

INSPECTION REPORT

PARKLANDS HIGH SCHOOL

Manchester

LEA area: Manchester

Unique reference number: 131883

Headteacher: M. H. Buczynski

Reporting inspector: W. S. Walton
1210

Dates of inspection: 12th - 15th March 2001

Inspection number: 230039

Full 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 students: 11 to 16

Gender of students: Mixed

School address: Simonsway
Wythenshawe
Manchester

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Councillor Paul Andrews

Date of previous inspection: None

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
1210	W. S. Walton	Registered inspector		Information about the school The school's results and achievements How well are the students taught? How well is the school led and managed What should the school do to improve further?
15181	M. E. Hackney	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
30512	M. Bailey	Team inspector	Science	
			Equality of opportunity	
30702	P. Bowyer	Team inspector	Mathematics	
8806	M. Flatman	Team inspector	Religious Education	
12470	B. Greasley	Team inspector	Geography	
			Provision for students with special educational needs	
11969	J. Hardy	Team inspector	Design and technology	
			Information and communication technology	
20287	D. Harris	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
11044	J. Hedge	Team inspector	English	
			Provision for students with English as an additional language	
12475	W. Johnson	Team inspector	Music	
2939	A. McGough	Team inspector	Art and design	
10378	H. Turton	Team inspector	History	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students
19295	P. Wall	Team inspector	Physical education	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Parklands School is a new mixed comprehensive school of average size which opened in September 1999. It was formed on the closure of two small schools and is located in the premises of one of them. The headteacher was appointed in June 1999 and, therefore, had less than three months to prepare for the opening of the new school. Together with members of the shadow governing body he was responsible for the appointment of all staff. The governing body of the new school was not formed until June 2000. The siting of the school in the premises of one of the former schools was not popular with all parents of the other school and attendance patterns of many students, especially in Year 11, were very poor in the first year. 15–20% of students living in the catchment area choose to attend grammar and other well-established schools outside the local area. The school serves the Wythenshawe area of Manchester. Levels of social deprivation are very high. One of the wards served by the school has the highest level of deprivation of 8,404 wards in this country, as measured by indices of European deprivation. Levels of take-up of free school meals are currently running at 68% which is very high compared with national averages. The proportions of students with special educational needs and of students with statements of special education are both above national averages. Standards of attainment of students entering the school are very low. The aggregate of percentages of students attaining expected levels in national tests in English, mathematics and science in 2000 at the end of Key Stage 2 was well below the average for the local authority and very low compared with national averages. Last year 58% of school leavers proceeded to further education and training and almost 30% entered employment. The school benefits from being within the Wythenshawe Education Action Zone which is strongly supported by businesses, further education establishments and community associations with the aim of raising educational standards and opportunities. The first year was a very challenging time for all in the school. In addition to establishing a new school, staff and students had to manage a £1 million building programme which has resulted in the refurbishment and development of many parts of the premises.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Very good progress has been made in a short time. In terms of academic standards and attendance the school starts from a very low base but much has been achieved already to raise standards of attainment and promote the value of education with students and parents. Excellent leadership and strong staff commitment combine to make this a very effective school giving good value for money.

What the school does well

- The quality of teaching is good.
- Arrangements for the assessment of standards of attainment and supporting students in their work are very good.
- Arrangements for staff to gauge the quality of their work and for monitoring and supporting teacher development are very good.
- Dedicated and very effective leadership provides clear direction for the school.
- There is a strong and varied programme of extra-curricular opportunity.
- There is strong provision for personal, social and health education and for social and moral development.
- There is very strong encouragement for parents to form an educational partnership with the school.
- The procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance are very good.

What could be improved

- Standards of attainment, particularly literacy, numeracy and study skills.
- Levels of attendance.

- The quality of staffing through reduced dependence on temporary appointments.
- Leadership, organisation and standards of attainment in geography.
- Integration of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum.
- The quality of library provision.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

This section does not apply, since the school has not previously been inspected.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with		Key
	all schools	similar schools	
	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	E*	E*	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

All results in national tests and examinations in 2000 refer to students who had been in attendance at Parklands School for only nine months. They reflect the standards of attainment of those students but not the effectiveness of teaching and learning at Parklands School. They provide a base for the measurement of progress of the school at the end of the two key stages. In national tests in summer 2000 in English, mathematics and science the overall standards of attainment were very low compared with national averages and below the averages of other schools with more than 50% of students eligible for free school meals. Standards in English were in line with those of similar schools but all other results in subjects are at least well below national averages and those of similar schools. At GCSE in 2000 the overall results of the school were at least well below national averages and those of similar schools. In individual subjects results were more varied. The proportion of students obtaining A* - C passes was close to or better than national averages in art and design, Spanish and drama, and the proportion obtaining A* - G passes was close to national averages in English language, combined science, physical education and vocational studies. In other subjects results were below national averages. There was little difference between the attainments of boys and girls at Key Stage 3. The overall results at GCSE were depressed by very low entry levels. Many Year 11 students had very poor records of attendance and were not present for the examinations. The experience of others in Year 10 at their former schools had not prepared them for GCSE work. Many students have a poor grasp of basic study skills, literacy and numeracy. During the inspection overall standards of attainment were below national averages at the end of both key stages. They were well below in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and geography, at the national average in physical education and personal, social and health education at both key stages and in art and design at Key Stage 4. Nearly one half of students' work in Year 7 and one third in Year 8 is in line with national averages. The achievements of boys and girls, including those with special educational needs and those identified as gifted and talented, are sound and they make satisfactory progress. Progress would be accelerated if basic study skills, literacy and numeracy were stronger. Lack of basic skills contributes to the difference in standards between the core and some practical subjects.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Overall attitudes of students present were positive. Many senior students want to do well and are willing to work hard. A significant minority are happy to get by and do not apply themselves fully to their studies.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in class is generally good. Students show respect for people and property. They are courteous and show consideration for others. Movement around the school is orderly. There is some bullying but students say that it is effectively dealt with and does not constitute a serious problem. Permanent exclusion is rare and the incidence of temporary exclusions is in line with national averages.
Personal development and relationships	Many students enter school with low self-esteem and self-confidence. Students are responding well to the atmosphere, attitudes and overall provision offered and many older students are mature, responsible young people. Relationships among students and with adults are good. There is much mutual respect between teachers and students.
Attendance	Levels of attendance are well below national averages and the incidence of unauthorised absence is high. Absence last year and this has been particularly high in Year 11.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Overall standards of teaching are good. There is virtually no unsatisfactory teaching by permanent staff. 70% of teaching at Key Stage 4 and 60% at Key Stage 3 is at least good. 20% of teaching is very good or better. A significant proportion of teaching by temporary staff is unsatisfactory. The planning of lessons, the effectiveness of teaching methods, the subject knowledge and understanding of members of permanent staff and the management of students are consistently strong. Teaching and support for students with special educational needs are good, sometimes very good. There is good co-operation between teachers and support staff although more in-class support would enable students to make better progress. Standards of learning are satisfactory. Students enter the school with little command of learning skills and high dependence on teachers. There are already indications that the work of the school on skill acquisition and on students' knowledge of their own learning is beginning to pay off but more needs to be done on the development of independent learning, interest and productivity. Students with special educational needs learn well when supported. Gifted and talented students respond well to the opportunities made available to them and are developing a good range of learning skills.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. There is a need, however, to integrate the use of ICT in subjects across the curriculum. Good arrangements are being made for students who do not respond well to traditional curriculum but more needs to be done to increase the appeal of Key Stage 4 curriculum. The school has a very good scheme for personal, social and health education although co-operation with the careers service and facilities to explore career opportunities require further development. There is a very strong extra-curricular programme. There is equality of access and opportunity in the curriculum. Relationships with the community and liaison with partner institutions are developing effectively.
Provision for students with special educational needs	There is an effective balance of provision between individual and in-class support for students with special educational needs and good induction arrangements with primary schools. Appropriate individual education programmes are in place and students with special needs are well known to teachers. Very good enhanced provision for gifted and talented students broadens their horizons and is producing some very high standards of work.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Overall provision is good. It is especially strong for moral and social development. The personal, social and health education curriculum, the values of the school and the example provided by teachers are influential strands of the provision. There are good arrangements for developing an appreciation of high culture but insufficient emphasis on the multi-cultural nature of society. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory although very much concentrated in the religious education programme and the 'Eden' project. The school should proceed with its proposed audit of provision for personal development as soon as possible.
How well the school cares for its students	There are good procedures for child protection and health and safety. The academic support and monitoring systems are very good and much appreciated by senior students. The provision for personal support for students is good but the contribution of the form tutor has not been fully established. There are effective, consistent systems for promoting good behaviour. Every effort is being made to challenge absence and to encourage students individually and in class groups to establish good attendance patterns. Arrangements would be improved by better understanding between the school and the education welfare service.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	The school is working very hard and with some success to create a meaningful partnership with parents. There are good induction arrangements and a number of initiatives seek to bring home the importance of the parental contribution to good standards of education. The quality and attractiveness of information sent to parents is good. Unfortunately many parents do not respond to the considerable efforts being made by the school to work in partnership with them.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership is energetic, supportive and provides a clear sense of direction. The achievements of the senior management team in setting up a new school with its own identity and common sense of purpose have been exceptional. Responsibilities are well defined and lines of communication are direct and effective. Day to day management runs very smoothly. The geography department lacks a sense of direction and planning, curriculum and monitoring are unsatisfactory.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is less than one year old and some governors are still coming to terms with their responsibilities. Core governors involved in the establishment of the school have a very good knowledge of it. They work very closely with the senior management and have been most effective in supporting the school in its early development. All governors are committed to the success of the school. They fulfil their statutory responsibilities except for the provision for a daily act of worship. They play a prominent role in policy making, education development and financial planning and control.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Structures are now in place for the on-going thorough evaluation of the work of students, staff, departments and school as a whole. Very good lines of communications allow senior managers to be very sensitive to change. The arrangements for self-evaluation by staff are particularly noteworthy. A comprehensive process of formal evaluation of development over the last year is currently underway.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are used carefully and effectively. Governors and managers are committed to obtaining best value for money and arrangements for financial control are secure. Accommodation is organised and used efficiently and provides well for the needs of the school. Staff are well deployed and support staff make a very important contribution to the smooth running of the school. The inability to attract suitably qualified and experienced staff to a number of vacancies is placing great strain on the school and other staff. There are very good arrangements for staff development. Educational resources are adequate although ICT should be fully integrated across the curriculum. The library is inadequately resourced in staff, books and equipment.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has high expectations of its students. • Students are helped to mature and become responsible. • Management is good and the school is well led. • The quality of teaching is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework. • The quality of the partnership with parents. • The range of activities outside lessons.

