

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **OXCLOSE COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

Oxclose Village, Washington

LEA area: Sunderland

Unique reference number: 108864

Headteacher: Mr M Foster

Lead inspector: Mr I Hodgkinson

Dates of inspection: 9<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> May 2005

Inspection number: 273554

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 - 16  
Gender of pupils: Mixed  
Number on roll: 775

School address: Dilston Close  
Oxclose Village  
Washington  
Tyne and Wear  
Postcode: NE38 0LN

Telephone number: (0191) 2193 777  
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Appropriate authority: The local education authority  
Name of chair of governors: Cllr Mrs Linda Williams

Date of previous inspection: November 1999

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

Oxclose is smaller than the average secondary school, but broadly similar in size to most 11-16 schools. It is in its first year as a specialist visual and performing arts college. Numbers on roll are about the same as they were at the time of the last inspection, although the school is drawing many more pupils from outside its immediate catchment in the heart of Washington, a New Town to the west of Sunderland. The school has a strongly growing reputation, which partly explains why its numbers have been broadly stable and have risen since 2002 in the face of a dramatic fall in school rolls locally. It is set to grow still further with the closure of another nearby secondary school.

The socio-economic backgrounds of the pupils are generally below average, although the proportion entitled to a free school meal is broadly average. Three pupils are in public care. Pupils are mostly White British. There are very few children from minority ethnic groups. Three pupils with English as an additional language are at an early stage of learning English, with Cantonese and Japanese as their first languages. Pupils' general attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is now average overall, and the school is not short on higher attainers as it was at the time of the last inspection. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and the proportion with statements of need are above average. The school is a well-equipped local centre for provision for pupils with physical and medical disabilities, and there are 12 pupils with physical disability on roll. Of other pupils requiring

support beyond that which can be given by the school alone, most have moderate learning difficulties or social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Seven pupils have specific learning difficulties, six a speech or communication disorder, two a hearing impairment, and seven have autistic spectrum disorders.

The school is part of the Sunderland *Excellence in Cities* programme, which among other things funds a team of learning mentors and supports provision for the able and talented. The school contributes teacher time to a local post-16 consortium which operates through partner schools and college at present, and which will soon acquire a site as a sixth form centre. Many awards have been received by the school in recent years, including Artsmark Gold, Investors in People, Investors in Careers, Sportsmark, Healthy Schools Silver, and the School Achievement Award.

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM**

<b>Members of the inspection team</b>			<b>Subject responsibilities</b>
20588	Mr I Hodgkinson	Lead inspector	
9417	Ms E Owen	Lay inspector	
19414	Ms J Fisher	Team inspector	English
30996	Ms A Higginbotham	Team inspector	Mathematics
18076	Mr H Dodd	Team inspector	Science
25377	Ms L Brown	Team inspector	Art and design Special educational needs
24894	Mr C Petts	Team inspector	Design and technology English as an additional language
13734	Mr H Davies	Team inspector	Geography
4317	Mr K Madrell	Team inspector	History
30046	Mr R Parker	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
31649	Mr R Marsden	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
33014	Mr A White	Team inspector	Music
23030	Ms C Runyard	Team inspector	Physical education
20719	Ms A Fraser	Team inspector	Religious education Citizenship

The inspection contractor was:

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE INSPECTION REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**Oxclose is a good school**, with a number of very good and outstanding features. It is improving rapidly. It brings together pupils with a broad range of needs and abilities, and provides them with education of a good quality. The pupils achieve well, because their progress is checked regularly and very carefully and they are given advice, support and guidance of a high quality. The school gives **good value for money**.

#### The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. He is very well supported by the senior team, and they share an exceptional vision for the school's improvement.
- The rate of improvement in the school's overall GCSE and GNVQ examination results has been among the best in the country.
- The systems the school has created for the assessment of pupils' progress are very good: they allow the school to clearly understand the strengths and weaknesses of its pupils.
- The curriculum, especially for pupils in Years 10 and 11, is very good, and very well supported by staffing, accommodation and resources of a high quality.
- The rate of improvement in pupils' performance has not been consistent across all subjects, so that pupils' achievement varies between subjects and between Years 7-9 and Years 10-11.
- Attendance rates are below average, and the absence of some pupils holds back their achievement.
- The school's links with the community and with other schools and colleges are exceptionally strong, and have done much to improve opportunities for staff and pupils. The very effective implementation of the visual and performing arts college plan has further enhanced the quality of such links.
- Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) and for design and technology is very good. There is very good provision for performing arts in Years 10-11. Provision for religious education in Years 10-11 is unsatisfactory.

The school has made very good improvement since its last inspection in 1999. Exceptional improvement has been made in GCSE and GNVQ results, rising from below the national average to well above average. Improvement against the key issues raised at the last inspection has been good. In particular, the school's assessment systems are now a key strength in supporting pupils' achievement. Pupils' behaviour is now good in lessons and around the school and the school's strategies for managing behaviour work effectively.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2002	2003	2004	2004
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	C	A	A	A*

Key: A\* - very high; A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average.

*For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

**Standards achieved overall are good.** Pupils join the school with average levels of attainment, and leave with GCSE and GNVQ results which are well above average. Results in design and technology have been consistently strong, and results in ICT were high in 2004. Achievement is good overall for all groups of pupils, including the able and talented and those with special educational needs (SEN). Pupils achieve very well to get such good examination results by Year 11, given their Year 9 test results. Achievement is not as strong in all subjects or at all years, though. Achievement over Years 7-9 is satisfactory, but performance in national tests by the end of Year 9 has been average overall, and well below average in relation to similar schools. Performance in mathematics has been below average in Year 9 tests and at GCSE, although there has been sustained improvement over recent years and achievement is now satisfactory. Achievement is unsatisfactory in religious education in Years 10 and 11.

**Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good overall.** Their attitudes to learning and behaviour are good. Pupils behave particularly well around the school in breaks and at lunchtime. Their moral and social development is very good and most develop as responsible citizens. A small number of pupils can be disruptive but that is mostly handled well by teachers. Attendance is unsatisfactory, and below the national average. Punctuality to school and to lessons is, however, satisfactory.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education provided by the school is good overall. Teaching is good.** Teachers plan very effectively to help pupils reach their targets. A key feature of the very good assessment system is the way it enables pupils to see what needs to be done to improve further and to learn to take responsibility for that. Teachers intervene quickly when pupils show signs of underachievement, and the high quality support and guidance they and mentors and support staff give keep most pupils on track. The school's curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is tailored very closely to the aspirations and aptitudes of individual pupils. Excellent links with the community and with other schools and colleges help pupils settle in when joining the school in Year 7 and considerably broaden the opportunities available to pupils when choosing what to learn at ages 14-16.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are very good.** The headteacher provides outstanding leadership, and has provided the exceptional vision and innovation which has produced such strong improvement in recent years. He is very well supported by the very good leadership of the senior team and other key staff. The governance of the school is good. Governors are highly supportive of the school, but some statutory requirements are not met: the annual report of governors to parents and the school prospectus are missing some required information, and pupils do not have a daily act of collective worship. Management is mostly very effective, but has yet to ensure that improvement in all subjects matches that in the best.

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

Pupils and parents on the whole have great admiration for the school and value its work: they rate the quality of teaching and school leadership very highly, and feel the school works hard to meet pupils' individual needs. Inspectors agree with these positive views. The



only general area of concern for pupils and parents was the access to and state of the toilet facilities. The school has taken appropriate action to separate year groups in their use of the toilets, to ensure cleanliness and to reduce misuse. A general upgrade of toilet facilities will be a high priority in the imminent school refurbishment.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Improve pupils' attendance.
- Improve the quality of provision in religious education in Years 10 and 11.
- Take steps to ensure all subjects and year groups improve equally well and that weaker subjects learn from the best practice in the school.

**And, to meet statutory requirements:**

- Meet requirements for a daily act of collective worship and for reporting information about the performance of the school to parents.

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

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

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

**Standards achieved overall are good.** Pupils join the school with average levels of attainment, and leave with GCSE and GNVQ results which are well above average. Achievement is good overall for all groups of pupils, including the able and talented and those with special educational needs. Pupils achieve very well to get such good examination results by Year 11, given their Year 9 test results. Achievement is not as strong in all subjects or at all years, though. Achievement over Years 7-9 is satisfactory, but performance in national tests by the end of Year 9 has been average overall, and well below average in relation to similar schools. Performance in mathematics has been below average in Year 9 tests and at GCSE, although there has been sustained improvement over recent years and achievement is now satisfactory.

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

- GCSE and GNVQ results are well above average, and have shown an exceptional rate of improvement.
- The very good achievement of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is very well supported by an assessment system which enables teachers to intervene early when pupils seem likely to miss their targets, and by a very good curriculum which responds well to individual needs.
- Results in design and technology have been consistently strong, and results in ICT were high in 2004. Pupils continue to achieve very well in these subjects.
- Results in Year 9 national tests have been weak in comparison to schools which take children of a similar level of prior attainment.
- Achievement is unsatisfactory in religious education in Years 10 and 11, and standards remain below average at Year 11 in history and modern foreign languages.
- Pupils' skills in using computers to support their learning are very good by Year 11.

#### **Commentary**

1. The attainment of pupils on joining the school in Year 7, as measured by their test results at the end of primary school, is in line with the national average. This is also the case for those who gained the higher Level 5 and above in their end-of-primary-school national tests. This profile has remained fairly constant over recent years.
2. Up to 2003, pupils' performance in Year 9 tests had remained pretty constant in relation to national standards since the last inspection. English results were relatively lower than at the previous inspection: in 2002 and 2003 they were average compared with all schools nationally rather than above average. Science results remained in line with the national average and mathematics consistently below average. Mathematics and science results, however, showed consistent improvement from 2001-3. Mathematics results continued to improve in 2004, and have improved at twice the national rate over the last three years. The school's targets for achievement in mathematics were exceeded in 2004, although results remained a little below the national average. English and science results fell in 2004, but there can be no national comparisons in English because of unavailable national data. In the case of science, there was a substantial and unexpected fall in the proportion of pupils gaining the nationally-expected Level 5 and above, and which, through detailed analysis by the science department, has been attributed to poor performance in one aspect of the new-style national tests.

**Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2004**

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	33 (33.8)	N/a (33.4)
mathematics	34 (33.4)	35.5 (35.4)
science	31 (34.2)	33.1 (33.6)

*There were 124 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

3. In comparison with schools which take pupils with similar results in national tests at the end of primary school, overall Year 9 test results were weak from 2002 to 2004 (they were very low in 2002 and well below average in 2003). They were mostly pulled down by relatively very low mathematics results in 2002 and 2003: English and science results were in line with those of similar schools in 2003. National comparisons with similar schools for 2004 are difficult because of the unavailability of national data in English and the exceptional nature of the school's science results.
4. Currently, standards in English, mathematics and science are in line with national expectations by the end of Year 9, representing satisfactory achievement across Years 7-9 in these core subjects. Achievement of pupils overall is satisfactory in Years 7-9. Achievement is good in subjects with a stronger practical component, including art and design, design and technology, music, ICT and physical education. Achievement is also good in geography where pupils are encouraged to develop good investigative and enquiry skills. In other subjects, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. There are currently no large differences overall between standards of achievement of girls and boys or between those of pupils of different attainment levels, but girls have performed better than boys over time in Year 9 tests and the school is right to monitor closely boys' achievement in subjects with a higher literacy component. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress across Years 7-9.
5. Currently there are only three pupils in Years 7 to 9 for whom English is an additional language. Very effective use is made by the school of the local authority English language support service to assess language need, provide staff guidance and specialist support in lessons. All three pupils have acquired sufficient fluency in language to achieve well in the school.
6. There has been a dramatic improvement in GCSE/GNVQ results since the last inspection. Results went from 35 per cent gaining five or more passes at grades A\*-C in 1999 to 71 per cent in 2003 (65 per cent in 2004). The Government's School Achievement Award given to the school in 2003 reflected the school's status as the 16<sup>th</sup> most improved school in the country. Results have been well above the national average for all schools in 2003 and 2004. The school has strongly exceeded most of its GCSE targets. Boys and girls have done equally well, though girls' results are a little better overall by slightly more than the national difference.

