries are primarily reminders about homework and school activities whereas others detail the pupil's reactions to certain situations. This enables both school and home to respond to daily events. This is clearly beneficial to the personal development of pupils.
31. There is an effective well-defined process to support pupils when they leave school. Good links with colleges and employers result in every pupil having the opportunity to experience college life, complete a college-based course and participate in a two-week work experience placement. For some pupils there are extended motivational work placements and individual educational programmes to maximise their chances of success in the next phase of their life.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good overall. The headteacher has a very clear vision and high aspirations for the school. The leadership of other key staff is good and has some very good features. Management is good. Governance is good and is an improving aspect of the school's work.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good improvement in the leadership and management of the school, particularly that of the headteacher, has had a positive impact on standards and the overall quality of the work of the school.
- Leaders provide very strong role models for other staff and pupils in the way they fulfil their own roles and ways in which they support staff and pupils.
- Governors are very supportive of the work of the headteacher and staff.
- The school's finances are very well monitored and very well tied to school priorities.
- Overall leadership of the curriculum is good. However, there are some variations in the quality of the leadership and management of the subjects.
- Monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning are now well established and performance management links very well into plans for improving the school's provision further.
- Data collected on pupils is now being analysed to set whole-school targets but more could be done in analysing the progress and achievements of different groups.

Commentary

32. Improvement since the last inspection, when leadership and management were unsatisfactory, has been very good because the key issues from that inspection have been effectively addressed. The detailed and comprehensive school improvement plan, drawn up in consultation with staff, governors and others, is very well focused on the

school's immediate and longer-term needs. Staff feel that they are listened to and have a clear voice in school improvement. Roles and responsibilities are more clearly defined and link directly into school priorities. Performance management is in place and is being used very effectively to raise standards.

33. There has been much change at senior management level since the last inspection. The headteacher has been in post for three years and has strengthened and developed changes he began to implement as an advisory headteacher to the school prior to this. He, staff and governors have worked very well together to move the school out of the local education authority's 'school causing concern' category and to the good provision in almost all aspects of its work now. He has been particularly successful in creating a very strong ethos for learning in the school, building staff morale and team spirit through a period of relentless and sometimes difficult change. There is now a culture of self-evaluation at every level. Where there have been difficulties the headteacher and governors have taken advice and implemented appropriate plans. Staff, parents and pupils value the headteacher's enthusiasm, determination and commitment.
34. The governing body is fully committed and highly supportive. Governors know the school very well and are aware of its main strengths and weaknesses. They have worked very well with the local education authority and the headteacher in driving change forward and supporting the school through this. They understand their role well and ensure all statutory requirements are met. The committee structure, reports from staff and the visits of governors are enabling them to fulfil and develop their 'critical friend' role.
35. The headteacher is ably supported by a highly committed senior management team. The newly re-formed team is already working very effectively together and with staff to ensure everyone understands the school's priorities and feels involved in determining and working towards them. Clarification of roles and line management, clear guidelines for co-ordinators and assignment of time for their posts mean that almost all leadership and management of the curriculum and individual subjects are good and often better, as, for example, in English, mathematics and religious education. There is, however, some variability in this, for example in science where leadership and management are unsatisfactory. In addition, although there are strengths in the way in which information about pupils is shared with staff, some aspects of the school's approach to the management of pupils' special educational needs, such as the purpose and use of individual education plans, are not effective.
36. Performance management and the monitoring of teaching and learning are being used very well to raise standards and to develop staff skills. Where weaknesses have been identified, very effective support programmes have been put in place. Staff value very highly the assistance that has been provided and are clear about the ways in which it is improving both the school and their own teaching.
37. School improvement planning is very good overall. It is most effective in the setting of whole-school priorities, where there is now a very strong planning process and targets are clearly costed. Occasionally the ways in which the school will monitor and evaluate the impact of its actions and spending decisions are unclear, particularly in relation to the impact on standards. Almost all subject co-ordinators have action plans in place, but the quality and effectiveness of these are variable and sometimes they do not cover everything they should. For example, there is inconsistency in planning the promotion and use of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum.