Only 11% of parents returned the questionnaire and nine parents were present at the meeting with the registered inspector. The very limited response reduces the reliability of any conclusions drawn from it. The great majority of responses were supportive of the school and inspectors strongly concur with their view. The evidence of the inspection makes it difficult to understand concerns about extra-curricular activities and the attempts by the school to establish a meaningful partnership with parents. There is a very strong extra-curricular programme which not only includes sporting, dramatic, musical and artistic activities but extends to support in many of the subject areas after school and in holidays. The school is trying very hard to establish a strong partnership with parents. Senior staff spend much time organising events for parents to engage their support in the learning process and there is a social programme to encourage parents to feel more at home in the school. Some of the above events are well attended but others do not have the support they deserve. Homework is set and marked regularly. Overall the quality of homework is satisfactory and some is very good. Students do not always complete their homework, however, and a few teachers do not attach sufficient importance to this.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. Overall standards of attainment in 2000 were very low compared with national averages in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 and in GCSE. Compared with other schools where more than half of students are eligible for free school meals overall standards in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were below average and well below average in GCSE.

2. In end of Key Stage 3 tests, results were very low compared with national averages in English, mathematics and science except at Level 5 in English and Level 6 in science where they were well below average. Overall there was little difference between the results of boys and girls in the tests. Standards in English were in line with those of similar schools but well below them in mathematics and science.

3. In GCSE the percentage of students gaining five or more passes at grades A* - C and A* - G and the percentage obtaining one grade A* - G were very low compared with national averages and with similar schools except that the proportion obtaining five or more A* - G was well below that of similar schools. In individual subjects the proportion of students gaining A* - C passes was close to the national average in art and design, with a relatively high number of students entered for the examination, and in Spanish and drama, with much lower entries. Pass levels at A* - C were well below national averages in other subjects. The proportion of students obtaining A* - G passes was close to the national average in physical education, vocational studies, English language and combined science. There were very low entries for modern foreign languages, history and music. Overall averages were depressed by low entry levels. The school suffered from non or very low attendance by a significant number of Year 11 students and the experience of some students in Year 10 at their previous schools had not prepared them for GCSE entry. Girls out-performed boys in GCSE but the difference between them overall was less than the national difference.

4. All results at the end of both key stages concerned students who had been in attendance at Parklands School for not more than nine months. They reflect the attainment standards of those students but not the effectiveness of teaching and learning at Parklands. Since this is a new school there is no record of attainment over recent years. During the week of the inspection the average attendance of Year 11 students was 65.4 per cent and of Year 9 students, 72.3 per cent. Attendance levels of these year groups in the current academic year are running at 76.9 and 77.7 per cent respectively. The poor levels of attendance in Year 11 are likely to depress the average overall pass levels in GCSE this year. The school is well positioned to achieve its targets for many subject areas but in view of the attendance position its overall targets may be too ambitious.

5. Students enter the school with very low standards of attainment. Students who attend regularly make sound progress and overall standards are improving. 45 per cent of the work of Year 7 students seen during the inspection and almost 40 per cent of that of Key Stage 4 students was close to the average national standard. Standards of work seen were lowest in Year 9 and overall at both key stages standards were below national averages. Standards are very low in the core subjects and geography. There is little difference between the standards attained by boys and girls; many girls lack self-confidence and are reluctant to contribute to discussion or question and answer sessions. Standards of literacy, numeracy and study skills, together with absenteeism, provide major obstacles to improved progress. At the end of both key stages high attainers read accurately and sustain and develop their

ideas in writing. They have a reasonable grasp of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Many students, however, are not fluent readers and, boys in particular have difficulty with writing. Oral skills are better than writing skills but because of limited vocabulary and lack of confidence many students cannot sustain ideas or develop a line of thought in discussion. High attainers are working at average standards in mathematics but there are many students who are working at a fairly basic level and who do not have a secure grasp of basic numeracy. The school has policies for literacy and numeracy which are in evidence in Year 7 in English and mathematics respectively but which need to be implemented across the curriculum. Study skills are weak. Students do not organise their work, including homework, well, and many arrive at lessons ill-prepared for work. They are reluctant to try to find answers, solve problems themselves and seek help without trying to understand answers.

6. Research and investigation skills are poor. The school is aware of these weaknesses and a major support programme is underway which currently concentrates on students in Years 9 and 11 to improve study skills. There is also a very effective programme for gifted and talented students which is being successful in broadening horizons and developing study skills as well as enabling students to reach high standards of attainment in their areas of strength.

7. Students do better in practical areas where there is less dependency on literacy skills. Standards in personal, social and health education and physical education are in line with the national average at both key stages and in art and design at Key Stage 4, although the practical work of GCSE students in physical education is better than their academic work. Standards in drama meet national expectations and some students are attaining high standards in GCSE work.

8. The overall progress of students with special educational needs is satisfactory. Where students are withdrawn from lessons to work in small groups progress is good. This is due to the teachers' very good knowledge of the needs of the individual students and the good quality of the teaching. In one lesson, for example, students in Year 7 made good progress in improving their use of adjectives, because the teacher used a very good knowledge of individual students to closely match the work to their needs, and skilfully extended their vocabulary through well thought out activities, whilst maintaining a good pace in a secure working atmosphere. In subject areas the overall rate of progress is satisfactory. In some subjects including art and design, design and technology, ICT and physical education the rate of progress is good, due to the good knowledge teachers have of the students, appropriate strategies and materials which are adapted to meet their needs, and the good work of learning support assistants working with some classes.

9. Overall the picture is of sound progress and improving standards but from a very low base.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

10. Most students work hard, answer questions and enjoy the learning activity during lessons. For example, in a Year 7 food technology lesson students worked enthusiastically on an assignment for the preparation of desserts and at the end of the lesson the whole group were proud to celebrate their achievements. In art and design, students display very positive attitudes and a real enthusiasm for learning. Students in Year 10 observed working in an ICT lesson had a good attitude towards their work and tried hard to complete a task even when they were encountering difficulties. Many students are involved in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Most students have a satisfactory attitude towards their studies, although a small number mainly in Years 9, 10 and 11 appear disinterested and apathetic. Even when the quality of teaching is good, some of these students lack motivation and respond with little

interest and enthusiasm. There are a significant number of students with low self-esteem who find it difficult to participate fully in class. This has a negative effect on their progress and achievements. An improvement in attitude and response has been noted amongst students working on an alternative curriculum to meet their individual needs.

11. When students with special educational needs are withdrawn from lessons to work in small groups and individually with a teacher, they have a positive attitude to their work. They arrive on time, are keen to do well and work hard. A minority, however, have a poor attendance record which slows their rate of progress.

12. Behaviour is good in lessons and while students are moving around the school. There is little evidence of vandalism or graffiti and students show respect for property. There is a consistent approach by all staff towards a high expectation of good behaviour which impacts well on students' response. The school is an orderly environment where there is very little unruly behaviour which goes unchecked. This is mainly due to the firm approach to discipline particularly by the senior management team. Students are well aware of the code of conduct, and behaviour is good during breaks and at lunchtime. Students are respectful and well behaved during assemblies. Parents are generally satisfied with the standard of behaviour in the school. Although there are occasional incidents of bullying and name calling, students do not feel that there is a particular problem in the school. The strong programme for personal, social and health education helps students to develop sound relationships. Students show concern and support for each other. During the last academic year the incidence of temporary exclusions has been in line with national averages and permanent exclusions have been rare.

13. Relationships throughout the school are good. Most students relate well to their teachers and are able to work well in groups sharing resources amicably. Despite the considerable efforts being made to raise standards of learning, poor study skills and low self-confidence affect the motivation and progress of some students. They have difficulty in planning and organising their work, maintaining concentration and studying without support. Opportunities to show initiative are limited. Students in Year 8 take turns to spend a day assisting the office staff with tasks around the school. The School Council is a developing group with one representative from each tutor group who discuss issues and suggestions for improvements. This is well organised and managed by a member of staff, and makes a good contribution to students' personal development. The School Council is currently circulating a questionnaire to all students seeking views on a number of school issues. Opportunities for all students to be actively involved in decision-making and practical assignments for the school as a community are limited.

14. Attendance is a major problem for the school and is very poor. Attendance this academic year, at 81.3% is very low compared to the national average, and unauthorised absence at 3.88% is well above the national average. During the time of the inspection a significant number of lessons were poorly attended and students' progress was often inhibited by the constant need to go over missed work. Students are well aware of the importance which the school places on good attendance, but there are some, mainly in Years 9, 10 and 11 who show little commitment to improvement. Although students are expected to record attendance in their homework planners, there is very little evidence to show that this is happening. Whilst most students are punctual, there are a few who are regularly late by a few minutes or longer. Registers are called promptly by form tutors. Lessons start on time and there is an efficient and well ordered start to the day.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

15. Standards of teaching are good overall. Teaching is stronger at Key Stage 4 than Key

Stage 3 but in both key stages 60% of teaching is good or better. 20% of teaching is very good or excellent. 6% of teaching is unsatisfactory but almost all of this is by temporary members of staff, some of whom have very little experience of the school. Teaching in all departments is at least satisfactory. There is very good teaching in English, drama and art and design in Key Stage 4 and in Spanish and physical education in both key stages.

16. The quality of teaching of students with special educational needs is good. The information provided to teachers by the special educational needs department is comprehensive and appropriate. Teachers make good use of this and the Individual Education Plans when preparing lessons and generally match the work effectively to the needs of individual students by adapting worksheets, giving and then reinforcing clear explanations and instructions, and using appropriate resources. The support given to students by the learning support assistants is of good quality. In one English lesson with students in Year 7, for instance, the learning support assistant provided effective guidance, support, and encouragement to a number of students to enable them to complete their work, allowing the teacher to maintain the pace of the lesson, and the students with special educational needs to make good progress.

17. When students are withdrawn to work in small groups the quality of teaching is very good. Teachers know the students and their individual needs well and through skilful management quickly establish an excellent working atmosphere. Lessons are very well planned with a variety of challenging yet achievable activities which are well focused on the needs of the students, and which are completed at a lively pace maintaining students' interest and concentration throughout. Lessons are brought to a conclusion with an appropriate exercise to review and consolidate what has been learnt with good questioning to enable teachers to assess what has been achieved.

18. The quality of teaching and support provided ensures that students with special educational needs learn well. They have a positive attitude, work hard at a good pace and generally maintain concentration throughout.

19. Standards of learning are satisfactory. Teachers work very hard to involve students in lessons and their response is acceptable but in many cases not enthusiastic. Students listen to and respond appropriately to instructions but are reluctant to work independently and many require much help from the teacher. Many are naturally passive and it is only through perseverance by teachers that they become involved in discussion. In some subjects, drama, physical education and personal, social and health education, they are more forthcoming and readily engage in practical activities and discussion.

20. Teachers, including temporary teachers, have a good command of their subjects and teachers working outside their subject specialisms have the knowledge and understanding to successfully deliver their courses. Standards of preparation and planning are very high and objectives of lessons are clear. The aim of lessons are explained to students and often written on the board so that students are continually reminded of them. Occasionally a lack of focus leads to insufficient learning in mathematics. Some lessons in mathematics do not hold the interests of students throughout but where lessons are broken down into distinct sessions, as in Year 7, they are much more successful. Teachers carefully explain tasks and provide clear explanations. Explanations in design and technology and child care are carefully structured with plenty of consolidation to ensure understanding. In practical subjects due attention is given to safe working practice. Work planned and carried out in lessons usually provides for the needs of all students. The demands of work are well pitched in English (where extension work is provided) ICT, design and technology and personal, social and health education. Students are well supported in business studies to ensure that all students make progress. In science, mathematics, history and music the work does not always place

sufficient demands on high attaining students.