**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	65 (71)	52 (52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	93 (96)	89 (88)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	38.0 (38.1)	34.9 (34.7)

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*There were 160 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

7. These GCSE/GNVQ results compare extremely favourably with schools with similar Year 9 test scores: they are very high (in the top five per cent of their comparator group) on most key measures, and represent very good achievement across Year 10 and 11. This is related in part to the weaknesses in Year 9 test performances indicated above, but data which measures pupils' progress from their tests at the end of primary school through to their GCSE/GNVQ results shows that pupils' "value added" across their time in school from Years 7-11 is good.
8. The key to this rapid improvement in GCSE/GNVQ performance has been the school's success in tailoring a curriculum to meet the needs and aptitudes of its pupils. A large range of vocational and applied subjects has been introduced, with mostly high pass rates. Achievement remains good or very good in most of these subjects. ICT GNVQ results have been very strong, including at merit and distinction level, and with over a third of the cohort doing so well in a subject worth four GCSE passes, the impact on average points score is significant.
9. Across other GCSE subjects, exam performance has been more variable. Results in 2004 in ICT, design and technology, physical education and statistics were strong: they were well above average and pupils did well in these subjects in relation to other subjects. Design and technology results have been strong over time. A small cohort of 13 geographers also achieved a high pass rate at grade C and above. Mathematics, French and history results were below average in 2004 (well below in the case of French and history) at grades A\*-C, and have been weak over time. Pupils did less well in these subjects than in others. The school has taken successful action to improve standards in mathematics, history and French. In mathematics and French, there have been changes in leadership and management, along with focused support for teaching and teachers' planning. New staffing in history has led to good, engaging teaching and learning in the subject which is raising standards and should improve results.
10. GCSE subjects generally have high pass rates, and in compulsory national curriculum subjects a high proportion of the cohort gets entered. This is facilitated by the school's very strong systems for monitoring pupils' performance and for intervening to support pupils when they are in danger of not meeting targets. This intervention helps to ensure that boys and girls at all levels of attainment achieve very well across Years 10 and 11. Identified able and talented pupils generally achieve their predicted numbers of A and A\* grades, and a higher proportion of students at the school achieve three or more A and A\* grades than is the case locally or nationally. In some subjects, though, including the high-performing design and technology, a low proportion of pupils get top A\* grades. Pupils with SEN achieve very well in Years 10 and 11 as a result of the support they are given, support which pupils know is flexible enough to respond to their needs when it is required.
11. Overall standards are well above average by Year 11, and across Years 10 and 11 pupils achieve very well, but there remains some variation by subject. Achievement is high in design and technology, ICT and performing arts; it is good in English, science, art, geography, music and physical education. In mathematics, improvements set in place mean that attainment is average and achievement is now satisfactory. Standards remain below average in history and modern foreign languages (French and German) and pupils in Year 11 are still not achieving as well as they should, but there are very positive signs of improvement for pupils in Year 10. A high proportion of pupils study a modern language, so overall more pupils at the school develop some foreign language skills than is the case in most schools. Achievement in religious education is, however, unsatisfactory across Years 10 and 11: the subject does not have a high enough status and in the lead up to GCSE examinations too many pupils miss lessons in the subject to work on other courses.

12. Pupils' good achievement is underpinned by sound literacy and numeracy skills. The school has given good attention to the implementation of the National Strategies in literacy and numeracy, so that pupils' skills are well developed through good planning in many subjects. Pupils' ICT skills are very good by Year 11 and play a significant part in helping to raise the standards of work in many subjects. In vocational and applied subjects in particular, pupils use ICT very well to access information and organise their work. In doing this, they gain very useful skills of independent learning.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND OTHER PERSONAL QUALITIES

Pupils' attendance is unsatisfactory, and in the last reported year was below the national average. Punctuality is satisfactory. Pupils' attitudes are good, and their behaviour is good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attendance was below average during the inspection, and there is not enough up-to-date monitoring of attendance trends.
- Pupils enjoy school and show very good interest in the activities provided.
- Pupils' very good behaviour around school and at lunch and break times is sociable and calm.
- Relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves are one of the school's strengths.
- Pupils' social and moral development is very good.

### Commentary

13. There has been some improvement in attendance during the current school year, but attendance was below average during the inspection week, and up-to-date monitoring of overall trends is not carried out on a regular basis. Registers are not taken in a systematic way at the start of all lessons so that internal truancy is not readily checked. However, for those individuals where a problem with attendance has been identified, a systematic process, in which the education social worker is heavily involved, is implemented which has shown a good success rate and an improvement in most cases. Where pupils are late in the mornings without good reason, detention has now been introduced after two occurrences, which all pupils are well aware of. Attendance is encouraged by awarding those with 100 per cent attendance with a certificate each term.

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	8.1	School data	1.0
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.*

14. Pupils are very supportive of their school and Year 11 pupils summed up their time at Oxclose with comments which included 'have learnt a lot and had fun', 'performing arts have made it very special and offered lots of opportunity', 'good atmosphere, treated fairly, and teachers help with problems'. The school's strong commitment to inclusion and equality of opportunity for all has led to a more flexible approach to the curriculum which now effectively meets the needs of all pupils. The vast majority of pupils behave well in lessons, often very well, and participate in their work with enthusiasm, especially when active learning is involved. A small number of pupils can be disruptive but this is not approved of by their fellow pupils, and

teachers mostly deal with this effectively. Exclusions are very low, and there has not been a permanent exclusion for five years. Exclusion when used is used appropriately.

**Ethnic background of pupils**

**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	Number of pupils on roll	Number of fixed-period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	766	37	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	2	2	0

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

15. Pupils are given the freedom of the whole site and local village centre at lunchtimes, and respond well, behaving in a mature and sociable manner. Any allegations of bullying are taken very seriously and pupils were confident that it would be dealt with effectively. Pupils are very clear that racist attitudes are unacceptable, and feel that all pupils are treated the same by everyone in school.
16. Pupils’ views are sought both in lessons and by their form tutors, and more formally through questionnaires and the school council on a range of issues, including the planned buildings development, fundraising and the healthy schools initiative. The form representatives can pass ideas and suggestions through to the school council via regular meetings.
17. Pupils relate well to each other and their social development is encouraged so that they freely express their opinions and listen to others. They have a very clear sense of right and wrong, and value fairness. Older pupils in school take on a range of responsibilities including helping and supporting younger ones. They are junior mentors when the Year 7 pupils start school and some qualify to instruct others in sport and dance, which they enjoy hugely. Pupils co-operate well together in their work and outside lessons and many pupils highlighted the friendly and secure atmosphere around school. Participation in cultural events and activities has been greatly improved by the performing arts status, and has widened pupils’ opportunities. The school ensures that there are opportunities for pupils to appreciate different cultures, but pupils are generally less aware of aspects of the multicultural nature of British society than pupils in most schools.
18. The values and other personal qualities of pupils with SEN are well developed and their ability to take decisions about themselves has a positive effect on their attitudes, behaviour and achievement. Pupils are allowed to decide when they need additional help in lessons and can go to the learning support area. For example, pupils who took themselves out of mathematics lessons did so realising that they needed more personal support; they came to the learning area, settled down to work immediately and were able to articulate precisely why they feel that they need to be there.

**QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The quality of education provided by the school is good overall. Teaching and learning are good, and teachers plan very effectively to help pupils reach their targets. Very good assessment systems help teachers and the pupils themselves to identify how well pupils are doing and what they need to do to improve further. Pupils therefore learn to take responsibility for improving their own standards. Teachers intervene quickly when pupils show signs of underachievement, and the high quality support and guidance they and mentors and support staff give keep most pupils on track. The school’s curriculum in Years

10 and 11 is tailored very closely to the aspirations and aptitudes of individual pupils. Excellent links with the community and with other schools and colleges help pupils settle in when joining the school in Year 7 and considerably broaden the opportunities available to pupils when choosing what to learn at ages 14 -16.

## Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good. Systems of assessment and the use the school and its pupils makes of assessment information are very good.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good assessment systems help pupils to know the standards at which they are working and what they need to do to improve.
- Assessment information is very well used in most subjects to identify strengths and weaknesses and to intervene when pupils show signs of not meeting their targets.
- Teachers' planning is very good, and often incorporates opportunities to develop pupils' skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT, and their breadth of understanding.
- Pupils learn to take increasing responsibility for their own learning, especially in Years 10 and 11, and are helped in this by the development of very good ICT skills.
- Best practice in teachers' planning, the use of assessment information and the use of resources is not shared by all subjects.

### Commentary

19. Teaching and learning are good in most subjects and good overall. Teachers plan lessons very well to incorporate a range of activities which engage and motivate pupils. In English, mathematics, and science in particular, teachers have become skilled in their use of starter activities at the beginning of lessons to enthuse pupils, and to consolidate and develop their understanding and skills. Teachers and pupils make very good use of available resources in most subjects to significantly broaden pupils' experiences and improve the quality of their work. Pupils use computers to excellent effect in exploring visual effects in art and in media studies, while pupils in GNVQ ICT and health and social care use computers very well to organise and present their work. In subjects where resources are limited and not so well used, learning is not as good. In religious education, there are too few textbooks and artefacts and too little use is made of ICT to stimulate and enthuse pupils for learning. In French and German, no use of ICT to promote learning was seen and there are hardly any books or magazines in the library for pupils' independent use in those languages.

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 115 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
4 (3%)	21 (19%)	55 (48%)	30 (26%)	4 (3%)	1 (1%)	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.*

20. Teachers' planning creates many good opportunities for the development of pupils' skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. The principles of the National Strategies in literacy and numeracy have been applied well in the school. The shortened Key Stage 3 pilot programme in humanities, science and ICT has also created opportunities for pupils to spend more time looking at ways of improving the quality of their learning through, for example, the

development of analytical skills. The school does much to encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own learning, and this has contributed a good deal to pupils' success in Years 10 and 11. For these older pupils, teachers have particularly high expectations, and pupils are offered a good deal of support both in and out of class in meeting their goals. Good teaching has yet to fully secure good achievement in Years 7-9, especially in Year 9 tests, but standards are rising well in most areas.