38. The school has improved its assessment procedures and the collection of data. As a result it is beginning to look more critically at its achievements. For example, it is broadening the range of GCSE and other qualifications available to ensure that the most able pupils and those with the most complex difficulties are being challenged even more. However, although its analysis of data is sound, the system for setting targets is rather broad at present and needs further breakdown.
39. Financial planning to support school priorities is very good. The highly competent administrator has recently become a member of the senior management team and is making a useful contribution. The governors and headteacher have been tenacious in securing additional funding for the school but are still working within very tight budget restrictions. Through clear prioritisation, involvement in other initiatives and very careful budgeting, they have improved provision and resourcing in a number of areas of the school's work. The limited finances available over a number of years, however, have resulted in some deficiencies in resources, for example the ICT facilities available in some subject classrooms and resources for history.
40. Best value principles are applied very well for purchases. The school's growing contacts with other schools and better gathering and analysis of its own data ensure that a spirit of challenge and comparison is in place and this is having a positive effect, for example on target setting. Expenditure per pupil is low for a school of this type.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	895,084	Balance from previous year	8,572
Total expenditure	886,147	Balance carried forward to the next	17,509
Expenditure per pupil	7,991		

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Work-related learning

The provision for work-related learning is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' understanding of the world of work is successfully promoted both within school and beyond.
- The school uses work placements effectively to engage and involve pupils who have some negative feelings about their education.

Commentary

41. The school's provision for work-related learning meets statutory requirements and the opportunities for pupils to learn about work and through work are sufficient and well organised. Careers education is good and the school, in a strong partnership with Connexions, provides planned work experiences with a variety of local employers for all pupils in Year 11. This is well monitored and evaluated, particularly by employers and pupils, with the result that pupils gain the necessary insights into the needs and expectations of the work place.

42. A small number of disaffected pupils have further work experience as part of a programme designed to keep them involved in education, which entails them working with an employer for one or two days each week for an extended period. This is proving to motivate them to continue learning and to remain on course for a smooth transition to employment, training or college when they leave school. Many other pupils have additional opportunities for work-related learning through practical projects in the locality such as the 'Community Kids' group.
43. The teaching of work-related learning observed in personal, social and health education involved Year 9 pupils in a good exploration of how the level of business in the locality affected its economy. While there are examples of subjects across the curriculum making similar contributions, for example health and safety in the work place in science and in design and technology, activities that promote work-related learning in all subjects are yet to be organised into a co-ordinated programme.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

44. English was inspected in full and is reported on below. **French** was sampled and it is not possible to make a reliable judgement on provision overall. However, there are very positive indicators for teaching, learning and achievement from the observation of one Year 9 lesson, a brief discussion with the subject co-ordinator and examination of classroom displays. French is taught throughout Years 7 to 11 and there are good opportunities for accreditation. Planning and organisation are good. In the lesson seen the teacher very successfully promoted new learning and consolidated existing knowledge of vocabulary from the café unit. All pupils were thoroughly engaged in challenging speaking and listening tasks and completed a written task well.

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Speaking and listening are very well promoted in English lessons through very good teaching and the use of drama.
- A good range of literature is used very well, in conjunction with drama and role-play, to support pupils' skills in, and attitudes to, reading and their understanding of what they read.
- Systematic support for spelling improves pupils' confidence and results in good progress but there could be more opportunities for independent writing, including the use of ICT.
- Teaching is lively and expert and teaching support assistants contribute well to pupil achievement, although sometimes they could be used more effectively.
- Assessment data is used well to guide teaching in English, although some teachers of other subjects are unclear as to pupils' current literacy needs and skills.

Commentary

45. On entry to the school many pupils are at the early stages of reading and writing. The good teaching, good range of learning opportunities and careful assessment and documenting of pupils' progress and skills mean that their achievements in English are good overall. All groups of pupils make progress at a similar rate. This is a good improvement since the last inspection when achievement was satisfactory.

46. In all subjects as well as English, there is very strong support for speaking and listening skills and pupils steadily expand their vocabulary and the ways in which they express themselves. The very good use of drama throughout the school and the very strong emphasis on listening to others means that pupils gain confidence and make very good progress in presenting their views and giving explanations and reports about what they are learning. Good use of key vocabulary in other subjects and in English lessons means that pupils make very good progress in their use of appropriate English terms, such as 'simile', 'character', 'style' and 'narrative'. The skills they gain in speaking and listening in English are built on well in other lessons, such as in a Year 10 science

lesson and an art lesson about a visit to a gallery. These improved speaking and listening skills contribute very well to their personal and social skills and awareness.