21. The teaching of basic skills is good in English. Teaching and support work with focus and target groups emphasise good study skills and habits. There are good opportunities for discussion in drama and personal, social and health education but insufficient oral work in ICT and history. Many students are lacking in self-confidence which makes them reluctant to show initiative or become involved in oral work. Insecurity among Key Stage 3 students in art and design inhibits imaginative responses. All departments pay attention to correct terminology and some attention is given to the development of literacy skills in history but overall not enough attention is given to basic skills to counter the very low standards of students on entry to the school. Independent working is emphasised in business studies and students are increasingly encouraged to take responsibility for their own work in art and design, but there is too much spoon-feeding of child care students and in some English lessons. In some design and technology and English lessons teachers are too protective; they tend to dominate the lessons and allow too little time for students to work on their own. Too little time is allowed for independent working in geography.

22. Teachers have high expectations of students in drama and personal, social and health education. Lessons proceed at a good pace and students concentrate and work productively. Students respond positively to the enthusiasm of teaching in physical education and to the challenging approaches of teachers at Key Stage 4 in art and design. Tasks are challenging but achievable in ICT but not enough is asked of students in geography or child care. There is much challenging teaching in modern foreign languages especially when emphasis is maintained on the use of the foreign language. Teachers use a good range of approaches and employ some vivid home-made resources. Occasionally in modern foreign languages, teaching lacks challenge and rigour and use of language is inconsistent. Religious education teaching employs a range of approaches and makes good reference to contemporary issues to engage the interests of students but some teaching does not challenge students sufficiently. Some teaching in design and technology is too cautious and too much time is allowed for some tasks. Some music lessons would benefit from greater variety to engage students more strongly.

23. Many students do not arrive at lessons strongly motivated or well organised to learn. Too much time is lost on organisation at the beginning of some lessons and although students listen when required they are not accustomed to concentrating or applying themselves diligently over extended periods of time. There are indications of improvement, however, in some subjects and with students in Year 7, focus and target groups, special educational needs withdrawal groups and classes for gifted and talented students.

24. Standards of classroom management across the school are very good. There are clear structures which are respected by students. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and students are accorded much respect by teachers. Students realise that teachers want them to do well. Students receive much encouragement and there is much positive feedback for good work or effort. Classroom behaviour is good and the atmosphere in classes is usually calm and relaxed. Classroom management is strongly supported by the senior management who have a strong presence around the school and in classrooms.

25. Work is marked regularly and all students have up to date assessments in all subjects of the standards of their work against National Curriculum or GCSE criteria. Students know how well they are doing. Homework is set and marked regularly but is of variable quality; too little is given in some areas yet other homework is demanding and of good quality. The mathematics department has a clear expectation that homework will be completed correctly. Other departments do not make the same demands on students and

often homework is not completed satisfactorily. This affects learning adversely.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?

26. The new school has worked hard to establish strong social and subject links with its local primary schools. This has strengthened the local reputation of the school and ensures a smooth transfer at eleven with effective continuity of learning.

27. In Key Stage 3, students follow a comprehensive programme of subjects that fulfil the requirements of the National Curriculum and religious education. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is broad and balanced except when students have been allowed to opt out of studying a modern foreign language. This will be altered from September 2001. The legal requirements for religious education are fully met at Key Stage 4. There is a well-designed strategy for improving the standards of literacy but not all teachers have yet incorporated this into their work. Similarly a numeracy policy has yet to have the intended impact beyond Year 7. The school is well provided with ICT but at this stage its use is insufficiently integrated in the curriculum of many departments. There are some interesting initiatives designed to meet the very different needs of some students. A co-operative venture with the local college of further education (FE College) provides an alternative curriculum to supplement school core subjects. It includes individual mentoring, a weekly session of work experience, off site study skills development and a half-day of vocational study taster sessions at the FE College. This, and 'Route 43', a community based support scheme, are effective in maintaining the interest and motivation of a small group of students who might otherwise lose contact with the school. Despite the introduction of GCSE drama, business studies and office applications, the organisation of curriculum is largely traditional. So far, the school has not generally exploited the new flexibility available to improve the relevancy of the Key Stage 4 curriculum, particularly through the introduction of a stronger vocational dimension. There is insufficient use of entry level programmes to provide certification of achievement for those students who find it difficult to cope with the skill levels of GCSE.

28. The school has a complex mix of form tutor and teaching groups in Key Stage 3, with some subjects using ability groupings decided by student capability in English. The five-lesson teaching day causes some difficulties to teachers and affects time deployment but has the advantage of reducing the amount of movement between classes. In mathematics, many students find it difficult to sustain concentration throughout a 60-minute lesson. Although most subjects have sufficient time to deliver the programmes of study, modern languages has less in Key Stage 3 than in many schools, making it harder to compensate for lack of foreign language study in the primary schools. In Year 11, art and design has less than average time which has impacted on the amount of course work produced by students. Staff absence and recruitment problems mean that, this year, geography has only half as much time as allocated to history in Years 7 and 8, inhibiting the learning process. There are plans to change this in September with better use of humanities time across the key stage.

29. A very carefully designed and well taught modular personal, social and health education programme, supplemented in science, covers the requirements for education about health, sex and the dangers of misuse of drugs. It also includes other elements relating to personal and social development, citizenship and careers education. This programme has been developed since September 2000. A small number of experienced teachers deal with sensitive issues in a forthright way. Links with out-of-school agencies brings in other contributors to increase the relevancy of the programme. This course, running through from Years 7-11, lies at the heart of the school's drive to provide good student welfare and guidance and improve confidence and self-esteem. In a short time, it has become the model for the local education authority to use with other schools.

30. The broader career education component is effectively taught in personal, social and health education. The 'job search' guidance element is as yet, underdeveloped. Students have limited access to the recently installed career library and sparse contact with ICT job search software. All students now have work experience placements in Year 10 and this works well. Contracted career advisors provide individual interviews and independent career advice. Students with special educational needs receive additional career guidance. At this early stage in the life of the new school, both staff and students, recognise that this element requires more development. Students have insufficient access to an extended range of careers information and guidance.

31. There are good arrangements to ensure students have equal access to the curriculum and opportunities to pursue their interests. Individual Education Plans for students with special educational needs fully reflect the requirements of the statements of special educational need and of students at Stages 2-4 of the special educational needs Code of Practice. They are well written, with clear and achievable targets set by both the department for special educational needs and subject teachers. The targets are discussed with students ensuring clarity and understanding. Good use is made of the individual education plans and their targets by teachers in most subjects. Arrangements for support in class are appropriate. Often such support is directly linked to students who have a statement of special educational needs. A small number of learning support assistants have recently been appointed but there are still not enough, especially in classes where there are large numbers of students with special educational needs and where there are no learning support assistants supporting students with a statement of special educational needs. The management of the programme for students with special educational needs to be withdrawn from subject lessons and work in small groups is appropriate and effective. There is a well organised and successful programme of individual tuition and support drawing on the expertise of a range of city-wide agencies.

32. Students with special educational needs are fully included in the life of the school. They receive their full entitlement to the National Curriculum, and the arrangements for grouping students for lessons across the school are appropriate. Students with special educational needs play a full part in lessons, answering questions, and being involved in the activities offered. An alternative curriculum is provided for disaffected students who find the discipline of GCSE subjects difficult and this vocationally orientated course is proving effective. Students generally take GCSE examinations in all subjects. An alternative accreditation, to support those for whom this is not appropriate, is available in mathematics.

33. There is a well developed, popular programme for gifted and talented students. The programme seeks to attract all students who have particular gifts, abilities and skills and involves those with good academic aptitudes as well as those talented in sport, drama and music. The school has formed links with the local library, sports centres and universities to devise a broad programme to enhance the personal horizons of students. A Summer School, weekend classes and outside visits, including a trip to Barcelona, have contributed to the programme. Some of the students have attained high standards, for example in modern languages and art and design.

34. There is a very strong extra-curricular programme. Most departments run clubs or additional classes. There is a range of additional lessons for GCSE students. The physical education department offers a wide sports programme. There are music and drama productions, a number of musical groups and a very active 'Eden' project. Extra-curricular activities are offered at weekends and in holidays as well as after school. The programme is making a very important contribution towards improved attitudes towards school as well as enhancing educational opportunity. Students value the chance to stay after school and come in at weekends and during holidays to use ICT equipment. They appreciate the time given by staff to help them do this. Although there is a programme for outside visits, fieldwork and excursions this area is not so well developed as others.

35. Each year group has an assembly, designed around a weekly theme. Assemblies are generally engaging and well delivered, capturing the attention of students. Even though they do not meet requirements for a collective act of worship, the assemblies provide an important opportunity for reflection and a corporate start, on that day, for respective year groups. Form tutor periods on the other hand are less effective in this respect. The impact of the 'thought for the day' is often diminished because some tutors are ill-prepared and concentrate on administrative routines. Effectiveness varies with individual tutors and there are examples of the time being well used. Nevertheless, there are many missed opportunities to develop relationships and strengthen pastoral support.

36. Desired social and moral values are embodied in the atmosphere of the school. Students receive very good social and moral guidance through the taught curriculum in subjects and personal, social and health education. The school creates a disciplined framework for learning, helping students to think about the consequences of their actions and distinguish right from wrong. The approaches are successful with those who attend and the senior team is working very hard to combat habits of absenteeism of a significant proportion of students. Teachers are good role models, dealing in a calm, courteous and patient way to help students observe classroom routines and work well together. Students are polite and welcome a range of outside visitors in personal, social and health education. There are opportunities for working with others, especially through the impressive range of extra-curricular activities on offer. The extra-curricular programme gives opportunity for students to explore the arts and their own cultural traditions. The school council offers a chance for elected students to show initiative, a sense of responsibility and demonstrate commitment to the development of their school. The school reaches out to the local community, making strong efforts to inform and involve parents in its work, so far with limited success.

37. Spiritual development is less explicit, except in the strong religious education programme and the excellent contribution of the community based Eden mission that has an impressive following in the school. Aspects are implied elsewhere in the curriculum, particularly in history, music, drama and personal, social and health education but they have not been clearly mapped or emphasised in schemes of work. Assemblies provide opportunities for reflection but the spiritual dimension is not promoted as strongly in the school as the moral and social elements.

38. Opportunities to appreciate the diversity and richness of other cultures are less well developed than in many other schools where there is a greater ethnic mix of students. Religious education lessons make an effective contribution and the quality displays of student work and reference material relating to Christianity and other world faiths, point up the key beliefs and precepts of each religion. In modern languages students are introduced to some aspects of Spanish and French culture. African, Caribbean, North and South American and Indian music are explored as well as the Western European classical tradition and a variety of cultural influences enrich work in art and design. In general however, there is scope to develop this aspect further so that students are better prepared to live and work in a multi-cultural society. The school is planning to proceed with its proposed audit of provision for personal development as soon as possible.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

39. Good procedures are followed by all staff to ensure students' safety and welfare, and good attention is paid to their individual needs. This is a significant strength of the school. Those parents attending the meeting prior to the inspection felt that the pastoral system was effective. Students speak positively about the support they receive and most feel confident that staff are readily available to assist with any problems. Very good procedures are consistently followed to monitor students' academic performance and personal and social development. As part of the 'Excellence in Cities' project the school has four learning mentors who provide good support for students in Years 7 to 10, and senior members of staff act as mentors for small groups of Year 11 students. Information about progress and special needs is well documented and shared between staff. The good pastoral support programmes where students are assisted to set personal targets has a very positive effect on progress and students' attitude towards school. The 'Tuesday' group is very well organised with an alternative curriculum for potentially disaffected students in Year 10. Students receive good support during lessons from a key worker working with individuals or small groups as appropriate. These students also receive good additional support through well-managed activities in school and at Manchester City College. Students in Year 11 have the opportunity to work with a voluntary organisation with the aim of raising their interest and motivation. Very good provision is made for extension activities for those students who are assessed by the school to be gifted and talented.