21. The school's very good systems of assessment mean that teachers know their pupils well and can intervene very quickly when pupils show signs of underachievement. Pupils are given clear attainment targets in all subjects based on their attainment in national tests and adjusted with reference to other test and performance information. Progress against these targets is reviewed regularly and thoroughly. Most subjects make very effective use of assessment information to inform their planning of teaching and learning, and there are particular strengths in the way assessment is used to guide pupils in coursework and assignments in Years 10 and 11. There are some weaknesses in assessment, however. Teacher assessments of pupils' capability in music in Years 7-9 do not take sufficient account of weaknesses in composition and notation skills. Assessment in modern foreign languages is not yet being used well enough to identify areas of weakness and bring about improvements. The quality of day-to-day marking is inconsistent in some subjects, including mathematics. In citizenship, there is not enough assessment of the knowledge elements of the subject against national expectations, which makes it difficult to gauge pupils' progress and monitor the quality of provision. Nonetheless, a real strength of assessment in the school is that pupils in most subjects know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve still further.
22. In design and technology and ICT, there are particularly strong features in teachers' planning, use of resources and use of assessment information; teaching and learning are very good in these subjects, especially in Years 10 and 11.
23. Teachers generally plan well to meet the full range of needs and attainment levels of pupils in their classes, although there are some shortcomings in planning in this regard in history and music. There are many good examples of work which has been planned to extend the able and talented pupils in classes. The teaching and learning of pupils with special educational needs in the main school are good overall and in line with those of other groups of pupils in the school. Teachers take responsibility for the pupils in their classes and structure their lessons to take account of individual needs. They support pupils well through targeted questions, good use of praise and encouragement and well-planned lessons which challenge and enthuse pupils. Pupils with reading difficulties in Years 7 to 9 are withdrawn for 20 minutes each day to follow a structured reading programmes led by learning support assistants, and make good improvements which enable them to work within the normal lessons. Learning support assistants based in the learning support area help those pupils who request help while others assist in practical subjects such as design and technology or science where it is important for the pupils to feel secure in order for them to make progress in their lessons. Pupils approaching external tests and examinations in Years 9 and 11 have the opportunity to use the learning support area to prepare or to have intensive help from support assistants to complete coursework, usually using non-examination lesson time.

## **THE CURRICULUM**

The curriculum is very good overall. There is a good range of enrichment activities. Overall, staffing, accommodation and resources are very good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The curriculum is imaginative, meets the needs of the pupils and is driving up standards.
- The school is influential in promoting a wider range of courses in other local schools.



- There is a very good range of vocational courses on offer to pupils in Years 10 and 11 and the work-related programme is carefully co-ordinated.
- The visual and performing arts college status is already having a positive impact on raising the pupils' self-esteem and interest in the arts.
- Pupils appreciate the PSHE programme, but the quality of teaching varies in consistency.
- Citizenship is not planned sufficiently well in all subjects.
- The programme for able and talented pupils is well co-ordinated and pupils are successful in reaching their potential.
- The school does not meet requirements for a daily act of collective worship.

## Commentary

24. The curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is good overall. National Curriculum citizenship is included in the personal and social education programme, but is not effectively monitored for quality of teaching and content. Drama is taught as an additional subject and is popular with the pupils. A number of subjects (science, ICT and the humanities) are accelerating coverage of the national curriculum to teach it all within Years 7 and 8. The final year has been planned to teach a variety of learning skills that will help pupils with future studies or to begin GNVQ programmes early. It is too soon to measure the full impact, but pupils are acquiring some good learning skills from their revised programmes. There has been a successful implementation of the national Key Stage 3 Strategy. Across all Years, provision to support pupils' literacy skills is effective and well managed.
25. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is of a very good quality and range. Pupils choose from a good range of GCSE and GNVQ options and all pupils take a vocational course. In addition, there are some pre-vocational courses for a small number of pupils who have difficulty coping with a full range of GCSEs. The well co-ordinated pre-vocational courses provide well for the pupils, raise their self-esteem and confidence and pupils' progress is tracked very effectively. The management of the curriculum is very good and ongoing review establishes where things might be improved. A particular feature is the school's willingness to try new and innovative ideas to ensure that all pupils are interested and find a relevant course for their future life. This has resulted in the development of a town partnership that offers additional courses to pupils from all schools. All pupils take a modern foreign language from Years 7 to 11. There is no daily act of collective worship.
26. The school is coming to the end of its first year as a specialist school with Performing and Visual Arts status. The management and planning of the development are very good. Links with local primary schools and other establishments have been closely forged, resulting in a wide involvement of the local community. There is a rising awareness of the performing arts by pupils and parents and an enthusiasm to achieve. The relatively inexperienced teachers of dance, drama and music have been carefully guided without suppressing their enthusiasm. The popularity of the examination courses is growing steadily.
27. The school has identified a number of pupils who are able and talented. Their progress is efficiently tracked and shows that pupils reach their potential. Some subject areas, such as art, are designing stimulating additional work to enable pupils to reach their potential but this is not the case in all subjects. There has been a range of additional activities organised to enrich the pupils' experiences and these are always carefully mapped. Close links to local colleges and universities give pupils a good insight into further educational and often broaden their horizons.
28. The provision for personal, social and health education is good, covering all the required topics. The planning is progressive and a good range of visiting speakers adds depth to the

topics. A large number of teachers are involved in teaching this programme and the quality, though mostly good, is not always of a consistently good standard.

29. The provision for extra-curricular activities is good overall, with strengths in sport, dance, drama and music. The growing music department offers all pupils in Year 7 the opportunity to learn an instrument and the instrumental teaching is of a high quality. Pupils are successful in national competitions in football and trampolining. There is a popular annual trip to either France or Germany and the ski trip is popular. Fieldwork extends pupils' learning in geography, but there is too little of it in Years 7 and 8 and there is only a limited range of visits to support learning in religious education. There are missed opportunities for extra-curricular or enrichment activities in some subjects. A number of subjects offer valuable booster classes to give additional support to pupils.
30. The curriculum experienced by pupils with special educational needs is good. The policy of inclusion allows them to participate very fully in the mainstream educational opportunities. Pupils' records are scrutinised on entry and pupils needing additional help with literacy in order to benefit from mainstream education are tested for reading ability. Those needing additional help are given it. However, there is insufficient formal monitoring of progress and the reading programme is sometimes considered at an end without any formal testing or recording of the progress made. Staff in the department work closely together and share knowledge about pupils informally, but there is not a systematic structure for the monitoring or evaluating of any assessment. The individual education plans of pupils are satisfactory but might benefit from more specific and measurable targets to assist teachers to plan lessons even more effectively and to measure the degree of progress in, for instance, reading.
31. The match of teachers to the curriculum is very good. There is a good range of age, experience and specialist expertise. Recently developed links with post-16 providers have enabled the school to appoint additional specialists who also teach for some of their time in a partner's college. The provision of support staff is generally good. The number has been increased since the last inspection. ICT technicians keep the complex systems running effectively. The science and technology technicians provide generally efficient support, but that support is stretched and contributes to some weaknesses in procedures for the conduct of regular safety checks. The level of staffing for the teaching of pupils with special educational needs who are taught in main school is very good. The match of support staff to the curriculum is good. Learning support teachers and assistants work hard throughout the day providing help but there are insufficient adults to maintain the level of help for pupils who withdraw themselves from class or are referred, as well as to support learning in any but a few mainstream classes. Subjects with particular specialisms such as languages do not easily allow for pupils to withdraw and work without a knowledgeable adult available to guide pupils, so that working elsewhere is not an option. In such cases, additional learning support assistants' presence in class to help pupils is desirable. The few pupils for whom English is an additional language make good progress but might benefit further if support assistants had specialist training in support of their specific language and literacy skills.
32. The interior of the school's accommodation is already impressive, and is set to improve still further with an imminent £9 million refurbishment under the *Building Schools for the Future* scheme, which will help it absorb pupils from the closure of another local school. The current accommodation is spacious and well-appointed. A high standard of display of pupils' work, artefacts and information adorns the very wide corridors which incorporate large social areas for each Year group. Pupils clearly treat the building with much respect – there is no sign of graffiti and little litter – and the quality of the environment clearly contributes much to pupils' calm and orderly behaviour in the building. The quality of classroom, workshop and practice areas is high and contributes very positively to learning in most subjects, with the exception of art and design where space is very limited. Specialist accommodation for pupils with physical and medical disabilities is of a very high standard and enables pupils with complex needs to gain access to the full mainstream school curriculum. The accommodation for supporting pupils with other special educational needs is very good, with a suite of rooms giving privacy and space in close proximity to the library.

33. Resourcing of subjects is generally good. Provision of text and reference materials is good in most subjects but unsatisfactory in supporting the teaching of religious education and citizenship. The resources in music are very good, particularly the facilities in the recording studio and the rehearsal rooms. Most departments, including English, mathematics and science, have their own computer suites and this helps to improve the standard of pupils' coursework, but in English there is insufficient use of ICT as a teaching and learning aid in lessons. The school is very well resourced in terms of the number and quality of computers, and data projectors and interactive whiteboards are available in many classrooms. The library has a good stock of fiction books, and there has been a very significant rise in the number of books borrowed. The quality of library provision of reference and other materials varies by subject, and is a weakness in modern foreign languages. The library will receive a considerable upgrade as part of the new refurbishment. Resources for pupils with SEN are good. Computers are available for research or word processing, and the laptops which pupils can take to lessons help those with identified needs to organise and present their work.

## Care, guidance and support

Provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety is **good**. Provision of support, advice and guidance is **very good**. Involvement of pupils through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is **good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good assessment forms a sound basis for advice and intervention to support pupils in reaching their goals.
- The support of learning mentors promotes the inclusion and achievement of all pupils.
- The school is very effective in promoting the involvement of relevant agencies to support individual pupils.
- An active school council gives pupils a good opportunity to influence school life.
- Not all safety requirements are fully met.
- Pastoral support is well managed.

## Commentary

34. The school makes very good use of the assessment information to provide well-targeted advice and support for pupils. Pupils are mostly well aware of what level they are achieving and what they need to do to improve. Targets are set and regularly reviewed, usually by pupils themselves with teacher input. The pastoral team meets regularly to discuss general or specific issues around individual pupils. Behaviour has been a focus for the past year's work, and a well-understood system for pupils whose behaviour continues to present problems is in place. The merit system is being re-evaluated, and a pilot involving the use of pupil planners in Year 10 is aimed at improving their use by older pupils. Mentors work closely with key pastoral staff to support pupils to boost their self-confidence and regularly monitor the effect on their achievement. Pupils are confident about going to adults in school for advice, and have a number of adults to whom they would turn if problems arose. Mentors also run a lunchtime club, which helps pupils back into the full swing of school life on a gradual basis. The very good relationships which exist in school mean that pupils are very well known by staff who have a secure grasp of their achievements and development. Success is celebrated and recognised in assemblies and other occasions.
35. Staff at the school have initiated a mini-review process to deal with more serious concerns about a pupil. They organise and co-ordinate a multi-agency meeting, which includes all relevant support agencies, to agree a pastoral support plan, through which the pupil and possibly the pupil's family can gain access to a range of necessary support to meet their

needs. The close links with feeder primary schools ensure a smooth transition at Year 7, and pastoral support is available for pupils who go on to a local tertiary college. There is very good careers advice and good links with Connexions, who help organise a number of events through the school year involving local industrialists, as well as being regularly available in school and giving each pupil a careers interview.