47. The school's positive response to and adaptation of the National Literacy Strategy ensure that reading and writing skills are systematically explored and developed. However, this is better for reading than for writing, where there could be more systematic use of ICT throughout the school to support pupils' more independent writing. Although there are some very good examples of ICT being used for writing, time constraints and the teaching approaches used mean that too often pupils copy-type what they have said from their teacher's writing, rather than use other ways of recording what they want to say themselves.
48. Pupils' reading skills are systematically developed and monitored throughout the school. There is very good use of group and individual reading to support this. A very good range of reading materials, adapted texts, stories and non-fiction texts is used. Homework and parental support further contribute to this effective development of skills. Some very good use of dramatic play reading was observed at both key stages. Pupils in a Year 10 lesson using Willie Russell's *Our Day Out* read the play with enthusiasm and enjoyed the humour. When watching the video of the film they were thrilled to hear actors saying the words they had just read. They watched and listened intently because of this, noticing changes from their own script. The very good support available from teachers and teaching assistants and the careful selection of materials, mean all pupils gain confidence in their reading and almost all attempt to read with expression. Less able pupils increase the range of words they recognise and the ways in which they sound out words. Some more able pupils cope very well with simple versions of classics and demonstrate good understanding of what they have read by the end of Year 9. All pupils make good gains in their understanding and in the ways in which they think about what they have read. Many say how much they enjoy reading and are keen to improve further. Not all pupils know their own reading or other English targets, although they do know what they must do to improve their work for the externally accredited courses they are taking.
49. Spelling is systematically supported throughout the school and pupils' handwriting and presentation of their work improve well, because of the high expectations and clear guidance given by teachers. While pupils make satisfactory progress in their writing skills in Years 7, 8 and 9, they make good progress in Years 10 and 11, where the accredited courses they follow ensure that they complete very focused writing tasks. However, sometimes teaching is too focused on finishing the assignment rather than providing systematic support for planning and developing writing.
50. Teaching and learning are good overall. They are often very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and relationships with pupils and know their pupils very well. Good use of assessment data and strong monitoring of pupils' progress mean that tasks are well suited to pupils' needs and to helping them to move on. However, this data and the pupil targets are not known by all teachers who teach them and this means some work in other subjects is not as well matched as it could be.
51. English is very well led and managed by two committed and very experienced co-ordinators, who monitor standards, teaching and the curriculum well. They have a very clear vision for the subject and high expectations for pupils. The curriculum is good and has some very good features. It has been strengthened by very good use of age-appropriate texts and materials and by good assessment practices being put into place. Visits and visitors, including a poet and theatre groups, as well as visits to the locality

enrich the curriculum considerably. English makes a very strong contribution to the pupils' cultural, social and moral development. Although there are good quality text resources, insufficient use is made of computers in English lessons, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9. In addition, the accommodation at times restricts the ways in which groups can be organised as there are few small group teaching rooms. The Years 10 and 11 room is small. The library is too small and inadequate for supporting library and personal study skills.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

52. This is satisfactory overall. Although staff extend and support pupils' speaking and listening very well in most subjects there is less consistent support for literacy. This is because there is no formal policy. Although teachers are required to identify any opportunities in their planning, they do not always have the information they need to ensure they are pitching work at the relevant level and working on appropriate targets with the pupils. Opportunities are thus missed for reinforcing writing, spelling and reading strategies.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good planning results in lessons that meet the needs of all pupils.
- The implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy has had a positive effect on the way that lessons are taught and because of this pupils have a very good attitude towards learning.
- All pupils achieve well and make good progress.
- Very good leadership of the subject results in thorough planning of appropriate learning activities and good methods to check pupils' progress.
- Planning for the use of mathematics in other subjects is under-developed.