40. The initial identification and assessment of the requirements of students with special educational needs are very good, due to the close relationships which are maintained with contributory primary schools and the very thorough assessment procedures as part of the whole school assessment programme. This establishes a sound baseline for assessing progress and a regular programme of assessment and review is being implemented. Records are well maintained and a thorough analysis of the results is used effectively to review and monitor the progress of students and provide appropriate support. The quality of information provided for the transition review as students prepare to leave school is of good quality and appropriate arrangements are made for all the key members of staff to make a contribution.

41. There are clear procedures to support students with emotional and behavioural difficulties including close liaison between the pastoral team who support students through day-to-day difficulties and the special educational needs co-ordinator who acts to contact outside agencies if required.

42. Departments in the school have identified gifted and talented students and teachers know who they are. The school is increasingly developing strategies to support these students both in the classroom and with extra-curricular activities. A group of gifted linguists recently made a cultural visit to Barcelona and students in science visited the North West Festival of Science.

43. Arrangements for the assessment of academic performance, for target setting and monitoring of progress are very good. There is now substantial information on attainment at entry through Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests and standardised tests administered by the school. All students have up to date assessments of performance and individual targets in all subjects. Students in Years 9 and 11 are receiving additional support from learning mentors and members of the senior management team and progress of these students is monitored regularly. The updating of individual assessments and awareness of students' targets are integral parts of the self-evaluation package for teachers. Assessment information is being well used to inform curriculum decisions in modern languages, science and for students in Year 9. It is also used to guide planning for Key Stage 4 students following alternative curriculum arrangements. In other areas there is a need to make better use of the information, for example to give greater emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy and provide more opportunities for students to develop self-confidence and develop their study skills.

44. All students have a form tutor who they meet each morning during form time, but some students feel that the head of their year is more accessible to them as a first point of contact. All students are well known to staff as individuals. Form tutors, heads of year and home liaison officers are very well informed about the academic performance, attendance and behaviour of students. Regular meetings are held to discuss students giving concern. The relationship between Form Tutors and students requires further development, however, so that students will be more confident to see the Tutor as their first contact point when they have individual problems. The senior management team is successful in closely monitoring issues of organisation and the impact on standards and students' progress. The school has good support strategies for helping students returning to school after a prolonged absence. There is a good programme of personal, social and health education which is of a high profile in the school. This is well organised to alert students to a range of moral and social issues including sex education and drugs awareness and impacts well on the care and guidance provision.

45. Procedures for monitoring child protection issues are good with two trained designated members of staff taking overall responsibility. Regular meetings are held with staff to ensure that all are fully aware and that procedures are closely followed. Students who are a cause for concern are dealt with in a caring and sympathetic manner, where necessary in conjunction with outside agencies. All issues are well documented and recorded confidentially. The health and safety policy is well implemented. A risk assessment of classrooms and circulation areas has informed a programme of improvements which is on-going. In subjects such as science and design and technology the school is particularly vigilant in its safety monitoring. A number of staff are qualified in First Aid.

46. The procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are very good. The school is working very hard to try to improve its poor record of attendance and unauthorised absence. A very good reward system is well established including prizes, names on Roll of Honour and a good attendance assembly held each half term. Computerised registration provides immediate information which is well used and readily available to staff, and systems are currently in the process of being further improved. The appointment of two home liaison officers assisted by the education welfare officer results in constant home visiting and enquiry into unauthorised absence. These arrangements are likely to become more effective

when there is better co-operation between the school and the education welfare service to clarify the aims of intervention by the education welfare officer. Students with a prolonged record of non-attendance are offered an alternative timetable. The school faces the problem of a significant amount of condoned absence and limited parental support. A good system is in place for daily contact with parents by telephone to monitor absence. Follow up letters home alert parents to unauthorised absence and promote the importance of regular attendance for successful achievements. Students arriving late are challenged by members of the senior management team and names are recorded in the late book.

47. Very good procedures are followed consistently by all staff to monitor and promote good behaviour. The headteacher and the senior management team have a high profile around the school, and students' behaviour is constantly monitored and, where necessary, challenged. The tight control systems result in students learning in an orderly and calm environment where behaviour is good. The school has very good procedures for monitoring and eliminating bullying or harassment, and students feel confident that any problems will be dealt with well by staff. Clear records are kept of any incidents of inappropriate behaviour. The school has a good system of rewards which students value and these are well used to promote self-esteem and confidence. An appropriate system of sanctions for poor work or behaviour is followed. The school's expectations, rewards and sanctions are displayed prominently in all areas of the building.

48. Through the close partnership which the school has with its feeder primary schools, a very good programme of induction activities is followed for students in Years 4, 5 and 6. A senior member of staff working with the head of Year 7 have overall responsibility for the development of primary liaison links. The school welcomes primary pupils who visit the school regularly to take part in activities including ICT, Spanish, art and design, science, drama and sports. The joint activities which are now well developed with a growing number of students taking part ensures a smooth transition period for joining the school as students in Year 7.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

49. The school works hard to involve parents in the work of the school but often with inadequate response. The overall contribution of parents to students' learning at school and at home is poor. Attendance at the meeting for parents held prior to the inspection and the return of completed questionnaires was very low. Those parents who did respond are generally pleased with the quality of education the school provides and feel that they are well informed about progress. Most parents feel comfortable to approach the school to discuss any problems or to request information. Those parents whose sons or daughters are following an alternative curriculum through the 'Tuesday' group are very satisfied with the arrangements made and the improvement in attitude and attendance. The school's home liaison officers work closely with a large number of parents and families as appropriate, referring them where necessary to outside agencies. This good support makes a strong contribution to establishing pastoral links, and encouraging parents to take an interest in the work of the school.

50. During the week of the inspection a celebration event for Year 7 students and their parents was held at the end of the school day. Parents were made welcome by the school but only a small proportion attended. A good opportunity was provided for students to select two free books, followed by a presentation focusing on study skills, and time for parents to speak with the head of year and form tutors. A meeting was also held for parents and Year 11 students who are expected to gain grade C passes at GCSE. This meeting was well attended, and an emphasis was placed on the support required from parents to help students to achieve the expected grades. A helpful booklet was provided containing good support material to assist revision. Regular open evenings are held for each year group which are usually well attended by parents. All parents receive a copy of their own child's attendance record. The department for special educational needs maintains good links with parents three quarters of whom recently attended transition review meetings for students with statements of special educational needs. Parents are kept fully informed of the targets that are set for students on the IEP and of their children's progress to meet those targets.

51. In the school's endeavour to improve attendance parents have received a copy of 'School Attendance – Advice and Guidance for Parents' and a recent letter from the headteacher informing them of active follow-up of absence on a daily basis. Reports to parents provide good information about progress and most parents are satisfied with the information they receive. All students receive an interim report containing a grade for attainment and effort. The annual reports are good and cover all subjects of the national curriculum setting individual targets for improvement which are closely linked to attendance, concentration and academic achievement. Although all students have planners, parents are not asked to sign them, and these are not being well used as a means of communication between home and school. An attractive and well-presented termly newsletter 'The Parklands Press' celebrates the school's successes and provides good information about activities.

52. The 'Friends of Parklands' are a small group of parents most of whom are also lunchtime supervisors. The group is very supportive of the school and organises a number of social events during the year which are well attended by parents and members of the local community.

53. The school prospectus provides good detail about organisation but only limited information about the curriculum. The prospectus is currently in the process of being updated and extended to provide greater detail about courses and the curriculum. Since the school opened there has been limited written information available about the option blocks for students in Key Stage 4. A booklet is currently in preparation providing students and their parents with improved information to assist them in making choices.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

54. The leadership has clear aims which it pursues consistently with energy and determination. It seeks to establish a school which is respected by the community for the quality of care and education it provides. The leadership has been responsible for the tremendous progress which has been made in a short time. The school has a clear identity and there is considerable commitment to well understood aims and values by those who work there. There is a strong organisational and administrative framework which functions smoothly on a day to day basis.

55. The management structure is clearly defined and there are very good direct lines of communication. Senior staff are very well informed and have a strong presence around the school. In almost all areas middle management provides effective leadership, the only weakness being in geography where there is no clear direction and curriculum and assessment arrangements are unsatisfactory.

56. The governing body was formed in June 2000 and some members are still coming to terms with their responsibilities. There is a strong core of members who have been involved with the school continuously from its planning stages. They are familiar with the governor role and have a very good knowledge of the school and the community it serves. They have been influential in establishing the direction of the school and have been heavily involved in the planning for resourcing it. The current governing body represents a wide range of interests which it is beginning to deploy effectively. Governors play an important role in educational and financial planning. They are particularly concerned for the proper control of resources and have good arrangements for financial monitoring. Financial resources are used efficiently and governors attach much importance to obtaining good value for money. The school has been successful in obtaining additional resources from a number of sources which have been very well used to improve the range and quality of opportunities for learning and to combat absenteeism. There are good relationships between managers and governors and roles are clearly defined. The governors meet their statutory responsibilities except for the provision for a daily act of collective worship.

57. Arrangements for teachers to evaluate their work and to monitor and develop teaching standards are strong. Members of the senior management spend much time observing teaching in classrooms. Teachers have had training in self-evaluation and use of assessment information and all have self-evaluation files. There is much informal observation of teaching within departments which should be extended when the staffing position improves. The school is fully prepared to introduce a new, well thought out scheme of performance management.

58. There is a very high correlation between the needs of the school and its priorities for action. There has been considerable effective action to seek to improve educational standards, quality of teaching and learning, levels of attendance, the learning environment and pastoral support. The inclusion of some of the above in this report's recommendations for improvement does not signify a lack of effectiveness in the actions taken by the school, rather a recognition that some of the problems faced by the school are deep-seated and improvement will be slow and long-term. The commitment of staff to improvement is very strong and very well focused considering the school is only 18 months old. The priorities of the school have been very well supported by financial planning and by teaching and non-teaching staff who have given very freely of their own time during a period when there have been shortages in permanent staff.

59. Procedures for the induction of staff new to the school are clear and effective. Newly qualified teachers are very well supported by their mentors and by the senior management team and are given time to widen their experience by observing experienced teaching and attending courses. The school has well established links with Manchester Metropolitan University for the initial training of teachers. Staff professional development is a good feature of the school's provision. Much in-service training comes from within the school itself and there is adequate funding to allow staff to attend outside courses where appropriate.