36. Child protection is thorough, and all staff have annual training from the lead teacher, who is familiar with all the local procedures. Looked-after pupils are supported well, closely monitored and generally achieve well. The premises manager and caretaker carry out regular health and safety audits, and the chair of governors is involved twice yearly. Accident reports are scrutinised. There is, however, no record of the required safety checks on electrical equipment, and dust extraction in the wood machine area of design and technology is inadequate and requires improvement and appropriate risk assessment.
37. Pupils are regularly consulted on a number of issues, sometimes as individuals, and often via the school council, which meets regularly and encourages participation. A number of changes have been introduced, and outstanding concerns expressed by pupils such as the condition of some of the toilets and the absence of water dispensers will be resolved with the new build. There is a good PSHE programme in effective tutor periods, which are monitored by the year heads. Inspectors did feel, however, that better use could be made of the registration periods, even though they have been shortened.
38. All pupils, whatever their level of need, are very well cared for, guided and supported. Individual education plans are in place and are known and understood by everyone. Consequently, pupils understand that they are known very well and feel accepted, unique but not different, and very valued. This is genuinely an inclusive school and all are made to feel part of it. Pupils speak well of the help that is given to them and feel that staff care for them. They know that they can approach staff with any problems and that there will be adults who listen. They particularly value the learning support assistants who give up their lunch breaks to look after pupils and who run the homework clubs each week.

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

Partnership with parents is very good. Partnership with other schools is excellent. Links with the community are excellent. The extended services provided by the school are very good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents are kept very well informed about their children's standards and progress.
- Parents are quickly involved if any concerns about individual pupils arise.
- The school works very closely with the community to the benefit of both.
- A range of very effective curricular and pastoral links with primary schools has been developed.
- The performing arts status has led to benefits for both the school and community.
- The annual report of governors to parents and the school prospectus are missing some required information.

## **Commentary**

39. Parents are very supportive of the school and 98 per cent who completed the questionnaire said they felt comfortable about approaching the school with any concerns. The school is successful in its aim to resolve any concerns at an early stage, and to be open and accessible. Parents receive very good quality information about their children's academic progress, and as well as good quality reports, have termly review days where detailed discussion can be held with tutors. Any changes to the curriculum are explained at information evenings, which take place annually. The school newspaper gives a lively and readable

picture of school life. Information in the governors' annual report to parents about school finances and progress made against the key issues of the last OFSTED report is inadequate, and the school prospectus lacks information about the comparison of school test and examination results with national averages.

40. Should any concerns arise over pupils' behaviour, progress or other areas, parents are always fully involved at an early stage.
41. There are exceptionally good links between the school and the local Youth project, and by working together closely many pupils are supported both in and outside school. A large number of organisations use the school premises out of school hours, and 800 local people come into school each week, including a lot of ex-pupils who attend especially for performing arts groups. The area's Japanese school meets at Oxclose at weekends, and a range of sporting clubs takes place at the school. The school is closely involved in the community development plan which is initiating a number of community developments, and is planning a community art club for next year. There are links with some local industries which are involved in the GNVQ courses and initiatives like the Young Engineers project.
42. The school works co-operatively with other secondary and further education colleges in the area, and a locally agreed common timetable across all the secondary schools is helping pupils to take full advantage of specialist vocational courses without timetable clashes. This is greatly extending pupils' opportunities across the whole area. Links with primary schools are extensive and cover pastoral and curricular aspects. Visits are made to primary schools by a number of staff, including the special educational needs co-ordinator, head of Year 7 and mentor. As well as taster visits by pupils, a summer school is held by the mentors to boost the confidence and self-esteem of potentially vulnerable pupils. Work is done with Year 6 pupils on thinking skills, and some do transitional units in English. Mathematics programmes in school have been modified to build on to the work done in primaries, rather than repeat it. Music, dance, modern foreign languages and art and design are taught in primaries by specialist teachers from Oxclose, and a local music cluster has been established. There is an excellent exchange of information and data to ensure the most effective transition. Clearly the community objectives of performing arts status are influencing and enhancing a significant number of these initiatives and the project and its development are effectively monitored and evaluated. A further very good element of the school's extended provision is its contribution of teaching time to the area post-16 partnership. In maintaining the involvement of the school in post-16 education, this contributes to improved staying-on rates as pupils have confidence in working with staff with whom they are familiar. The opportunity to teach advanced and other courses post-16 also benefits the morale and professional development of teachers.
43. Very good and close links have been forged between the school and the parents of pupils with special educational needs. Parents are closely involved in the review meetings, and the school goes to some lengths to help the parents and carers to attend meetings. The school also goes further by helping the families to cope with difficulties by supporting them in getting access to help from other organisations. The special educational needs co-ordinator has worked very hard to establish very good links with the nearby primary schools and those who will be sending pupils to Oxclose by visiting them and helping the pupils to feel welcome.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management throughout the school are very good. The headteacher provides excellent leadership. The governance of the school is good. All statutory requirements are met, with the exception of the daily act of collective worship and some omissions from the annual report for parents and the school prospectus. Other key staff provide very good leadership. Management is very effective.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher's commitment to improvement is reflected throughout the life of the school.
- Governors are highly supportive of the school but leadership responsibilities are not shared and some statutory requirements are not met.
- There are very good procedures for reviewing work across subject areas.
- The leadership and management of religious education are unsatisfactory.
- Management is mostly very effective, but has not ensured that improvement is uniform in all subjects.
- Financial management is very good.

## Commentary

44. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. He is committed to excellence and shows that he values and respects all who are involved in the school. He is successfully translating his vision of a successful and fully inclusive school, which serves the interests of all pupils equally well, by building very effective teams and establishing innovative and highly effective partnerships with the local and wider community. Since taking up his appointment he has overseen many significant improvements, including an excellent improvement in examination results, an increase in the popularity of the school and a much-improved curriculum. Under his leadership the school has had many outstanding successes, including the gaining of specialist college status, Investors in People, Charter Mark, the DfES Achievement award, the Healthy Schools award, Artsmark Gold and Sportsmark awards. The views of parents, pupils and governors are accurate in describing him as an excellent leader.
45. The governance of the school is good. Governors use their knowledge, experience and skills to the benefit of the school. They have a very good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are active in shaping its future. The governors are very well led by a knowledgeable, active and effective chair of governors. Her role as a critical friend to the school is very good. She is the chair of all the governors' committees. Although this has the advantage of continuity, there are also disadvantages such as the lack of opportunity for other governors to develop their roles of challenge and support. Whilst the governing body has fulfilled most of its statutory duties, the school does not fully meet the requirements for providing a daily act of collective worship. There are also omissions from the annual report for parents and the school prospectus. Some areas of health and safety measures are not in place.
46. The dedicated, effective and hard working senior leadership team supports the headteacher very well. Effective line management of subject areas and very good systems to review the work of the departments provide a clear picture of strengths and weaknesses across the school. A common format of what is to be reviewed, how and when has been central to the school's successful drive for improvement. There remain, however, variations in standards across the school and some inconsistencies in the application of best practice, for example, in the use of assessment and teachers' planning. In a number of cases where weaknesses have remained, the school has acted with some innovation to solve the problems. Thus the mathematics department has been drawn into the successful leadership and management systems of the design and technology faculty. Weaknesses in music and art have been addressed with significant staffing changes and the additional resources and prominence given by specialist school status. Most heads of department provide good leadership and management; they are very good in science, music, art, performing arts, ICT, design and technology, and SEN. Heads of department plan effectively and make good use of performance data. However, the leadership and management of religious education are unsatisfactory because of weaknesses in strategic planning for the subject and a failure to address low standards in Years 10 and 11: improvement in this subject has not been given a sufficiently high priority by senior management. In the humanities faculty, there is a lack of clarity over where responsibilities lie for budget and resource planning between the head of faculty and heads of subject. This lack of clarity has contributed to some shortages of resources available for use in the classroom in religious education and history.

47. Staff are very well managed. The thorough departmental reviews contribute to a culture of continuous improvement. The arrangements for staff induction and professional development are very effective. The school has very good systems for performance management. Newly recruited teachers are very well supported. A comprehensive programme of support has enabled the staff team, many of whom have been in post for many years, to embrace the changes involved in a number of very significant initiatives such as the specialist school bid and the two-year Key Stage 3 pilot. The school makes a good contribution to teacher training, and has made very good progress towards managing the workload of both teachers and support staff.
48. There is very good leadership of the school's work with pupils with SEN. A welcoming environment has been created for all pupils, and the school's ethos of accepting and supporting pupils with a diverse range of needs is widely supported by staff and pupils. The management of special educational needs is very good. The team of staff work together very closely, and the very hard-working learning support assistants take on wide-ranging and considerable responsibilities such as administering the reading programmes or monitoring access to the learning support area.

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

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,091,784
Total expenditure	2,966,798
Expenditure per pupil	3,873

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	26,386
Balance carried forward to the next year	98,600

49. Financial management of the school is very good. The school monitors income and expenditure very carefully. The school follows best value principles and ensures that value for money is achieved on all purchases. The recent audit of school finances by the local authority confirms the very efficient procedures. In the light of the good quality of education which brings about good achievement and personal development for pupils with funding which is broadly in line with the national average, the school provides good value for money.

**OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES**

**WORK-RELATED LEARNING**

Provision for work-related learning (WRL) is **good**. It meets statutory requirements.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- WRL is well planned and curriculum provision is very good.
- WRL is a high priority for the senior leadership team, who provide good support.
- Careers education and opportunities for experience in the workplace are very good.
- Most subject departments do not emphasise their contribution to WRL sufficiently.
- The implementation of the WRL policy is not thoroughly monitored, assessed or evaluated.

**Commentary**

50. WRL is a high priority for the school and a key element of its strategy to raise standards for all pupils in Years 10 and 11. All pupils follow a vocational option at GCE or GNVQ, with courses available in information technology, performing arts, art and design, leisure and tourism, and health and social care. Lower-attaining pupils are able to follow an entry-level award provided by the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). In addition, some

pupils follow an alternative pathway, which in addition to core subjects provides an individualised programme of WRL, including hairdressing and beauty, building construction, sport and performing arts. The school's provision benefits from very good links with the local college and schools within the Washington Partnership. Pupils' achievement on the vocational courses is generally very good. This is particularly the case in ICT, which was inspected in detail.

51. In addition to the courses listed above, some pupils have the opportunity to undertake vocational guided study within the timetable to provide an additional two hours of supported learning. Pupils engaged on the off-site vocational courses also have a discrete WRL timetabled lesson at school. WRL is also a part of the tutorial programme for all pupils. The school has developed a very good range of materials to support WRL. Links with local companies are very good. A Young Engineers course is run in conjunction with local businesses. Overall provision is very good.
52. Careers education is very good. In addition, all pupils take part in work experience in Year 10. This is well supported by the school's very good links with the local community and local businesses. Pupils are very effectively prepared and after their placements their experiences are reviewed and evaluated. During Year 11, pupils gain further experience in mock interviews organised by local businesses.
53. WRL is led and managed satisfactorily. It is supported very well by the leadership team; there is a co-ordinator and a broad policy. The vocational and alternative courses have been carefully planned, with very good liaison with other schools and the local college. The school, however, acknowledges a lack of overall co-ordination and thorough monitoring, assessment and evaluation of its WRL provision. The contribution that other subjects can make to work-related learning, primarily the skills that pupils need for work, has been planned, but many non-vocational subjects do not emphasise and implement them sufficiently.