Commentary

53. The good achievement and progress that all the pupils make are a direct result of well-planned and organised teaching. Teaching and learning are good overall. Effective use is made of a range of questions that matches the individual needs of the pupils and provides them with an appropriate level of challenge. The fact that activities are carefully planned to meet the needs of all the pupils ensures that they are interested and concentrate well for the duration of lessons. If pupils do not understand they feel confident to ask the teacher or support assistant to explain. In the most successful lessons, pupils successfully solve problems based on real-life situations, which they are able to relate to. Two Year 11 lessons timetabled at the same time were observed. The more able group were successfully working on the calculation of averages, based on a discussion of the race times of the athlete Kelly Holmes, as part of their GCSE coursework. The group of less able pupils were writing the times represented on a clock face with reasonable success. In both cases the activities were appropriately planned to provide the correct amount of challenge to meet the pupils' needs. Year 7 pupils made very good gains in basic numeracy skills because of their very good relationships with the adults, immediate marking and verbal feedback and rapid pace to the challenging activities.

54. All staff successfully use the guidance for, and the structure of, the National Numeracy Strategy to teach their lessons. This has a positive effect on producing lessons of a consistently high quality. Good consideration is given to the different capabilities of learning difficulties of pupils in the planning of both units of work and individual lessons. Teachers regularly check pupils' understanding of set tasks. Support staff are making an increasingly important contribution to pupils' learning. As a result, all pupils make good gains in their knowledge and skills in lessons and over time. There has been an increase in the numbers of more able pupils who are successfully obtaining nationally recognised qualifications. The 2004 GCSE and Entry Level Certificate results reflect the very good achievement of the Year 11 pupils in that particular group.

55. There is very good leadership and management of the subject. The knowledgeable and enthusiastic subject co-ordinator uses planning and assessment information effectively to determine future development priorities. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

56. This is satisfactory overall. Although pupils use their numeracy skills in other subjects, such as when using spreadsheets and databases in ICT and measuring and weighing in design and technology, there is no specific planning to ensure that this occurs in a structured way. The pupils have insufficient opportunities to practically apply the skills taught in mathematics lessons in a wide range of situations.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In Years 7 to 9, lessons are not planned well enough for pupils to have effective learning opportunities.
- The recent introduction of very effective teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 is accelerating the rate of pupils' progress.
- While the good provision observed at the time of the previous inspection has not been maintained, weaknesses are recognised and being tackled successfully.

Commentary

57. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 enjoy their science lessons and their personal development benefits from the many opportunities in lessons to work together in small groups. Their relationships with staff and with each other are very good and they behave very well. However, in planning lessons in Years 7 to 9 not enough attention is given to pupils' different capabilities and learning needs and there is insufficient thought given to how investigative activities are organised to ensure pupils will achieve successful outcomes. The assessment of pupils' progress lacks rigour and offers too little towards adapting the curriculum to their needs. The longer-term curriculum planning does not have the level of detail to give it the necessary coherence to ensure pupils learn in a steady, systematic way. As a result, pupils make slow progress and by the end of Year 9 they have underachieved. While the format of planning is sound, within it the relationship between what pupils are meant to learn and the activities and resources they are given is not strong enough to achieve lesson aims. When Year 9 pupils were given the task of making a model of the solar system, they faced a barrier to achievement from the technical problems of assembling the components. This prevented them from spending enough time considering the important points about planets and stars and how gravity acts to hold the system together. In addition, teaching is not driven sufficiently by the objectives set for lessons. There is too little focused questioning of pupils about what they are learning and they are over-helped in arriving at answers. As a result, pupils gain little of the knowledge and understanding being aimed for.

58. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is very sharply focused on challenging pupils to think for themselves and to solve problems independently and collaboratively. Pupils have to work hard and they are confident in managing the demands made of them. This leads to pupils achieving very well in lessons. Each lesson is planned with considerable precision, linking securely what pupils will learn to the activities arranged. A strong grasp of pupils' needs leads to very effective teaching methods, in particular a clear and careful approach to explaining experiments and developing pupils' understanding of their purpose. Very good subject expertise is put to use to ensure scientific method and language are stressed in how pupils tackle tasks. As a result, experiments are carried out and recorded methodically by pupils, leading to them learning, for example, how acid reacts with different metals and which metals therefore are best for transporting acids. In achieving this it was a short but creative step for pupils to access and begin interpreting the Periodic Table.