60. The school makes good use of the services of its very committed and hard working staff, both teaching and non-teaching. Most departments have sufficient qualified specialist teachers to meet the demands of the curriculum. However, the relatively high dependence on temporary teachers, necessitated by the absence through illness of a number of permanent staff and unfilled vacancies, is currently having a detrimental effect on standards and consuming much of the time and energy of senior staff. In mathematics, science and geography, in spite of the best efforts of everyone involved, students' learning is compromised through disrupted continuity of teaching and, in a few cases, teaching that is unsatisfactory. The long-term absence of the heads of the mathematics and geography departments means that these areas are currently without leadership. Other areas, for example the religious education department, are well up to strength with permanent staff who teach to their specialism. Teachers and students are well supported by the school's skilled technical and administrative staff who are sufficient in number to enable the school to function effectively.

61. The arrangements for supporting students with special educational needs are good and meet all national requirements. There is a well written policy, records are up-to-date, and the department is well organised. Subject teachers are kept well informed of the needs of individual students, informal links with most departments are strong and a system of regular formal liaison meetings between the department for special educational needs and subject areas is being established. The special educational needs co-ordinator is well supported by a designated member of the senior management team and development planning is of good quality. Although there has been an increase in the number of learning support assistants working with students in class there is not enough to provide effective support in many areas of the school. Records maintained by the learning support assistants, meetings with staff and informal discussion provide the basis for monitoring and evaluating the work of the department. There is a need for a more systematic programme to effectively identify areas for further development and support for departments and staff across the school. Accommodation for the department in one large pleasant teaching room and an office where files can be stored securely is barely adequate and space for confidential conversation and for one-to-one work by outside agencies is difficult to find. Resources are satisfactory, but the computers available within the department are out of date. The leadership of the department is very good. The special educational needs co-ordinator has established clear procedures, an ethos of efficient and effective support, and a well thought out development plan based on a clear vision for the future. The department is well organised, but effective monitoring and evaluation of provision across the school has yet to be established. The department has a caring and committed staff and very good leadership and is in a strong position to improve the quality of the provision still further in the future.

62. The school is well provided for books, apparatus and classroom equipment in most subject areas. In physical education and modern foreign languages, for example, equipment is sufficient, up to date and very well used, and well supports students' learning. Students would benefit from greater access to three-dimensional resources in art and design. The design technology department - otherwise well resourced - does not currently offer computer aided manufacture. Provision for the teaching of ICT in four suites of largely new computers is good, and the ratio of computers to students, at around nine to one, is near to the national average for comprehensive schools. However, resources for ICT across the curriculum are insufficient and access to the computer rooms by departments is often difficult. Most subject areas lack their own up to date hardware for running specialised programmes and keeping records of students' attainment. In science, for example, there is an immediate need for such equipment for ensuring that the National Curriculum is adequately taught.

63. The absence of a functioning library and accessible stocks of up to date fiction and reference books is a weakness that the school has made plans to put right. In view of the problems of literacy that the school is facing, and the need for a central welcoming area for quiet reading and research, this is a matter of urgent priority. Overall the accommodation of the school has been improved considerably in appearance, security and its suitability to meet educational needs as a consequence of the recent building programme. Standards of accommodation are generally good although some accommodation for art and design is too small and poorly resourced.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

64. The school should now raise standards further by:

- (1) fully implementing its policies for the development of literacy and numeracy across the school and placing greater emphasis on the development of study skills across the curriculum.
(Paragraphs: 5, 6, 13, 19, 21, 23, 27, 43, 65-67, 71, 72, 80, 89, 91-93, 97, 116, 125, 126, 135, 155, 158)
- (2) supplementing its ongoing measures to improve attendance by working more closely with the Education Welfare Service to ensure that they share a common approach to non-school attendance.
(Paragraphs: 4, 5, 14, 46, 51, 56, 69, 124)
- (3) attracting a greater number of suitable staff to fill permanent vacancies and long-term absences.
(Paragraphs: 15, 60, 74, 79, 82, 95)
- (4) improving the leadership of the geography department to improve direction, curriculum and assessment and thereby raise standards of attainment.
(Paragraphs: 5, 21, 27, 55, 114, 121-123)
- (5) improving access to ICT for all subject areas and integrating its use across the curriculum.
(Paragraphs: 62, 73, 89, 98, 104, 121, 130, 136, 138, 149, 153, 164)
- (6) raising the profile of the library by improving levels of staffing and resourcing, and developing its use more effectively in the curriculum.
(Paragraphs: 63, 72)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	160
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	45

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4	16	45	29	6	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's students

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of students on the school's roll	872
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	525

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	31
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	435

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	3

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of students
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	49
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	53

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	13.9
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	4.6
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	87	95	182

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	24	25	23
	Girls	44	23	20
	Total	68	48	43
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	38 (N/A)	27 (N/A)	24 (N/A)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	3 (N/A)	9 (N/A)	5 (N/A)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	20	28	36
	Girls	37	37	38
	Total	57	65	74
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	32 (N/A)	37 (N/A)	40 (N/A)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	11 (N/A)	8 (N/A)	23 (N/A)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	87	88	175

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	3	51	63
	Girls	5	57	63
	Total	8	108	126
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	5 (N/A)	62 (N/A)	72 (N/A)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score	School	16

per pupil	National	38.4
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Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	28
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	833
Any other minority ethnic group	10

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	4	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	45	2
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of students excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	54
Number of students per qualified teacher	16.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	17
Total aggregate hours worked per week	504

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	70.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.8
Key Stage 4	20.2

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	1 444 407
Total expenditure	1 319 144
Expenditure per pupil	1 411
Balance brought forward from previous year	0
Balance carried forward to next year	125 263

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	872
Number of questionnaires returned	92

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	32	50	11	5	1
My child is making good progress in school.	33	47	12	4	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	35	42	16	3	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	30	30	18	15	5
The teaching is good.	30	46	10	5	9
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	32	39	13	14	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47	34	10	7	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	55	41	1	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	28	38	17	9	8
The school is well led and managed.	29	49	3	9	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	33	49	5	7	7
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	20	45	13	12	11

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH

65. Overall standards of attainment at the end of both key stages are well below average. When students enter the school in Year 7 their attainment in English is well below the national average. Only a third of the present Year 7 are able to read at the level which is expected for students of their age. Significant proportions of students in Years 8 and 9 read at a level which is two or more years below their chronological age. Low levels of attainment are confirmed by the results of the National Curriculum test taken in Year 6. Overall, the progress students make in the school represents a reasonable achievement given their low starting point. By the end of Year 9 and 11 higher attaining students read fairly accurately and are able to identify quotations from the text to support a point of view but significant numbers of students still do not read very fluently.

66. Standards of students' writing closely mirror those of reading. At both stages, higher attainers sustain and develop their ideas in writing. They make notes and are used to drafting their work. They have a reasonable grasp of spelling, punctuation and grammar. These students reach standards that are broadly in line with the national average. Many students, however, and especially boys, have difficulty with writing. Standards of accuracy are poor and students need considerable help in planning and structuring their work. By the end of Year 9 overall standards are well below average. Although learning is often good in lessons students make slow progress with basic skills so that by the end of Y 11 attainment is still well below average.

67. Students are often better at expressing themselves orally than they are in writing. Even so standards in speaking and listening are poor. Many students, especially girls are very reticent speakers. Although boys often participate in discussion more confidently than girls very many students have only limited vocabulary and are handicapped in expressing their ideas. Few are able to sustain ideas or develop a line of thought in discussion.

68. Test and examination results were disappointing in the first year of the new school. Students, drawn from two schools, had been at Parklands for only eight months and results are likely to have been depressed. In 2000 results of National Curriculum testing in English at the end of Key Stage 3 were well below average although when compared to similar schools attainment in the test was average. Unusually, there was little difference in performance between boys and girls. Students did better in the English test than in mathematics and science. At GCSE, results in the A* to C range in English and English literature were very low in comparison to national figures. Girls did slightly better than boys although they did less well than boys against national averages. Very few students attained the higher grades. Most students entered attained a grade in the A* to G range although the percentage of students entered was lower than the national average.

69. Although many students do not find learning easy, behaviour in lessons is generally good. Many students have a short span of concentration and are easily unsettled but there were few occasion during the inspection where behaviour interrupted lessons. High attaining students are generally interested in their lessons. Where teaching is very strong and challenging tasks are presented in an interesting and purposeful way students, including low attainers, often respond very positively and are willing to participate in discussion. Significant numbers, however, find English very difficult and do not expect to enjoy lessons or to do well. These students are often passive and make little effort to participate despite good teaching. Their poor attendance makes it hard for them to pick up on the work they have missed. They do not expect to work hard.

70. Teaching is good overall and in a significant number of lessons, especially in Key Stage 4 it was very good. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Lessons generally get off to a crisp start. Teachers have a clear sense of objectives which they make explicit and have planned and resourced their teaching well. Tasks are pitched at an appropriate level and in most lessons students' very weak language skills are recognised and targeted directly through, for example, the use of key words, dictionaries and discussion. Extension work is provided for higher attainers. Students' work is well marked and students are often praised. Teachers know students well, including those who have special educational needs and classroom relationships are generally very good. Teachers and learning support assistants work well together and where there is additional support special needs students' learning is good. Teachers cope good naturedly with poor attendance which affects learning in lessons very badly. They work very hard to try to ensure that all students actively participate and keep up with the lesson and as a result of their efforts, overall, learning is satisfactory. In the best lessons expectations are high, lessons have variety and pace and there are opportunities for students to engage with and enjoy the material. In a high attaining Year 11 class, for example, students were analysing two quite difficult poems exploring the cultural associations of language. Students had sufficient grasp of language to make some initial sense of the poems, the teacher led discussion very skilfully so that students were interested and enthusiastic. In a Year 9 class where students' verbal test scores were well below average and nearly all were on the special needs register, students were enjoying their work on Macbeth and were able to recall key points about character and plot. In both these lessons teachers had a strong focus on extending the range of students' vocabulary and experience of language. Teachers' commitment to students' success sometimes leads to a tendency to dominate lessons. Students would benefit from more varied activities in the classroom. Too few lessons provide enough opportunity for students to develop independent learning skills. They do not have enough time to think, discuss, research, organise and plan their work independently. In this respect expectations of students are not high enough. Sometimes the important emphasis on literacy outweighs opportunities to enjoy and engage with writing.

71. The department has a number of excellent initiatives targeted on improving students' literacy skills. Good liaison with partner primary schools, for example, enabled the school to identify pupils likely to benefit from a literacy summer school. This ran last year for pupils joining Year 7 and was oversubscribed. The progress of this group of students continues to be tracked as they move through Year 7. Students in Years 7 and 9 have had workshops on Macbeth and A Midsummer Night's Dream run by 'Shakespeare 4 Kidz'. During the inspection the school launched Reading is Fundamental, funded by the Wythenshawe Education Action Zone, which provided all students in Year 7 with free books. Students have visited the Library Theatre in Manchester on National Poetry day and a reading group runs after school. The department offers various extra classes run by teachers after school, on Saturday mornings and in the holidays to provide students with extra opportunities.