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

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

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

##### **English**

Provision in English is **good**.

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

- Leadership and management are clearly focused on raising attainment.
- Assessment is used very effectively to show pupils how well they are performing and how they can improve.
- Support for study outside the school day is very good and a major element in the drive to raise standards.
- ICT is not yet used enough to support learning.
- GCSE results have improved since the last inspection.

##### **Commentary**

54. Results in the 2004 national tests for pupils at the end of Year 9 were slightly lower than the 2003 results, which had been in line with the national average. The attainment of girls in both years was higher than that of boys, reflecting the national picture. Inspection evidence indicates that attainment in the current Year 9 is close to national expectations. Achievement for these pupils is satisfactory overall: progress in spelling, punctuation and basic grammar is satisfactory, but pupils are making good progress over Years 7-9 in their reading and in the use of planning and drafting to give structure to their writing.
55. The 2004 GCSE examination results in English were also close to the national average. A particular strength of the department's work is the very high proportion of pupils, including those who have special educational needs, who gain A\* to G grades in both English and English literature. In literature especially, a far higher proportion of pupils is entered than is the case in most schools. Girls performed particularly well, with no grade lower than E. Both girls and boys achieved an average points score above the national average. In addition, GCSE attainment was very high when compared with schools where pupils had similar Year 9 test scores. This represents good achievement overall although it is more rapid in Years 10 and 11 than lower down the school. Current achievement by pupils in Years 10-11 is good. GCSE results are now better than at the last inspection and have been achieved by a very focused and individual approach to helping pupils understand how they can improve their performance. Early completion of coursework, careful coaching in examination techniques, after-school study sessions and very good marking all promote these improving standards.
56. The quality of teaching and learning overall is good. Although two unsatisfactory lessons were observed during the inspection, the standard of the work seen in pupils' books and the improving examination results indicate that these were unusual occurrences. The best lessons have clear objectives, which are explained to pupils at the outset so that they know what is expected of them. They are well planned to include a range of challenging activities and proceed at a brisk pace. This helps pupils, and in particular boys, to retain good levels of interest and concentration. A particularly effective feature of lessons is the focus on equipping pupils with analytical and evaluative skills that enable them to be objective about their own work. The assessment of pupils' work and progress is highly effective and allows teachers to know when and how to intervene to support pupils.

57. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The recently appointed head of department is maintaining the clear focus on raising standards and is developing the use of data to track and monitor pupils' progress so that any potential underachievement can be identified and appropriate intervention made. The National Literacy Strategy is now being implemented effectively and this is providing a sharper focus to lessons. Strategies to stimulate boys' interest in the subject are proving effective and these are helping to raise standards. A good programme of support for learning outside the school day for pupils whose predicted grades are borderline has also been introduced, as have special progress classes to bring Year 7 pupils up to the expected levels. The effect on pupils of substantial staff absence during the spring term was minimised by very good support for supply teachers and pupils' progress was not allowed to suffer.
58. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, with rising standards and much better use of assessment. Not enough use is made of ICT to support pupils' learning. Good teamwork by the specialist and experienced staff with good support from senior managers means that the capacity for further improvement is good.

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

59. Pupils' standards of literacy are satisfactory: they are sufficient to enable the vast majority to make progress in their learning. The English department lays a sound foundation through its enthusiastic adoption of the National Literacy Strategy, and other subjects are developing strategies to support further development. Most pupils are able to write in different styles, and lower-attaining pupils are generally able to express themselves with reasonable clarity. This is in some part due to the way in which they are encouraged in English to write at length and with enjoyment. There is a noticeable willingness to experiment and to use new and unfamiliar vocabulary. Pupils respond well to opportunities to participate in discussions and their reading skills are generally adequate to cope with the demands of most subjects. In many subjects pupils' writing is supported by the use of guidelines that help them to plan their writing. Departments expect pupils to use the language specific to the subject and most offer good opportunities for pupils to produce extended writing which is marked thoroughly and helpfully. Raising standards of literacy further is recognised as an essential element in the drive to improve test and examination results.

### **Modern Foreign Languages**

#### **French and German**

Provision in French and German is **satisfactory**.

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

- GCSE results have been below those of other subjects at this school, but the school ensures a high proportion of pupils continue to study a foreign language in Years 10 and 11.
- Relationships and behaviour are good and pupils want to learn.
- Teachers provide varied activities to motivate pupils.
- Detailed information is kept to show how well pupils are doing, but this information is not fully exploited to raise standards.

#### **Commentary**

60. GCSE results in 2004 were below national averages in German, and well below in French. In both languages they were below those of most other subjects at this school. In German, girls performed much better than boys although in French there was little difference. Standards by Year 11 remain below average overall, but the school ensures that a higher proportion of its pupils study a language through to GCSE than is the case nationally. By Year 9, standards

seen were in line with national expectations for both boys and girls. The highest attainers write accurately in French/German using a range of tenses and complex sentences. Most pupils can pick out details in what they read and hear. Pupils speak in pairs but with varying degrees of accuracy and confidence.

61. Pupils' overall achievement is satisfactory. Achievement is satisfactory across Years 7-9. Although standards are rising in Years 10 and 11, pupils' achievement at GCSE has been inadequate. Pupils' long-term retention of knowledge hinders progress, with older pupils often having to re-learn material covered previously. Some pupils' folders contain reference notes muddled with rough work and exercises so that it is not clear to them what to revise from. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well when teachers give them appropriate tasks, but in some lessons they lack the support needed to make adequate progress. The highest attainers do not have enough opportunities to work at the highest levels. Teachers, for example, do not insist that they use French/German whenever possible in the classroom.
62. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. In classes in both languages, relationships are good and pupils respond well to the encouragement shown by their teachers. Teaching is good in French in Years 7-9, where teachers plan well and use engaging methods. In the best lessons teachers motivate pupils with varied activities, including pair work, group work and games. There is a good pace and a good balance of listening, reading, speaking and writing. In some lessons, however, there is too much emphasis on talking *about* language rather than allowing pupils to *use* it themselves and thus gain confidence. No use of ICT to promote learning was seen and there are hardly any books or magazines in the library for pupils' independent use. Marking is conscientious and provides detailed information on how well pupils are doing, but is not effective in showing the pupils how they can improve further. Assessment information is not currently being used well enough by teachers to help them plan to support pupils' improvement.
63. Leadership is good. Management is satisfactory. The subject leader has a clear vision and has begun a broad-ranging and ambitious programme of modernisation, based on a good understanding of the department's strengths and weaknesses. The school has maintained a strong commitment to the study of modern languages in Years 10-11 in spite of a national decline in numbers following these courses. Staff work well together in planning. The impact of good leadership has been seen in improved GCSE standards in German but not, as yet, in French. The subject leader monitors the work of other teachers, although a consistency of approach between teachers – necessary for sustained improvement – is not yet in evidence.
64. Improvements since the last inspection have been satisfactory. A much larger proportion of pupils in Years 10 and 11 now take GCSE. Relationships and pupils' attitudes are still good but some pupils with special educational needs still do not always learn effectively and the use of ICT remains under-developed. Given recent changes, however, the department is well placed to improve.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good and promotes effective learning.
- Relationships in lessons are good and the pupils behave well and work hard, though many pupils could improve the presentation of their work.
- Test and examination results have been weak but are improving, particularly at the end of Year 9.
- Assessment and the use of data are good but day-to-day marking is inconsistent.

## Commentary

65. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2004 show the proportion of pupils reaching the nationally expected level is just below the national average. When compared to similar schools the proportion is well below. The proportion of pupils reaching the nationally expected level and the higher levels has, however, risen significantly over the last two years. Girls have done better than boys over time, but the gap has been narrowing.
66. In GCSE examinations in 2004 the proportion of pupils gaining A\*-C was below the national average, though this proportion is an improvement on that for 2003 and is above the average for pupils from similar schools based on their results at the end of Year 9. The proportion of pupils achieving A\*-G is around the national average. The boys' results were better than the girls' in 2004.
67. Standards of work seen in lessons and in the pupils' books were at the expected level for most pupils by Year 9 and by Year 11. GCSE coursework seen was of a high standard, making an important contribution to the pupils' grade. Most pupils handle data competently but many do not draw graphs sufficiently accurately. Poor presentation of work affects the accuracy of some pupils' work. Basic numerical skills of most pupils are sound. Pupils' attainment on entry is around the national average. Achievement by the majority of pupils across all years is satisfactory. In all years pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.
68. Teaching is good overall. All lessons seen were at least satisfactory, and some were very good. Lessons are well planned with clear learning objectives, which are shared with pupils. In the best lessons, the teachers have high expectations of the pupils, the pace is good and a variety of tasks had been prepared to challenge the pupils. There is good use of ICT and calculators are used appropriately. In a high-attaining Year 7 group the pupils were competently using computers to make a spreadsheet and draw various types of graph to display and compare data they had collected on the length of words from different types of newspapers in preparation for their report on the task. A low-attaining Year 11 group was accurately calculating the area of quadrilaterals using the strategies they had learnt for mental multiplication of large numbers. Some good starter exercises were seen; for example, in a Year 8 group the pupils were investigating writing certain numbers as the sum of consecutive numbers in preparation for finding these numbers algebraically.
69. The endings of lessons are more variable in quality and do not always consolidate learning appropriately. Teachers make effective use of questioning, encouraging pupils to explain their answers and solutions to the rest of the class. Weaker lessons moved along too slowly and rely on too narrow a range of methods and activities.
70. As a result of effective teaching, pupils learn well. The good learning in evidence now is a reflection of recent improvements in the work of the department: standards are rising and pupils' achievement in mathematics looks set to be good in the future. Most pupils acquire knowledge of basic skills and concepts, which enables them to work on their own to improve their understanding. Literacy skills are improved by the good displays of key words, the insistence of teachers on the correct use of mathematical language and the good oral work in lessons. Pupils have a positive attitude to mathematics, they behave well in lessons and relationships between pupils and with their teachers are good.
71. Leadership and management of the department are good. Radical new leadership and management arrangements are raising standards in what had been a low-performing subject in the school. These arrangements, involving the department being led as part of a faculty which includes the high-performing design and technology department, are working well and have contributed to the more effective teamwork and the raising of standards. There is a clear vision of what needs to be done to raise standards even further. The positive response to the

National Numeracy Strategy has also contributed to the raising of standards. Good links with Primary schools have been developed. Assessment procedures are good and pupils are tested regularly; they are aware of National Curriculum levels and have clear targets set. Day-to-day marking, however, varies in quality between teachers, so that some pupils get better help from marking than others.

72. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The quality of teaching and learning has improved, which has raised standards, and results in tests and examinations have improved significantly. Assessment, target setting and resources have improved.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

73. Pupils' numeracy skills are satisfactory. The key features of the National Numeracy Strategy have been shared with all staff in the school at a training day, which was well received, so that aspects of mathematics have been identified in most subject schemes of work, and numeracy has been targeted in the school development plan.
74. Pupils are using their mathematical knowledge and skills in other subjects across the curriculum. In science, pupils, particularly in high-attaining groups, are able to use formulae competently and in ICT there was good understanding and use of spreadsheets. In a module on personal finance in a Year 9 PSHE lesson, the pupils were able to work out basic numerical calculations competently. Insufficient use is made of numeracy in physical education to develop pupils' skills further.