59. The quality of provision in science, overall, has deteriorated from that reported at the time of the previous inspection, leaving improvement since then unsatisfactory. The

leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory because they have been, until very recently, ineffective in halting the slide. The standards achieved by Year 11 pupils in the Entry Level Certificate in science are much lower compared to the same pupils' results in English and mathematics. It is a situation recognised and being tackled by the senior management team. The recent appointment of a senior member of staff with science expertise is proving beneficial in this respect and most noticeably in the recent rapid rise in standards achieved by pupils in Years 10 and 11.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well in the key skills of ICT such as word processing, data handling and using the Internet.
- Teachers successfully motivate pupils' desire to learn and involve them in the good management of resources.
- There is a good subject action plan with clear emphasis on raising standards and improving resources.
- The use of ICT in other subjects is being improved as part of the National Strategy for Key Stage 3 but is not yet implemented consistently by all teachers.

Commentary

60. Skills and knowledge are predominantly taught through well-planned and structured units of work which the pupils work through at their own pace and this helps them to make good progress. It provides a simple and effective way of ensuring that all pupils receive their curriculum entitlement but complete work at a good rate in relation to their individual needs. For example, at the time of this inspection, Year 11 pupils had completed between two and five tasks in their Internet Online activity books. In relation to their capabilities, pupils throughout the school show a good understanding of how to input and change the appearance of text and graphics.

61. Teaching and learning are good overall. This judgement is based on observations of lessons which ranged from excellent to satisfactory and the examination of pupils' work, particularly in Years 9 and 11. The best lessons featured very good teacher/pupil relationships including effective use of humour, challenging question and answer sessions and rapidly paced individual tasks. As a result, Year 9 pupils made substantial gains in using a database to answer questions. Similarly, Year 8 pupils learnt a lot about basic word-processing skills and reinforced literacy skills when using alphabetical order as part of the task.

62. The school does not have a permanent separate ICT suite and this is largely because of security issues. However, the same room is used to good effect for all ICT lessons. Pupils are responsible for transporting the computers from the secure store to the teaching room and setting them up for use. This contributes significantly to their personal development in terms of taking responsibility, and showing care for, expensive equipment. This does not result in any loss of teaching time. There is a good number of computers for use in the ICT room and around the school in other subjects and a good range of other devices such as digital cameras, digital microscope, sensors and Roamers (a programmable device). Major resource improvements in terms of interactive whiteboards and projectors and a new computer network were ongoing at the time of this inspection.

63. Leadership and management are good. The deputy headteacher gives a strong lead to the development of the provision in ICT and this is clearly detailed in the subject action plan and other documentation. He has a very clear vision of how the subject should be taught and how pupils' achievements are to be recorded and measured. The new assistant headteacher is a valuable new member of the ICT team. Improvement since

the last inspection has been satisfactory as many good and very good features have been maintained.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

64. Whilst there are some positive aspects to the use and development of ICT skills in other subjects, particularly mathematics, they are only satisfactory overall and could usefully be developed. Although lesson plans often include references to the use of ICT, practice varies from very good to unsatisfactory. Teachers do not always make the best use of the available modern technology resources as an aid to developing pupils' learning in other subjects and to reinforce the pupils' ICT skills. However, the co-ordinator and assistant headteacher are using the National Strategy for Key Stage 3 as a vehicle to improve this aspect of the school's work.

HUMANITIES

65. Religious education was inspected in full and is reported on below. History and geography were both sampled so it is not possible, therefore, to make judgements about the quality of provision.

66. In **history**, pupils' achievements are at least satisfactory. The curriculum provided ensures that pupils build on their previous knowledge, experience and skills. The relatively new co-ordinator is enthusiastic, has good development plans for the subject and leads and manages the subject appropriately. There is good support from the school and local education authority. Effective policies have been developed with a good scheme of work in place and programmes fulfil the requirements of the National Curriculum. Lesson observations, records and pupils' work confirm teaching and learning to be at least satisfactory overall. Some good examples of support for history in other subjects such as English were seen. A lesson exploring the poetry of the First World War reinforced pupils' understanding of the sights and events of the period. A good range of visits supports pupils' understanding. Resources are adequate, although more artefacts are needed and the lack of a dedicated room means it is difficult for the co-ordinator to organise these.