72. The school has a draft policy on literacy and a cross-curricular working party looking at improving departmental practice. There is, however, no one with responsibility for overseeing strategies to address literacy skills across the curriculum and currently departments' response to literacy is variable. Students are seriously disadvantaged by the lack of a school library. As a result there are few opportunities for quiet reading or for them to research topics or work independently. There are few opportunities for extended writing in geography and history. In science there is some development of literacy and lower attaining students use writing frames. In many areas teachers make a point of identifying key words related to particular themes. The English department makes good use of display to illustrate technical terms. Both ICT and design and technology have good displays of technical vocabulary. Year 8 students in ICT, for example, were involved in discussion about terms, such as filter, sort and search. In most subjects students have difficulty in explaining what

they think. They are often reluctant to answer questions and response is often very brief. Discussion is rare in mathematics. Overall, opportunities across the curriculum for students to develop speaking and listening skills are too few.

73. The English department is a well-led and cohesive department. The department works well together and teachers help and support each other. The school's senior team provides excellent support, as does the city's School Improvement Service. There is a very strong and shared commitment to raising attainment. The work of students in both key stages is monitored and careful arrangements made to support them through the Key Stage 3 test and the GCSE examination. Good and improving use is made of assessment data. Teachers' planning is monitored and their work in the classroom observed. Curriculum planning is strong although at present opportunities for students to use ICT in English are few. The department must address the planning, provision and resourcing of ICT as a matter of some urgency. Careful attention is given in lessons and in the organisation of teaching groups to preparing students at all levels of attainment for examination. All students who attend frequently enough to complete their course work are entered for GCSE. Links with the special educational needs department are good and are regularly reviewed. Teachers have good information on students through individual education plans and teachers use these documents well and set their own targets for students. Much time is wasted in lessons because some students do not bring or have lost their work. The department should consider strategies for the storage and maintenance of students' work to minimise disruption to teaching time.

74. Teachers have worked very hard to establish a new department and to address the considerable difficulties encountered by students. At present the department is functioning well although staff are under considerable pressure. The department includes three teachers who are not subject specialists, one post is filled temporarily, three teachers have major responsibilities in other areas, which makes the department vulnerable. A newly qualified teacher is well supported. In most other respects the department is well placed to make further improvement.

Drama

75. Overall standards of attainment in drama are in line with national averages. All students in Key Stage 3 have a period of drama every week. At Key Stage 4 drama is offered as an option subject. Last year students did well in drama at GCSE; all students entered achieved a grade in the A* to G range and the proportion attaining A* to C was broadly in line with national figures. Four students in Year 10 were entered and all achieved A grades. These results represent a considerable achievement for the students and their teachers.

76. Students in both stages approach drama with enthusiasm. In Key Stage 3 students were able to work co-operatively and to develop a creative response. In Year 9 students were exploring themes from Macbeth. They demonstrated good recall of the plot but although they were able to read from a simplified version of the text with reasonable understanding, there was little expression or empathy with character. In both Years 10 and 11 students worked hard to perfect their group work. By the end of Year 11 students have developed very good skills in co-operative working. They are able to organise, plan, and work independently. A few students are very confident, able to get into role quickly and show good understanding of the relationships between characters as well as good use of dramatic conventions to convey events. Some very powerful role-play was seen in Year 10. Many students, however, have a very limited vocabulary and experience on which to base their creative work.

77. Teaching of drama is very good in Key Stage 4. In the best lessons students are interested and eager to participate. There are high expectations of students and lesson move

at good pace. Students are required to work in a disciplined way and teachers provide good feedback and support for their efforts. There is some very effective team teaching in Key Stage 4. In Key Stage 3 teaching is satisfactory overall, though tasks are not well focused and the pace of lessons is rather slow.

78. Extra curricular drama plays an important part in the life of the school. There are two productions each year and Year 11 examination students run workshops on road safety for pupils in local primary schools. Parents are always invited to performances of work. There are visits to theatres when funding allows. Additional drama classes, run after school, provide good opportunities for students to extend and consolidate their dramatic skills.

MATHEMATICS

79. The mathematics department is in a difficult position at present with regard to staffing. In September 2000 the department had five full-time specialist teachers. Since then, two members of staff have left and the head of department is away with a long-term illness. Now there are two mathematics specialists, one non-specialist on a temporary contract and two supply teachers. Classes have been reallocated so that higher attaining groups are being taught by specialist teachers. Although this has protected higher attaining students it has created a lack of stability for other students. Teachers are doing their best to cope with the difficulties of the situation but overall the effect of the reduction in specialism has been to lower the quality of mathematics education received by students.

80. Overall standards at the end of both key stages are well below average. The standards on entry to the school of the students are very low by national comparisons. Work seen during the inspection shows attainment to be well below national averages although there is some evidence of sound progress. At the end of Key Stage 3 higher attaining students understand and use the Pythagoras theorem, they find the n th term of sequences, measure circles using appropriate formulae and use standard form notation. Middle attaining students calculate areas of plain shapes, understand the idea of symmetry, know prime, square and triangular numbers. They read and construct bar charts, tally charts and pictograms and calculate the mean, median and mode of data. Several low attaining students do not have a secure grasp of basic number calculations. At the end of Key Stage 4 higher attaining students use trigonometry to find angles and sides of right-angled triangles, use ratio and proportion in calculation, read and construct histograms and cumulative frequency graphs. The highest maths set will be entered for the intermediate tier at GCSE. They solve linear simultaneous equations by elimination. Middle attaining students measure circles using appropriate formulae, they solve simple linear equations, substitute numbers into formulae and solve problems using ratio and proportion.

81. The examination results obtained at Key Stage 3 and at Key Stage 4 in the summer 2000 examinations were by students who had spent only nine months in Parklands. The department seeks to improve on these examination results in future years, as they were very low by comparison with national averages. There are targets for improvement in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 examinations but, in the current staffing situation, improvements may be modest.

82. The overall quality of teaching is good. Standards are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 although there is much good teaching. The knowledge and experience of teachers and the effectiveness of planning are better at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. Most teaching is calm and effective, producing good working environments. Teaching is best where lessons have been well planned and exploit the good learning environment. Occasionally, as in a Year 11 lesson on space and shape, a lack of focus by students leads to insufficient learning, poor progress and poor attitudes. In general, the department works well as a team to support all

members of staff in their planning but temporary teachers need more guidance. In one lesson with Year 9, the teacher was unaware that the topic had been covered recently by the students. Classroom management is good but too much time is taken, especially with students in Years 7 and 8, in settling them down and establishing a calm learning environment. The pace of lessons is generally appropriate to attainment, especially in higher attaining sets. However, in a minority of lessons there is evidence that low teacher expectation leads to a lack of pace. Most lessons rely on textbook exercises, which do not always allow faster working students to progress rapidly. In the long term it may be necessary to supplement these textbook exercises with extra resources in order to aid differentiation. Homework is set at least once a week. Those who do not complete work are given detentions. Homework is satisfactory and usually consolidates classwork but is separate from the textbook exercises of the classroom.

83. Students' interest is strongly linked to the quality of teaching. Most students respond well to good teaching. Concentration is a problem for some students, especially low attainers who find it difficult to work for a full hour. Some lessons are broken up into shorter sessions (especially in Year 7 where the department is following the National Numeracy Scheme). This approach uses time effectively and the technique might reasonably be extended to all lessons. The majority of students are compliant in class but passive, relying heavily on teacher input. Many students have under-developed learning skills and find new ideas and skills difficult to assimilate. Independent work only occurs in investigative coursework. Confident use of algebra in investigation work is rare but some higher attaining students' work does demonstrate a modest level of algebraic insight.

84. Students take care of textbooks and do not abuse equipment. Most equipment, including pens and pencils, is provided by the school. Exercise books (which students rarely take home) are generally graffiti free as are textbooks. There is little evidence of litter in the maths area. This is a mono-cultural school and there is little evidence within the subject of a multi-cultural dimension.

85. Teachers monitor academic progress well through classwork, homework and regular end-of-unit tests. Marks, together with teacher recommendations, advise the setting procedures. Students are made aware of their marks, their progress and their mathematics set.

86. There are satisfactory arrangements for supporting students with special educational needs through the setting arrangements. The bottom sets contain many special educational needs students who are supported by external staff. Where support teachers are used they are effective. Progress made by students with special educational needs is sound.

87. Some students are identified as having talent in mathematics. As an experiment this year the highest attaining set in Year 10 study GCSE statistics. There are extra curricular opportunities for talented students; last year, for example, there was a trip to Johnny Ball's "Maths and legends" road-show. Also, Year 7 and Year 8 students took part in the Greater Manchester Junior maths challenge and are due to take part again this year. Higher attaining lower school students are due to participate in the Leeds University Junior challenge.

88. The mathematics teaching area consists of a suite of five classrooms all of adequate size with sufficient natural light and heating. There are pleasing displays on the walls of classrooms and in the corridor linking some of the rooms. Classrooms have key words on the wall, which aim to familiarise students with mathematical terminology. This is good practice, but something that needs extending. There are sufficient textbooks so that each student has access to a book in lessons. Departmental policy is not to allow textbooks to be taken home so that textbooks are shared between groups. There are, however, sufficient books to cover each lesson. The textbooks themselves are new but the level of English they contain creates problems. There is a long-term need to supplement the textbooks with additional material to make some exercises more accessible to students with poor literacy skills. There are sufficient calculators (both simple and scientific) for each class. The school tries to persuade higher attaining students to buy their own calculators but is not always successful. Some calculator usage observed shows that the more sophisticated calculator functions are not well understood by students.

89. The department is clearly missing the head of department. There are a number of initiatives that have been started but are currently in abeyance. These include the implementation of a whole school numeracy policy and the development of ICT. ICT provision and use within the department is unsatisfactory. Only the Year 10 statistics group makes regular use of computer facilities. In the current circumstances members of the maths department are working hard to overcome the problems created by the staffing shortage and can only realistically concentrate on the short term, which is to ensure that students receive the best maths education possible. Members of the senior management team provide some support in lessons but regular monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching in the subject is largely in abeyance and therefore unsatisfactory. There is no evidence of a coherent approach to numeracy in subject areas other than mathematics.

SCIENCE

90. In 2000, the results of the national tests taken by Year 9 students were very low compared with all schools and well below the national average for similar schools. The girls performed less well than the boys relative to their respective national averages. The results were lower than those in English and similar to those in mathematics. The percentage of students achieving Level 6, however, was in line with similar schools and was better than in English and mathematics. GCSE results in 2000, were very low compared with all and similar schools. Students studying for the national tests and examinations inevitably suffered disruption to their courses due to the closure of their original schools in the previous September.

91. Students make satisfactory progress throughout Years 7, 8 and 9 and are achieving satisfactory standards in relation to their very low starting point at the beginning of Year 7. By the age of 14, the standards seen are still well below average but are higher than the standard shown in the 2000 national tests. Students have good practice in developing experimental skills but, overall, these skills are weak. Students have a good grasp of the concept of 'fair test' and have good planning skills. There is a lack of accuracy in students' observation and recording of experimental results. Students' analysis and evaluation skills are poor. In lessons, students learn key scientific facts, but often their understanding is

incomplete which hinders their long-term recall.