### **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Results at GCSE have improved significantly since the last inspection.
- Achievement is good because of very good leadership and management.
- Good teaching promotes good learning.
- Good assessments and marking mean that pupils know how to improve.
- There are too few technicians to adequately support the work of this large science department.

### **Commentary**

75. Achievement in science by the end of Year 11 is good. In 2004, overall results in GCSE science were in line with the national average, with most pupils out-performing their predicted grade, based on prior attainment, by at least half a GCSE grade. The trend over the last three years is one of continuous improvement, with the percentage of pupils gaining at least a grade C at GCSE rising from 36 per cent in 2002 to 50 per cent in 2004. From the evidence collected during the inspection, standards have improved further this year, with most pupils in Year 11 performing above national expectations.
76. Achievement by the end of Year 9 is satisfactory. In 2004, results in national tests for pupils aged 14 were below average. This was well below the school's expectations because over the previous three years results had been consistently in line with national expectations. The disappointing outcome in 2004 was mainly due to inadequate preparation for the new style of the national tests which now include questions on the practical aspects of science: 'scientific enquiry'. The current standard of work in Year 9 is at the national average and results in the national test are likely to return to normal this year.
77. The good overall achievement as pupils move from Year 7 to Year 11 is due to good teaching, and very good management. Progress is closely monitored and any pupil who is not doing as

well as expected is given help in order to improve. This support helps all pupils to achieve well in science, including pupils with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs. Standards and achievement are high compared with similar schools.

78. Teaching and learning are consistently good. There were no unsatisfactory lessons; most were good or very good and one excellent lesson was observed. Teaching is best where objectives for the lesson are explained at the start of the lesson, explanations are clear and the lesson contains a variety of interesting stimuli and pupil activities. Teachers have good subject knowledge and display genuine enthusiasm for science. They generally plan entertaining lessons that maintain the interest of the pupils well and this leads to good learning. The relationship between teachers and pupils is noticeably good and pupils behave well in lessons. A couple of lessons were judged to be only satisfactory because they lacked variety and, as a consequence, pupils tended to lose interest.
79. Leadership and management of the department are both very good. The head of faculty has a clear vision of the future and is scrupulously fair in the way he organises the curriculum and allocates teachers to classes. His hard work and commitment to the on-going development of the department sets an exemplary standard. As a consequence, he leads a very harmonious and unified team of staff who are very supportive of each other. New developments and improvements are always being considered. Over recent years GNVQ science and a new modular GCSE course have been very successfully implemented, which has significantly raised standards. There is a comprehensive departmental handbook and good assessment systems are in place to monitor the progress of the pupils – particularly in Years 10 and 11.
80. The highly efficient and hardworking chief science technician provides teachers with excellent support but needs more assistance in order to adequately cater for the demands made by a large science team teaching a wide range of courses. The portable electrical items, such as power supplies, heaters and lamps, have not been checked since August 2001. This important safety requirement needs urgent attention. The department's computer suite is a very useful asset, especially for pupils following the GNVQ and applied science courses. There is, however, room for improvement in use of ICT in lessons to enhance the learning experience of the pupils.
81. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have improved significantly at GCSE, and were improving faster than the national rate up to 2003. Resources are much better and more appropriate courses have been introduced at both key stages.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards by the end of Year 11 are high compared to the national picture.
- Teachers' very good knowledge of examination requirements enables them to plan and teach very effectively.
- Curriculum arrangements for the current Year 9 group have constrained their progress.

### **Commentary**

82. Pupils come to the school with average skills in ICT and have progressed to well-above-average levels by the end of Year 9 in recent years. Results in examinations at the end of Year 11 have improved consistently so that they were well above the national average in 2004. Success rates were well above average in the GNVQ course, and practically all of the pupils who do not opt for this course take a GCSE qualification instead. Results here were

also well above average, even though pupils spend less time on ICT than they do on their other GCSE subjects.

83. Work seen during the inspection confirmed this very good overall achievement. Standards improve steadily during Years 7 and 8, so much so that the school sought to capitalise on this by starting a GCSE course in Year 9. The first attempt to do this met with a combination of unpredictable difficulties, so that standards in the current Year 9, though still above average, are lower than they have been in recent years. These pupils have still achieved well to develop ways of working which will ensure continued success in Years 10 and 11. Sensible plans are now in place to exploit the momentum that is gained in Years 7 and 8 more effectively. Current standards of pupils by Year 11 are well above average.
84. In all years, pupils develop a solid understanding of the most efficient ways to use a range of software options. They reject the superficial trimmings and decoration in their presentations and web page designs, preferring instead to model their work on professional workplace examples. In Years 10 and 11 they work methodically to master a series of new and complex ideas. One Year 10 group struggled initially to create a diagram representing the flow of information round a business organisation. Their persistence, coupled with the step-by-step approach encouraged by the teacher in the lesson, ensured that the concept was well understood before they left the class. Work is organised so pupils with individual learning needs are not prevented from understanding the work and they achieve as well as others in their group.
85. Teaching is very good overall and promotes very good learning. Teachers manage behaviour firmly and the consistently high quality of planning and resources means that pupils come to lessons expecting to be interested and busy. Teachers exploit the electronic whiteboards very effectively to maintain a good pace of learning. The range of activities in most lessons ensures that all pupils master the basic concepts, but more individual questioning would challenge higher attainers to think more deeply. Teachers mark pupils' work very carefully, and keep detailed records of their attainment, but do not make enough use of day-to-day assessment to adjust their plans from lesson to lesson.
86. Leadership and management are both very good. The head of department provides a very good role model for the teaching team, and has created very effective planning and assessment routines. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. Results have continued to improve for all pupils. The curriculum has been improved to ensure that all pupils achieve a very good level of competence, and resources have been significantly upgraded.

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

87. There is good provision for ICT across the curriculum and pupils' skills are well above average by the end of Year 11. Pupils are encouraged to make appropriate use of ICT, using the Internet for research, and to word process their written work if they prefer. In art and music, teachers use specialised software very effectively, and pupils' competence shows up clearly as they quickly adapt to new applications. In vocational and applied subjects in particular, pupils use ICT very well to access information and organise their work. In mathematics, geography, science and design and technology, computers are sometimes used well to add another dimension to otherwise routine activities and to mirror workplace practice. In English, science, and design and technology, however, there is room for greater general use of computers to support pupils' learning and to enhance the quality of their work.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **good**.

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

- Assessment to develop and support learning is very thorough and is having a positive effect on learning.
- Teaching methods are effective in developing independent learning and enquiry skills.
- The subject is very well led; there is a good team approach within the department, combined with a clear sense of direction.
- The department has made good progress in planning and implementing the shortened Years 7 to 9 curriculum.
- Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning to share best practice are limited.
- Opportunities for fieldwork in Years 7 to 9 are currently too limited.

#### **Commentary**

88. GCSE results were well below average in 2003 but significantly above in 2004. The number of candidates, however, was low in 2004, with a class of thirteen. Pupils did well in relation to their prior attainment. Girls did better than boys by a similar amount to that found nationally but boys' results were well above the national average for boys.
89. Standards in Year 9 are above average. Pupils achieve well in relation to their knowledge of geography on entry to the school. Those with special educational needs make equivalent progress to their peers. Pupils quickly acquire good skills in map work and can undertake geographical enquiries. Some particularly good personal research files were seen on development in Kenya and on mountains and volcanoes. Their written work is generally good and their use of number is well developed. Pupils develop a good understanding of how physical and human aspects of geography interrelate and of the issues surrounding human development and the need for management of resources.
90. Standards in Year 11 are also above average and pupils achieve well. They gain a good understanding of geographical concepts. In physical geography, for example, Year 11 display a sound understanding of coastal management using a range of appropriate case studies. Higher-attaining pupils, in particular, provide detailed interpretations of geographical situations and ideas. Other pupils' work sometimes lacks detail and depth of understanding to achieve the highest grades. They all possess good enquiry skills and are able to work effectively as independent learners. Pupils use computers well to research, analyse and present data.
91. Teaching and learning overall are good, with some very good practice. Teachers have very good subject knowledge; they are enthusiastic and committed and use a range of imaginative methods that stimulate pupils' interest. Lessons are well structured in three parts and pupils have many opportunities to learn independently and develop their thinking and enquiry skills. High expectations, rigorous pace and challenge lead pupils to make good progress. Most pupils have very positive attitudes and behave well and this contributes to the quality of their learning. Case studies and geographical simulations are used very well to consolidate understanding of geographical ideas. Assessment to assist learning is very good and pupils are clearly informed of what they need to do to reach their target grades and improve the quality of their work.
92. The subject is very well led. Schemes of work and lesson plans are very good and a considerable amount of effective and innovative planning has been carried out to introduce the shortened Year 7 to 9 curriculum. There is very good teamwork within the subject and



processes and procedures are kept under review. Management of the subject is good. Tracking of pupils' progress is well established and highly effective, but recording and use of assessment is over-complicated and might be rationalised. Some formal monitoring of teaching and learning takes place, but there are not enough opportunities for evaluation and the sharing of the very good practice which exists in the department. The use of "learning to learn" lessons in Years 7 and 8 are very beneficial to develop pupils' skills and understanding, but opportunities for fieldwork are far too limited in these years.

93. Since the last inspection, results have improved and new teaching methods have been developed. Improvement has been good and the department has very good capacity for further improvement.

## History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- In recent years GCSE examination results have been well below average.
- Subject staff are very knowledgeable and make learning fun but purposeful.
- Some approaches used in the classroom do not meet the needs of all learners.
- Very good assessment procedures help pupils improve their work.

### Commentary

94. In 2004, at the end of Year 9, teacher assessments were average. Standards in the current Year 9 are average. Pupils have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of topics such as Irish history and Germany under Hitler. Higher-attaining pupils use their historical knowledge well to write good essays on topics such as the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and the sinking of the Titanic.
95. In 2004 and in recent years, results at GCSE have been consistently well below average. Standards in the current Year 11 are below average. Pupils have weaknesses in their knowledge, for example, in their understanding of the history of medicine and of Germany in the twentieth century. Pupils' use and application of historical language is weak. Coursework on castles and the Arab-Israeli conflict show satisfactory skills with the analysis and interpretation of sources.
96. Pupils enter the school with standards that are average. The achievement of pupils in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. Pupils of all abilities and of all ethnic backgrounds achieve equally well. In Year 11 standards are still not as high as they should be: achievement is therefore unsatisfactory but has improved because of better teaching and more effective support given to pupils with their coursework and examination skills. In Year 10, good teaching is enabling pupils to achieve well. Overall, then, pupils' achievement is satisfactory and the school has taken appropriate steps to address weaknesses in the subject.
97. New staff are having a good impact in the classroom and the quality of teaching and learning is now good. Teachers use their very good specialist knowledge well to make learning fun but purposeful. Lessons are well structured with exciting starter activities and a good range of activities that effectively engage pupils in their learning. However, the teachers' planning does not identify strategies to meet the needs of all learners in their classes, so that sometimes the activities are not well suited to individuals or groups of pupils. Assessment procedures are good and targets are used effectively to monitor pupil progress. There is accurate marking of pupils' work; they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Relationships are very good and pupils display good attitudes to their work.