67. **Geography** is well led and managed by a committed co-ordinator who has clear development plans for the subject. One lesson was observed and the teaching and learning were good. Pupil records, discussions and work confirm achievement in geography to be good. Pupils develop a good awareness of features of the environment and use appropriate vocabulary to describe them. They contrast features of their own and other localities and identify different areas of the United Kingdom and of the world well. The locality, residential visits and projects, such as those with the Weaver Parkway Rangers, support this very well. Lesson plans and work seen show that pupils learn well about natural features and the experiences of people who live in other countries. The curriculum is designed to motivate and to link into other areas of pupil study. It allows them to study areas of particular interest such as sport around the world. Lessons are clearly planned and organised with interesting activities that help pupils to develop their skills and understanding. Although a good range of recording activities is carried out these would be more effective if they were tied in more tightly to what is known about individual pupils' literacy levels and needs. Good support is given for pupils' understanding of key vocabulary.

68. **History** and **geography** are currently taught at Key Stage 3 only, which is all that is required nationally, although the co-ordinators are exploring ways of teaching an

accredited humanities course in Years 10 and 11. Planning documents and discussions with co-ordinators for both subjects reveal effective plans to be in place to strengthen and develop the provision.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good expertise in teaching, along with the very positive relationships with pupils, leads to high quality discussions on religion.
- There is a good curriculum which is very well enriched with many additional activities.

Commentary

69. The very good rapport with pupils in religious education lessons gives rise to lively, thoughtful discussions which all pupils are keen to engage in, and they fully enjoy this involvement. This makes a considerable contribution to their spiritual awareness. A very good subject knowledge is used most effectively to stimulate discussion. Lessons get off to quick and interesting starts with very carefully thought out introductions and questions, which are skilfully pitched at a level and in ways making them very relevant to the different groups of pupils. A discussion with Year 9 pupils on the meaning of Lent maintained a strong focus on what it would mean to each pupil to have to give something up. This was extended to them identifying the things they would find most difficult to go without. In doing so, pupils gained a good insight into the meaning of sacrifice and the teacher was skilful in using the pupils' feelings to understand what Jesus faced in his 40 days and nights in the desert.

70. Achievement is good overall and, in discussions, pupils reveal a good level of cultural awareness in their interest and knowledge of different religions and their places of worship. As lesson discussions are extensive, there is only a little time for other activities, particularly reading and writing about religion. While teaching and learning are good, there is not enough attention given to pupils researching topics independently or opportunities for them to instigate and lead discussions.

71. Very good leadership of religious education arises from the co-ordinator's strong commitment and active involvement with a number of local organisations and projects to broaden the teacher's knowledge and pupils' learning opportunities. This also gives a positive incentive to close and regular monitoring of the curriculum and ensures it is up to date. There has been a satisfactory improvement since the last inspection and the good provision observed then has been maintained. The good breadth of learning opportunities provided in lessons is very well enriched by links with local churches and trips to Manchester and Liverpool to visit a wide variety of places of worship. While there are few opportunities and finances are stretched to draw upon a variety of people of different faiths from the locality, Christian representatives visit school to lead assemblies and take part in festivals. In the recent past a Hindu dance group also paid a visit to the school.

TECHNOLOGY

72. It is not possible to make a judgement about the provision in **design and technology** overall. However, there are positive indicators for the pupils' achievements both in designing and making projects using resistant materials and in food studies. In the two lessons seen, teaching and learning were good. Year 9 pupils showed a good understanding of symbols used in clothing when learning laundry skills and achieved well in two different tasks, plaster casting and making a pop-up card, in the workshop. Work on display shows that pupils design and make a good range of products and that the teaching is carefully planned to give them a sense of success and satisfaction. There are good opportunities for accreditation in Years 10 and 11, which shows that pupils' achievements are at least good in their time at the school. The two teachers work well together in planning and assessing pupils' work. Accommodation and resources are good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

73. Art and design and music were sampled and it is not possible to make an overall judgement about the provision in these subjects.