92. By the age of 16, the standards of work seen are well below average but are higher than the standard shown in the 2000 GCSE results. During Years 10 and 11, carefully structured teaching enables all students to make satisfactory progress in their knowledge and understanding of science and in their skills. The standard of students' investigation work is better than their knowledge of scientific facts. Their planning and observational skills are sound but their analysis and evaluation skills are underdeveloped. Low attaining students are not sufficiently accurate in the collecting of their experimental results. Students doing the dual award science course have a greater understanding of scientific concepts than those following the single award course. All students have poor study skills and so find the recall of facts in tests and examinations difficult.

93. The students' literacy skills are very weak on entry to the school but there is some development of literacy in science with an emphasis on the correct use and spelling of scientific terminology. There is insufficient use of a wide range of writing styles to enhance literacy development. Numeracy skills are also weak and mathematical knowledge is not applied and practised enough. Graphical work by high attaining students is sound but low attaining students have problems with choosing appropriate scales and tend to draw bar charts instead of line graphs. Students use computers to represent information in the form of tables and graphs but they do not have sufficient practice in using computers for modelling and to collect measurements.

94. Students with special educational needs generally make the same progress as other students, due to good support from teachers and support assistants. The developing use of writing frames helps students to structure their work. Gifted and talented students are well stimulated by extra-curricular activities such as the 'INSPIRE' club and participation in the 'NorthWest Science Festival'.

95. Overall standards of teaching are satisfactory. At the time of the inspection, half the science teachers were absent from the school due to illness and temporary teachers covered their timetables. The teaching of the permanent members of the department is good across the whole age range. A strength of the teaching is the very good relationships between the teachers and the students, which engenders a positive attitude and interest in science. Teachers manage their classes very well and insist on high standards of behaviour. Good subject knowledge and understanding is evident even when teachers are not teaching their own science specialism. Lessons are very well planned and learning objectives are always made clear to the students at the start of the lesson. These features were seen in a good Year 8 lesson on energy. The lesson was carefully structured in small steps and included a variety of activities, including teacher demonstration and student experiments. The teacher captured the students' interest at the beginning of the lesson so that they listened attentively, sustained concentration and worked hard. The lesson objectives were reviewed at the end of the lesson, reinforcing student learning. The students enjoyed the lesson and made good progress.

96. The teachers' expectations are generally appropriately high, but in some lessons, especially in Years 7-9, teachers do not match resources and activities well enough to meet the learning needs of the higher attaining students. When this is done well, as in a Year 9 lesson on electromagnetism, where an extension activity was provided, students are well motivated, concentrate on their work and make good progress. In some lessons, however, tasks are the same for students of all attainment levels so that they are not all challenged sufficiently and, in consequence, make less progress. More problem solving exercises and the application of knowledge to new situations would provide more of a stimulus for the higher attaining students. In some good lessons, different learning objectives for different groups of

students give a clear focus to the learning. In some lessons, teachers set deadlines for tasks, and these motivate students to work productively, but some lessons lack pace when these deadlines are not set. Written work is regularly marked but comments do not show the students how to improve their work. Homeworks set are often too brief and do not give the students the opportunity to develop their thinking and literacy skills with extended writing.

97. Generally, students come into school with an apathetic attitude towards learning. Good teaching has to capture the students' interest and to generate the motivation to learn. When this happens, students listen well, sustain concentration and make good progress. Students co-operate well with one another and they work safely and sensibly in practical work. However, many students lack confidence in their own ability and do not readily volunteer answers to questions posed by the teacher, which has a negative impact on their progress. They have poor independent working skills and self-motivation and require constant teacher support. The high level of absence of some students hinders their learning considerably.

98. The science department is well led and managed. It has set up a solid framework for the teaching and learning of science in the very short time since the school opened. There is a good departmental improvement plan with appropriate targets for raising standards. Procedures for assessing student attainment and progress are good, as is the use of assessment to inform curriculum planning. Accommodation is good. The resources are efficiently organised by the laboratory technician, but are inadequate since there is an urgent need for computers to enable students to collect and analyse scientific data. In order to improve, the department should concentrate on refining their teaching strategies to better meet individual needs, particularly those of the high attainers; developing students' study and revision skills to enhance their long term recall and developing the use of ICT in science. The department has the capacity to improve because of the effective and thoughtful management together with an extremely hardworking, enthusiastic and committed team, who have already planned a range of strategies for raising standards in future years.

ART AND DESIGN

99. Overall standards of attainment in art and design are broadly satisfactory. On entry to the school, students' standards of attainment are well below average. They make satisfactory progress and by the end of Key Stage 3, the standards of attainment of a significant proportion, though still below expectations, show sound gains in knowledge and skills. There is clear understanding of a range of drawing media and developing knowledge of art and crafts from different cultures which is well used to inform and extend practical work as in a Year 7 lesson where students designed well considered and drawn letter forms in an Art Deco style. By the end of Year 9, higher attaining students show the ability to use drawing materials with sensitivity though many are hesitant in working from direct observation. Painting skills are less well developed as seen in another Year 7 lesson though this indicated a lack of experience partly due to poor resources. Students respond well to working with a limited range of three dimensional materials and use them with care but with

some unfamiliarity. Folders of work indicate insufficient breadth in work to date and imagery sometimes immature for the age of the students.

100. Good progress is made at Key Stage 4 to reach standards of attainment which are in line with national expectations. The proportion of students attaining A*-C grades in GCSE examinations in 2000, when they had been in the school for only nine months, was broadly average. Observation of GCSE controlled tests indicate that these standards are being maintained though scrutiny of folders demonstrates some weakness in the amount of coursework completed to date in the shorter time available for art and design in this year. There is greater strength in Year 10 as, for example, in a textile lesson observed where students showed imagination in combining experiments in a variety of techniques which then stimulated further personal response. In a Year 10 art and design lesson, research into a chosen artist was being combined well with elements of ethnic art using a variety of media. At this key stage, students continue to develop their basic skills, use a wider range of materials well and make major gains in their knowledge and understanding of art and design. Though evidence indicates that students can observe well, there is some over-dependence on the use of secondary source material. Flexible schemes of work and individual support enable gifted and talented students and those with special educational needs to make good progress at both key stages.

101. The overall quality of teaching is good. There is much very good teaching at Key Stage 4. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subject and the quality of lesson planning are sound at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. They know their students well and provide well-focused individual support on identified strengths and weaknesses through ongoing assessment. Time and resources are generally used well though some teaching is inhibited by poor accommodation. Teachers establish good relationships with their students, lessons are well managed and generally proceed at a good pace. Though there is challenge at Key Stage 4, this is sometimes lacking at Key Stage 3 when the need to encourage and maintain the interest of more disaffected students can lead to a lack of rigour in the activity.

102. The majority of students, including those with special educational needs, respond well to the quality of teaching, stay on task throughout lessons and work with concentration. There is clear acquisition of knowledge and skills particularly at Key Stage 4 where students often show a good awareness of their own progress and increasing independence. There is some weakness apparent in the amount of work covered at Key Stage 3 and in the insecurity shown by some of these students in making an imaginative response.

103. Most students display very positive attitudes in art and design lessons and often a real enthusiasm for art and design. They organise their resources well and show pride in their work. Behaviour is almost invariably good and most lessons are quiet and productive. Though some younger students were noisy in the lessons observed, they were not un-co-operative. Students relate well to each other and are mutually supportive particularly at Key Stage 4. Older students show increasing responsibility for the direction of their own work as observed in work developed at home, in a well attended after school workshop and in studies inspired by a visit to Barcelona.

104. In outline, the art and design curriculum at Key Stage 3 is sufficiently broad and relevant but as the scheme of work is still being developed there is a need for monitoring and evaluation of content to ensure balance and progression of experience across years. The range of three dimensional work is limited and the department does not yet have access to resources to meet the requirements for the use of ICT in art and design. Appropriate options are offered at Key Stage 4 which provide students with a wider range of experience other than in ICT. Good attention is paid to the critical studies element of courses at both key stages enabling students to explore work from a variety of different cultures. Art makes a

good contribution overall to students' moral, social and cultural development but with insufficient exploration of ideas and meaning in art and design to extend their spiritual experience.

105. The department has satisfactory policies in place for assessment and day to day assessment is good. All staff maintain good records of progress and potential grades. A common marking system is used but there is some inconsistency in the use of constructive written comment on work. A good response has been made to GCSE moderators' comments on examination performance to modify the art and design curriculum at Key Stage 4.

106. The department is well led and the commitment of staff to improvement and the reflection to the aims and values in the school of their work are outstanding. Sound policies and practice are in place. The experienced specialist staff are appropriately deployed to meet needs but there is only informal monitoring of teaching and little opportunity for staff development. Very good support is provided for students on initial teaching training. The department has satisfactory two-dimensional resources and a good stock of books and materials is well used to support critical studies. The lack of access to ICT and limited provision for three dimensional work are weaknesses. Though the amount of accommodation is satisfactory, one art and design room is too small for large groups, poorly resourced and with a lack of secure storage space, all factors which inhibit teaching and learning.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

107. Students enter the school with a level of attainment well below that expected of students of a similar age. During their time in the school they develop a sound understanding of the design process and build on the limited range of skills with which they arrived.

108. By the time they reach the end of Year 9, they still attain at a level below national expectation but have made good progress. They have knowledge of a range of materials and show an understanding of the criteria to be considered when making products. Year 7 students working on mechanisms are able to produce drawings from which they can make a moving poster, with some accuracy. They gain a basic knowledge of linkages and show some understanding of the products that make use of such mechanisms. In food technology students are introduced to the characteristics of different materials and the effects of changes in temperatures on bacteria. Students in Year 9 demonstrated a basic knowledge of research methods by considering appropriate questions to gain valid information. Lessons throughout the first three years provide students with opportunities to make appropriate use of the ICT facilities available in the department and the ICT department.

109. By the age of 16, students have a basic understanding of design and make processes. Those who choose to specialise in resistant materials produce items that demonstrate a knowledge of fitness for purpose, using jointing techniques that give sufficient strength to meet functional demands. Year 10 students taking food technology extend their ICT skills by analysing nutritional values and consider production processes using virtual reality programs. In resistant materials and graphic products the quality of working drawings is below average. Students use dated but functional computers with competence, to produce orthographic and isometric drawings. More up-to-date equipment is available for students working on systems and control to develop programming skills. Currently the range of materials used in resistant lessons is limited. The majority of students in Year 11 are working in soft wood. The quality of what is produced falls below national average in all design and technology areas. In relation to many other subjects in the school results in all aspects of design and technology are good. Given their starting point, students make sound progress.

Students with special educational needs make good progress. Those working towards a foundation level GNVQ award in manufacturing were able to cut and form sheet copper with some guidance. Students worked safely in the workshop, using hand tools with a degree of competence and accuracy.

110. All teaching within the department is always satisfactory and mainly good. Teachers have a commitment to improving student attainment and work hard to provide suitable materials to ensure that all groups have access to the work set. Students with special educational needs receive good support from teachers in the form of additional tuition and where available, support staff. Additional materials are provided at an appropriate level when required. Students identified as gifted and talented in the subject have the opportunity to extend their knowledge and understanding through additional guidance and extension tasks. Teachers have a good understanding of the students and in general enjoy their confidence. The management of students, particularly the most disaffected is good. In order to achieve the best possible outcomes teachers take time to explain each step in the design and make process. Where lessons are less successful there is a lack of sustained challenge. Students are given too much time to complete relatively straightforward tasks. Lessons are sometimes over dominated by the teacher thus providing the students with too little responsibility for their learning. On occasions teachers over-compensate for the difficulties facing students which results in lack of challenge.