98. The leadership and management of history are satisfactory. The subject is part of the humanities faculty. At departmental level teamwork is a good feature and teachers meet regularly to plan work and produce resources. However, there is a lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of the head of department and head of faculty with respect to some management functions, such as subject planning and budget allocation. Procedures for reviewing the work of the department are developing and priorities for improvement have been established. There are good changes being made to the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 and these are providing a better quality of education for the pupils. There are good after-school support sessions for pupils studying GCSE.
99. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. GCSE results have yet to improve significantly from the low standards of the last report, but standards are better now by Year 9. Recent changes in staffing and support for management are having a good impact and there is now the capacity for continued improvement.

## Religious education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**, because of weaknesses in provision for Years 10 and 11.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in Years 10 and 11 are well below average and achievement is unsatisfactory because of weaknesses in the planning of provision for the subject.
- The active learning in Year 7 results in good achievement.
- Resources for the subject are inadequate: there are insufficient textbooks, artefacts and ICT facilities.
- The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

### Commentary

100. Standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 8 for the new shortened key stage are in line with the expectations of the Sunderland Agreed syllabus. Standards of attainment at the end of Year 11 are poor, and well below national levels in the GCSE short course, for which all pupils were entered in recent years.
101. Achievement in Years 8 and 9 is satisfactory. Pupils arrive with average standards and these are maintained throughout the three years. Achievement in Year 7 is best due to the active learning that occurs. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory. The status of the subject within the school is low due to strategic decisions taken outside the department. In the lead up to the GCSE exam period, too many pupils are withdrawn from lessons in religious education to complete coursework in other subjects.
102. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. They are best in Year 7 when the three-part lesson with shared objectives and attention to speaking and listening and group work are consistently applied. Resources are inadequate. Although there are good school-produced resources, there are too few textbooks and artefacts. Access to information and communication technology is not possible for whole groups and this restricts independent learning opportunities. Lessons are well planned and prepared. The more able pupils are suitably challenged, and opportunities for extended writing allow them to show their capabilities. Pupils with special educational needs are fully involved because of the structure of the lessons that begin with a task all can tackle, and they make similar progress to their peers. Exercise books are regularly corrected and assessments are marked constructively and awarded clear and well-understood levels. The criteria for success are shared with pupils and self-and peer-

assessment helps understanding of what is required for a level or grade. Opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good.

103. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. There are weaknesses in planning for provision for the subject to help it raise its status and performance, especially in Years 10 and 11. The head of department is not given enough time to monitor teaching and learning, although work is standardised and best practice shared and colleagues supported. A lack of clarity about whether the subject or faculty leadership is responsible for budget planning and resource allocation has left the department under-resourced with textbooks and artefacts. There is no enrichment provision through external visits and visiting speakers.
104. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory. Standards of attainment at Year 9 have remained satisfactory but there has been no improvement in standards in Years 10 and 11. Resources in the department and the library are still inadequate. Teaching has improved and assessment has developed and is beginning to inform planning; assignments are levelled or graded and referenced to pupils' prior and predicted attainment.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

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

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

- The 2004 GCSE results reveal well-above-average standards in all subjects.
- During the completion of major coursework projects, pupils achieve very well.
- There is strong drive and determination to raise standards and an effective team of committed specialists works hard to encourage and engage all pupils.
- Assessment data is very effectively used in Year 10 and 11 to improve GCSE performance.
- There is insufficient use of ICT in teaching and in design and manufacture, and ICT is not used enough by pupils to improve the accuracy and final quality of work.
- Dust provides an unacceptable hazard in the wood machine area and requires more effective control.

#### **Commentary**

105. Overall standards in 2004 GCSE are well above average in all design and technology subjects. This represents very good achievement across all ability groups, including special needs pupils. The vast majority of pupils do as well as they can, with all pupils entered fully completing major GCSE coursework. Pupils do very well compared to other subjects, with boys doing exceptionally well. Overall there is no significant difference in the performance of girls and boys. Standards of work seen by the end of Year 11 are well above average, and pupils achieve very well. Pupils successfully apply design principles to a range of design briefs, analyse solutions, compile a specification and evaluate accurately. Standards of manufacturing are very good, with good attention to accuracy and finish. Pupils display proficient freehand sketching techniques but limited variety and refinement of sketched solutions hinder access to higher grades. Many pupils are confident using ICT, but editing and adaptation of Internet and digital research material is underdeveloped. Production charts are well used but production drawings for use in workshops often lack detail.
106. At the end of Year 9, although teacher assessments point to well-above-average standards, standards of work seen are above average. This represents good achievement for all pupils, including pupils with special needs and gifted and talented pupils. Pupils quickly acquire the skills to solve design problems and confidently and safely use tools, machines and appliances to successfully complete making. However, research skills are underdeveloped and freehand sketching techniques lack annotation, detail and refinement. Whilst pupils are happy to

respond to questions, technical vocabulary lacks depth. ICT is not used sufficiently to help in research and testing and computer-aided manufacture experiences are too limited.

107. Teaching is good in Years 7-9, very good in Years 10 and 11, and very good overall. In Years 10 and 11 in particular, lessons are very well organised, activities provide a good match to pupil need, and time is well used. In food and textiles in particular, opportunities are seized to make teaching lively, stimulating and demanding. Assessment is very effectively used to show pupils how to improve GCSE grades. Very good access to facilities outside of lessons is provided for extra study. Making skills are supported by tasks which help pupils understand more about the materials and processes with which they are working, but there are not enough opportunities to work with modern materials. Design booklets provide a well-structured approach to design and make but are not adapted enough to suit the different capabilities of pupils. Too little ICT is used in teaching, restricting the range of teaching methods. Very good learning support is provided by the food technician, although time allocation is inadequate. Where teaching is only satisfactory, expectations are usually not high enough.
108. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is a strong drive and commitment to raising standards. A hardworking team of specialists manages their teaching areas very efficiently and GCSE schemes of examination are followed vigilantly. Monitoring of classroom performance is undertaken, though good practice is not always shared effectively enough. Risk assessments are complete but are not revised regularly enough to control hazards, such as the unacceptable accumulation of machine sawdust, or to check on routine testing.
109. Progress since the last inspection has been very good, especially with regard to improvements in GCSE results; there is clearly a capacity to consolidate gains made in GCSE attainment and improve performance at higher-level grades.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

Art and design and music were the focus subjects for the inspection, but lessons were also sampled in GNVQ performing arts, drama, and media studies.

110. Dance, drama and music are the optional components of the **GNVQ performing arts course** offered by the school to pupils in Years 10 and 11. Subject specialists work with small numbers of pupils in these options, which has a very positive effect on pupils' attitudes and standard of work. Overall, provision is very good and the course is very well managed. In the **dance** component, the standards of pupils in Year 11 are above average and they are achieving very well. Their movements show control, poise and flair. The quality of teaching in the lesson seen was excellent. The teacher had very high expectations of the pupils' effort and quality of work, especially their technique. Assessment sheets were used well to enable pupils to evaluate their own performance and set new targets. In the **drama** option, pupils achieve very well as a result of very good teaching. Relationships between teacher and pupils are excellent and there are very high expectations of behaviour, participation, concentration and achievement. Pupils are encouraged to experiment, take risks and to learn from their mistakes. The subject makes an excellent contribution to the development of pupils' confidence, self-esteem and belief in what they can achieve. There is very good use of assessment, including self-and peer-assessment in lessons. In the **music** component, standards achieved are good. In a music lesson observed, the teacher displayed good subject knowledge and understanding and had strong interpersonal skills to assess and inspire all pupils in the group. Good support material was used to enhance pupil understanding. ICT resources were also used to their full potential and this was reflected in the good standard of work completed by all pupils.
111. **Drama** is also taught to all pupils in Years 7 to 9. Teaching is very good. The teacher is constantly aware of the needs and feelings of his pupils while at the same time demonstrating how to give and receive constructive criticism using the correct evaluative language. In an

excellent Year 8 lesson on status, pupils were enabled to draw out the dramatic theory themselves from the practical exercises the teacher led them through. Every pupil made excellent progress in his or her understanding of how body language, speech patterns, facial language and levels combine to show the audience the relative status of characters in the drama.

112. A very good lesson was seen in Year 11 **media studies** GNVQ. Pupils on this course are offered very good opportunities to develop their skills and understanding. They are able to gain access to a range of media technology such as digital audio and visual editing software, and they are given very good specialist help in learning to use this technology. Good first-hand experience of media production techniques adds to the breadth and depth of their understanding. Pupils' progress through their assignments is clearly tracked, so that they have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their work and what they need to do to improve.

## **Art and design**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers' expertise provides well-planned lessons, leading to improved standards.
- The subject is very well led and managed.
- Careful assessment allows pupils to understand how they can improve further.
- Very good use of ICT as an artistic medium allows boys in particular to achieve well.
- Pupils' range of artistic experiences is constrained by a lack of three-dimensional work.
- Year 11 pupils have some lack of confidence in drawing and some weaknesses in basic drawing skills.

### **Commentary**

113. GCSE results in 2004 were average and part of an upward trend. This is creditable: some pupils received their only successes in art and design, and pupils generally did better in art and design than in their other subjects. All pupils passed at grades A\*-G.
114. Teacher assessment of pupils' attainment by the end of Year 9 in 2004 indicated standards were well below average, but were part of an upward trend which is set to continue in 2005. These results reflect a relatively recent period of departmental instability and a lack of accurately assessed work, the repercussions of which in terms of the standards of pupils work are still being felt after two years of stability. Standards seen are now above the national expectation at the end of Year 9, and in line with national average by the end of Year 11. Achievement in art and design is good throughout the school and the results represent the rapidly developing ability of the pupils. Skills and understanding are developed systematically from Year 7 so pupils appreciate the differences in painting techniques. Pupils in Year 9 have made considerable advances in acquiring the skills in drawing, painting and knowledge of art, which allows them to understand the rationale behind Aboriginal painting or the totem poles and masks of the American Indians. They can also use their understanding of animal symbolism to design totem poles which illustrate their own family networks in both two- and three-dimensional work. Pupils in Year 11 draw on their knowledge of art history and other cultures as they complete their examination preparation designing mosaics or blinds for a children's nursery. They talk about how Escher or Islamic pattern influenced their mosaics and use colour and line well to create a dramatic impact. They develop their own ideas based upon fruits and seeds very imaginatively, but their observational drawing is very tentative and lacks confidence, revealing limitations in their basic drawing skills. Pupils with special

educational needs achieve well. Art and design makes a very good contribution to social, moral, spiritual and cultural education in the school.