74. In **art and design**, there are very positive indicators for pupils' achievements from examination of work on display and in their individual portfolios, including projects towards GCSE accreditation. Teaching and learning were good in the two lessons seen and resulted in all pupils producing imaginative, individualised first pieces of work at the start of new projects. The co-ordinator, another teacher and teaching assistants work very well as a team in planning and organising the units of work and individual lessons. Pupils complete a very good amount of work using a good range of techniques and media. Sketchbooks are used effectively to explore ideas and develop skills. Pupils learn about many different artists and styles from around the world and successfully complete challenging projects. Pupils working towards GCSE accreditation show considerable commitment by doing additional work at lunchtimes and at home and some of the three-dimensional work is particularly impressive. Visits to local sites of interest and art galleries and participation in exhibitions in Manchester and Liverpool clearly motivate the pupils and give them a great sense of personal achievement.

75. In **music**, teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are very good and lead to these pupils achieving very well. The teaching observed combines a considerable knowledge and skill of music with a full awareness of pupils' needs, resulting in pupils having exciting and challenging learning experiences. The relationships developed with pupils are very good, leading to inspiring pupils' confidence to perform to the best of their ability and feel enthusiasm so that they enjoy discovering a breadth of musical experiences. In each lesson pupils have the opportunity to listen to and appreciate music as well as sing and explore aspects of composition. In an excellent Year 7 lesson, pupils rapidly learnt to create rhythms and to modulate them creatively. The pace was very brisk and by the end of the lesson the group had learnt to tap out a four-beat rhythm with their feet while adding a different rhythm clapping with their hands. This was a considerable achievement of concentration and understanding, which fully challenged pupils' physical co-ordination.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

76. It is not possible to make a reliable judgement about the provision in **physical education**. Discussions with the well-informed subject co-ordinator, scrutiny of curriculum planning documents and pupil assessment records suggest there are many good features. In a very good Year 7 lesson and in several short observations of

sessions the pupils were seen to be making good progress in developing skills and in the amount of physical effort they put into activities. This is because of the good specialist knowledge of the teacher who has high expectations of the pupils' performance. There is a wide range of well-structured activities, including bowling and curling to assist in the development of the pupils' hand/eye co-ordination. Leadership and management are good. The co-ordinator has devised a very comprehensive system to record the ongoing achievements and progress that the pupils are making in all areas of the subject. The evidence indicates significant improvement since the last inspection. In order to extend the existing extensive range of activities, the school is hopeful that discussions with a local comprehensive school, that has recently been granted a specialist sports status, will provide the pupils with improved access to better facilities. The present indoor accommodation is unsatisfactory and seriously limits the ability to provide the range of activities that is necessary to meet the pupils' needs. Furthermore, the fact that the hall acts as a thoroughfare means there are constant interruptions to lessons.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A good range of additional opportunities is provided alongside the specific personal, social and health education and citizenship lessons to extend the pupils' learning.
- The good teaching in lessons provides the pupils with plenty of opportunities to express their opinions and ideas.

Commentary

77. Pupils achieve very well in their personal and social development. This is because the specific teaching of personal, social and health education has improved well since the last inspection and a good programme on citizenship has recently been introduced. In addition, the opportunities that are provided to enable the pupils to develop their personal and social skills through other subjects and other school activities including assemblies and in 'real life' situations are a strength of the school's provision. Pupils are encouraged to participate in helping others in the local and wider community through fund-raising activities and practical assistance. A group of pupils have helped to construct a garden area at a local day centre.

78. The good teaching is correctly focused on the development of a range of independence skills that the pupils will require when they leave the school. There is a deliberate emphasis on the promotion of thinking skills and pupils are encouraged to express their opinions and ideas. They are asked searching questions and, with good support from the teachers and support assistants, give well thought out answers and are able to rationalise the solutions to simple problems. Pupils are able to decide why they need to save money and can discuss issues that they like and dislike about their local neighbourhood. They understand the reasons for voting in elections and have conducted a secret ballot to elect pupils to the School Council. The curriculum includes sex and relationships education, and representatives of the local police visit to discuss the dangers of taking drugs. Because of the good blend of school-based lessons and involvement in community initiatives, the pupils display very good signs in their development as responsible members of the school and wider community. There is

good joint co-ordination of personal, social and health education and citizenship. At present, the co-ordinators are carrying out a useful review of the curriculum content of both these areas.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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