115. Teaching and learning are good in all years and pupils with special educational needs are supported well. Teachers use their expertise to plan and structure lessons so pupils make good progress in developing their skills and use them increasingly confidently. Pupils' work is assessed continuously and accurately so that pupils are very aware of the levels at which they are working and they record what they need to do to improve. Teachers are sensitive to the needs of pupils and create work which is relevant to them and stimulates their imagination as well as extending their computer skills. For example, pupils working on pop art and repeat patterns had to imagine what Warhol or Lichtenstein would have created if the computer had been available to them, and design patterns accordingly. A Year 10 class comprising almost all boys was particularly absorbed when using Photoshop to produce very creative and artistic borders in the style of Klimt, rapidly learning layering techniques. In the plenary session one pupil then used the interactive whiteboard well to demonstrate to the class how he achieved his effects. Although two-dimensional work is developing well, there is still a lack of sufficient three-dimensional work, a weakness which was also identified in the previous inspection report. However, this is expected to be rectified with the move to the new art area with its increased space and a kiln. Pupils respond well to art and work hard in well managed classes but limitations on space and skills mean that insufficient opportunities have been created for them to work independently.
116. The leadership of the department is very good. After a period of turmoil and staff shortages, the current head of department has produced significant improvements in two years. A very able team of artists and technicians have been recruited and nurtured, who share common goals and values which are understood by pupils and other staff. Very good management has ensured that all staff share in the creation of schemes of work, which are discussed and evaluated critically. The subject has been instrumental in the department's bid for Arts College status, which will lead to a long-awaited move to improved accommodation. However, the present inadequate accommodation has been very well managed so that inexperienced teachers are very well supported and pupils are not disadvantaged. Resources are limited by constraints on space but are used very well. The school has established very good links with the primary schools so teachers have visited the schools and worked on projects with the younger pupils. Pupils are encouraged to work in the art clubs after school and some pupils have been given the opportunity to visit and work at a London art college and visit Tate Modern.
117. There has been good improvement, particularly in the assessment of pupils, since the last inspection. The previous report identified accommodation as needing improvement and this will be the focus of the imminent new building development.

## **Music**

Provision in music is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Leadership and management are very good and have brought about significant improvements in the quality of provision.
- Music teachers demonstrate thorough subject knowledge and understanding.
- Performing arts college status has provided a positive impetus for improvement.
- Extra-curricular pupil numbers have increased and are supported with a new 'wider opportunities' initiative in Year 7.
- Pupils in Years 7-9 have weaknesses in composition, use of vocabulary, and the application of musical terms.
- GCSE results have been below average, but have improved rapidly.

## Commentary

118. Standards attained by GCSE pupils have improved strongly over the last three years, but remain below the national average. The present cohort's attainment in performance and composition is in line with the national expectation and shows a further improvement upon previous results. Given their standards on starting the course, this represents good achievement for these pupils. This positive progression is also reflected in the increased number of pupils opting for this subject. Indications identify that this trend is likely to continue with the school's new Performing Arts status and recognition conferred by the Artsmark (Gold) award.
119. Pupils join the school with a wide variety of backgrounds and experience in music, but standards on entry are generally below average. By Year 9 standards are average and pupils' achievement across Years 7-9 is good. New schemes of work have been introduced and provide a firm basis upon which to build but the full impact upon pupil achievement and standards has yet to be fully realised. Pupil attitudes in practical work are good but their creative application of knowledge and understanding, particularly in composition but also in their use of vocabulary and application of musical terms, has some weaknesses.
120. Teaching and learning are good. The music teaching staff demonstrate thorough subject knowledge and understanding which enriches the lives of those they teach. They encourage creativity through a variety of musical devices. While teaching methods are imaginative, pupils struggle to apply their musical knowledge when writing melodies and composing. Some pupils in Years 7-9 experience difficulties when using musical language relating to notation, structures and musical genres, and overall assessment levels awarded to pupils do not take sufficient account of pupils' standards in the composition and appraisal elements of pupils' attainment. Better schemes of work have helped to raise overall standards in Years 7-9, but there is at present insufficient explicit planning within these schemes to support and extend the learning of gifted and talented pupils and those with special educational needs.
121. All pupils enjoy practical music making and in Years 9, 10 and 11 are encouraged to access very good ICT equipment to enhance their compositions, musical understanding and creative development. Pupils are assisted when recording compositions and performances by a specialist sound technician. Pupils also have good, well-equipped rehearsal rooms in which to practice. GCSE pupils are encouraged to have additional instrumental or vocal lessons to improve their practical techniques, which are financially supported through performing arts college funding. There has been an increase in musical workshops and experiences for all school pupils. This is reflected in the increased numbers of instrumentalists (111) and choristers attending rehearsals for the chamber choir, orchestra and excellent three-part female choir. Popular music making is also apparent, particularly with Year 9 and 10 male guitarists and percussionists. A new 'wider opportunities' initiative offering all Year 7 pupils the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument has been offered, and a fifth of pupils have taken this up. It is envisaged that this initiative will increase the numbers of instrumentalists involved in school ensembles, improve levels of achievement in Years 7 to 9, increase the number of pupils opting for GCSE music and improve GCSE results.
122. Leadership and management are very good and have had a direct and very positive impact on the growth in instrumental lessons and instrumental teaching. The director of performing arts and music has given the department credibility and a new sense of direction which is appreciated by the school, parents and pupils. The subject leadership has a very clear vision for future improvement, which has included the development of a cluster group of primary schools in order to provide tuition for instrumentalists within feeder schools. The school has addressed weaknesses in standards and status of the subject very successfully through

significant investment in staffing and resources, made possible by the acquisition of performing arts college status.

123. There has been good improvement since the last inspection report, but more recently improvements have been rapid and there is the potential for a very significant rise in standards and quality of provision. The new Performing and Visual Arts building to be opened in the near future should further enhance the present resources, opportunities for musical performances and pupil achievement.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils achieve above-average standards at GCSE and in Year 11.
- Pupils achieve well in their practical skills as a result of good teaching and a very good curriculum.
- The department benefits from good leadership and a clear vision for the subject.
- Pupils' ability to evaluate their own and others' performance is not developed as effectively as practical aspects.
- A small minority of Year 10 pupils show unsatisfactory attitudes to learning and underachieve.

### **Commentary**

124. GCSE results were above average in 2003 and 2004 and pupils did better in physical education than in their other subjects.
125. Standards of games skills in Year 9 are average and pupils achieve well. Pupils improve well between Year 7 and Year 9 in all their practical skills, including dance, as a result of good teaching and their own enthusiasm. Standards in Year 11 are above average overall. Pupils' practical skills become more refined and precise and are above average. However, their ability to coach and evaluate performance is below average because of a lack of confidence in using technical vocabulary. Pupils continue to achieve well. A minority of girls have below-average racket skills. A small minority of pupils in Year 10 underachieve because they regularly do not take part in lessons despite a very varied curriculum.
126. An increasing number of pupils choose to follow a GCSE course in physical education. Standards are above average overall. Pupils' practical performance is well above average and their theoretical work is above average. Their achievement is very good overall. Their coursework is of a good standard and regular testing and homework ensure that pupils consolidate their knowledge. A wide range of activities is on offer, enabling pupils to achieve well in their preferred sport.
127. Teaching and learning are good overall. They are best in Years 10 and 11, where tasks are challenging and expectations are high. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan a good sequence of tasks that build up to the final activity. However, not all lessons include enough well-planned opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own and others' performance, enabling them to use this to improve their work and their speaking skills. Video is sometimes used well to analyse performance, but opportunities are not used to develop numeracy skills. Pupils' work is assessed and they know the level at which they are working. They could be more involved in using the very good activity level descriptors to improve their own learning. The teaching of GCSE theory is well established. Teachers use a good range of methods to



stimulate learning in lessons, and homework and notebooks are rigorously checked for completion and quality.

128. There is good participation in the very good extra-curricular programme. Teams and individuals enjoy success at local, county and national levels in activities such as football and trampolining. The thriving dance clubs are generating a wide range of interest and there is a growing interest from the boys. Older pupils help to coach and organise events in local primary schools as part of the Sports Leaders Award; this encourages greater achievement amongst both sets of pupils.
129. Leadership and management are good. Under new leadership, the department has good team spirit and challenging targets. Departmental progress in achieving the targets is monitored, though this is not done rigorously enough. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The curriculum has been improved and has recently won a local award for innovation. A successful partnership with the local school sports co-ordinator programme is having a positive impact on the curriculum and teaching. Teachers support pupils' personal development well.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

No subject was inspected in detail in this area, but lessons were sampled in health and social care and leisure and tourism.

130. A very good Year 10 lesson was seen in GNVQ **health and social care**. The lesson was very well prepared and skilfully used a range of methods to lead pupils to a very good understanding of some sophisticated concepts of personal development. Resources were well adapted to meet the needs of pupils of widely differing abilities in the class. Results in this well-established course have varied above and below the national averages, with above-average results in the GCSE double award in 2004. Current standards in the class seen are below average, but these pupils are currently achieving very well in relation to their prior attainment.
131. In a Year 11 GNVQ **leisure and tourism** lesson observed, which was a well-structured revision lesson on components of the leisure industry in the local area, the teaching and learning were good and pupils received very clear advice on standards required in their final assessments. Current standards are in line with the national average and pupils' achievement overall is satisfactory. In 2004, all pupils passed, although the proportion gaining grades A\*-C was below average.

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

The provision for **personal, social and health education (PSHE)** is good, covering all the required topics. Good planning ensures that pupils make progress across a range of issues, and a good variety of visiting speakers adds depth to the topics. A good range of resources is used: Year 11 pupils found a video that warned the pupils of the dangers of binge drinking, especially when pregnant, particularly moving, although opportunities were lost to discuss their views afterwards. A large number of teachers are involved in teaching this programme to their forms, and while there is some variation in the quality of lessons, most lessons seen were good and none was unsatisfactory.

### **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The National Curriculum is in place.

- The active year and school councils are providing valuable experience of the democratic process and opportunities to participate as citizens.
- Pupils' achievements in the knowledge, participation and communication strands are insufficiently assessed.
- Pupils are often unaware of when they are learning about citizenship but are developing as responsible citizens.

## **Commentary**

132. Standards of attainment at the end of Years 9 and 11 are in line with the expectations of the end-of-key stage statements. Achievement is satisfactory within all years. Pupils are developing the skills to enable them to be good citizens and are becoming aware of their rights and responsibilities.
133. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The taught programme is delivered in tutorial time with PSHE and pupils often do not know when they are studying National Curriculum citizenship. Although departments have indicated citizenship in their documentation, and teachers have indicated where citizenship occurs in lesson plans, these rarely emerge as significant contributions to the lesson. The exceptions are in GNVQ ICT and GNVQ science, where opportunities are fully used. Teaching and learning are best when pupils are involved in active learning. Teaching and learning are less successful where lessons in the PSHE programme are too heavily based on the completion of worksheets, which occurs because the teachers are non-specialists and rely on materials given to them.
134. Leadership is satisfactory. The leadership has understood the requirements of the National Curriculum for citizenship and asked departments to map where citizenship takes place within subjects. The opportunities provided by the operation of the school and year councils for all pupils to experience the democratic process and participate as citizens within school are very well used. Management is satisfactory. It needs to ensure pupils are aware of when they are learning about citizenship. Tutorial teams meet to discuss how the subject will be taught but there is insufficient time to develop regular active approaches in a subject that is not their specialism. The achievements of pupils in the knowledge strand and their efforts in participation, research and communication are insufficiently well monitored and assessed against subject criteria, and brought together to provide a complete picture of the pupils' capabilities. The suspended timetable days provide good opportunities for everyone to develop their skills in enquiry and communication as well as in participation and taking responsible action.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

### *Inspection judgement*

### *Grade*

<b>The overall effectiveness of the school</b>	<b>3</b>
How inclusive the school is	2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2
Value for money provided by the school	3

<b>Overall standards achieved</b>	<b>3</b>
Pupils' achievement	3

<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>	<b>3</b>
Attendance	5
Attitudes	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>	<b>3</b>
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	2
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	3
Accommodation and resources	2
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	1
The school's links with other schools and colleges	1

<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>	<b>2</b>
The governance of the school	3
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).*