111. Attitudes to the subject vary with a significant minority demonstrating a high degree of apathy, despite the best efforts of teachers. Students are generally more motivated when involved in practical work. Behaviour in the practical areas is sound and students are aware of the need for safe practice. In examination classes students know their predicted grade along with targets for improvement. Equally in the lower years students are tracked to ensure that they are making the appropriate level of progress. The staff in the department make good use of assessment when planning their work.

112. The organisation of Key Stage 3 meets all of the requirements of the National Curriculum. There is a corporate approach to the design process in the department that ensures students are given every opportunity to achieve. In Years 10 and 11 students can take graphic products, resistant materials, food technology or systems control. All students take one of the subjects. Students have experience of all materials, although the range in use for the GCSE course in resistant materials is very limited this year. Use of ICT is evident and developing. The department is aware of the need to introduce opportunities for rapid prototyping.

113. Design and technology has the benefit of a capable and committed head of department. The clear vision she has, is being translated into good provision for all students in the school. The planned curriculum at Key Stage 3 provides very good opportunities for students. The strong team approach that is continuing to develop enables students to gain a sound, effective corporate experience. The accommodation provides a pleasant working environment that needs enhanced ICT and computer aided design and manufacturing facilities. The commitment of the staff to developing capable young technologists is very good. They provide opportunities after school and during school holidays for students to improve further on the achievements in class. Effective cooperation with individual partners and residential visits for lower school students, serve to extend the range of learning opportunities.

GEOGRAPHY

114. Students' overall level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is well below that expected nationally. When teachers assessed students' work at the end of Year 9 in 2000,

results indicated that students' attainment was well below the national average. By the end of Key Stage 4 students' overall level of attainment is well below the national norm. The GCSE results in 2000 were very low. During the inspection the standard of work seen was well below the national expectation. The department has reviewed the GCSE results and has implemented strategies to raise standards.

115. Students have a basic knowledge of the subject, but have difficulty in remembering facts from one lesson to the next. For instance, one group of students in Year 10 could not recall the main features and purpose of a National Park which they studied in the previous lesson. Students have a poor knowledge of where places are and what they are like. Higher attaining students understand the link between people and the environment and how landscapes change. They know some basic geographical terms and in Years 10 and 11 can give examples of the features they have studied. In Year 7 students gain simple mapwork skills, and by the end of Year 9 read and place features on a map accurately. Lower attaining students including those with special educational needs answer most questions accurately but are unable to explain changes taking place in cities, landscapes, and the environment.

116. Students comprehend and extract information from resource material to complete exercises accurately. In Year 11 students collect and analyse data accurately to complete a geographical investigation. They use these skills to complete a GCSE coursework enquiry comparing the geographical features of two local shopping centres. Overall the quality of written work is weak. Students written answers to questions are brief and contain spelling errors. A minority of higher attaining students develop and structure extended pieces of writing successfully.

117. During the inspection all of the classes in geography, except one, were taught by temporary supply teachers. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall but some unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Teachers are always well prepared and organised so lessons start briskly and promptly. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives which are made clear to students, a good variety of activities and are well structured with an appropriate conclusion. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject is satisfactory, so explanations are clear and information given is accurate. Most lessons fail to inspire students, much of the work is based on textbooks and worksheets and lacks visual stimulus, and where this is present it is rarely exploited effectively.

118. Few activities challenge students to draw their own conclusions from the material provided. Much of the work in lessons involves the students transferring information from the textbook to exercise books, some of it copied. Students are not involved in using the information they collect to investigate a geographical issue, or to explain a feature in a new context in order to gain a deeper understanding.

119. Lessons are generally orderly and the majority of students work steadily but without conviction. In the least successful lessons a significant number of students are reluctant to participate, are 'off task' particularly towards the end of the lesson, and make little progress. Teachers give good support to students in difficulty, and the support given by learning assistants working in the classroom is effective. Marking is generally up to date, in line with school and humanities policy, but rarely includes detailed comment of what is good, or incorrect, and how to improve. The homework set is satisfactory in quality and quantity.

120. Students' learning in Years 7-9 is unsatisfactory. A significant proportion of students are reluctant to take part in classroom discussion, disinclined to work, and dependent on teacher intervention to complete work. In Years 10-11, learning is satisfactory, the majority of students listen carefully and complete tasks effectively. Students are generally well behaved and work well with each other particularly in Years 10 and 11 where they have a more

positive attitude to the subject. They generally arrive for lessons on time, but many have patterns of irregular attendance which results in slow progress being made.

121. The scheme of work for Years 7-9 meets statutory requirements, but some of the teaching seen did not follow this programme. At Years 10-11 the teaching scheme is unsatisfactory as it has not been developed from the examination syllabus to show a development of knowledge, understanding, and skills which builds on what has been learnt in Years 7-9. The contribution of the subject to students personal development is unsatisfactory because there is no policy or systematic planning within the scheme of work for this to be implemented. There is no programme of fieldwork in Years 7-9 to enable students to develop skills required for GCSE coursework. There is no systematic programme to develop the use of ICT in the subject. The procedures for assessment are weak as there is no coherent programme of regular assessment to supplement the whole school examination pattern, and the system for recording of results to support the progress of individual students is still being developed. The timetable time allocated for geography in Years 7 and 8 is not enough for the curriculum to be taught in sufficient depth.

122. At the time of the inspection the head of the humanities worked to support the department as the head of geography was absent. Leadership of the subject is unsatisfactory. The department has little sense of direction, no effective scheme of work, assessment procedures are weak, and there is no detailed long term planning or systematic monitoring of the work of the department. Accommodation is good with two classrooms of appropriate size, next to each other. Resources are satisfactory.

123. Students are not reaching their full potential in the subject due to teaching which lacks inspiration and challenge, an unsatisfactory scheme of work, inadequate assessment procedures, and lack of direction. The department does not have the capacity to succeed without effective and dynamic leadership.

HISTORY

124. Attainment is below average when judged against national expectations at the end of each stage. A significant number of students are well below average. Teachers recognise this and are working hard to combat factors that prevent progress. Erratic attendance by some students in Key Stage 3 interrupts their development of basic and historical skills. In Year 11 particularly, there are many with very poor attendance, dramatically reducing the number of entries for GCSE history.

125. The quality of teaching by this well qualified and experienced team of history specialists is usually satisfactory or better. Most lessons indicate a good standard of teaching. Teachers respond vigorously to the considerable challenge of helping the many students who lack fluent reading skills to tackle a subject that relies on literacy. A significant strength is the quality of lesson planning. There are clear learning objectives for each lesson. These objectives are usually explained to the students and displayed throughout the lesson. Teachers exercise good classroom management skills but often have to work hard to develop the habits of normal classroom practice. Teachers' explanations are clear, well sequenced and not too long. The balance of planned activities encourages a good pace, helping to sustain attention and a measure of concentration. Questioning techniques are effective but could be strengthened with more targeted questions to challenge passive students to contribute. The use of supplementary oral questions would also encourage higher attainers to add more detail or explanation to their first response. Teachers welcome and value all relevant observations and contributions from students. Students are praised and encouraged by a rewards system of merit marks. Teachers are very aware of the special educational needs of students and seek to include all in the lesson activities. Learning

support assistants are used effectively in the classroom to help students with special educational needs. Not enough of this help is available to cope with the large number of special needs students in many history classes. All of the teaching team try hard to support lower attaining students individually during lessons and this helps students with special educational needs to make satisfactory progress.

126. Some aspects of teaching could be improved. Teachers tend to use tasks that target the main level of ability in the class. These are often not challenging enough for more capable students. Ability groups within classes need different classroom and homework tasks, structured to encourage independent working, to increase levels of skill and understanding. Current 'extension' tasks do not target these needs well enough. High attaining students are not given sufficient scope to show what they can do and are often content to give superficial oral and written responses. During the inspection week, teaching method varied little. Students require more opportunity to develop independent study skills and be challenged to research information from different sources. At the moment, even the higher attainers work largely from given materials and therefore do not learn how to select relevant information for themselves. Students do not use simple historical sources well by the end of Key Stage 3 and are therefore disadvantaged when tackling the GCSE programme of study.

127. Students' attitudes are generally satisfactory and sometimes good. Behaviour is usually good. Most of the time students co-operate well with teachers and with each other. Lessons are generally orderly but teachers sometimes have to work very hard to ensure that students keep working and concentrating on oral and written tasks. On the other hand, attitudes to learning vary greatly. A few students are eager to learn and get on with their work. Most work quietly but without enthusiasm. They usually listen but can be quickly distracted. They answer questions when asked and some show initiative by volunteering opinions or raising queries. They settle down to classroom tasks but too many are easily diverted, even when the tasks are well designed and appropriate to their needs. Most are content to rely on their memory of teacher explanations without checking in textbooks or consulting other material, even when these are directly available. In Key Stage 4, this attitude persists although it is less noticeable with the small group of students in Year 10 who have specifically chosen to study history, than in Year 11 where a humanities subject was compulsory. Some Year 11 GCSE history course work indicates that the spirit of enquiry may have been kindled. The passive attitude to learning makes it difficult for teachers to secure the detailed interpretative response expected for higher GCSE grades. Teachers are working very hard but are not yet getting the level of return that their efforts warrant.

128. Key Stage 3 students are making good progress in relation to their previous attainment although the rate of learning is steady. It is a little higher in Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4. During Key Stage 3, there is development of a sense of time and sequence of events. Students also begin to show some appreciation of what it was like to live in past times. The best work indicates some appreciation of cause and effect. Students are beginning to combine information from more than one source but this skill is underdeveloped in the majority of students. Many describe events effectively although they could include more detailed examples to show understanding. In Key Stage 4, written sources present the most difficulty because some find these very difficult to read. By the time students start Key Stage 4 they can usually extract information from short documents, books and pictures but they find it very hard to make judgements about why things happened and to trace the links between longer term causes and effects. When Year 10 students worked in small groups to develop arguments for and against government action to tackle public health issues in towns in the 1850s, most of the ideas came from just one or two students in each group.

129. The quality of leadership of the department is satisfactory. The very well-qualified history staff work well together but despite the proximity of the teaching rooms, teachers tackle topics differently and often do not make use of the same materials. There is plenty of individual good practice that could be identified and built into the detailed schemes of work that still have to be written. Teachers use the same marking system when assessing work. One teacher regularly tells the students what he is looking for if he is to give the higher grades. The others do not. Formal examinations are still the main way of judging attainment. These are supplemented by some common assessment tasks, targeting different levels of ability. These tasks were originally designed for one of the former schools. They need revising by the whole team so that they systematically target different skills and areas of historical knowledge. They could then be used by the whole team to build up a more comprehensive and progressive picture of levels of attainment during the year and at the end of each key stage.

130. The subject teaching rooms are close together with all teaching resources to hand. It is a very good working environment for students and teachers. There is access to video and television although neither was used during the inspection week. Textbooks are adequate but some are rather dated. Two new computers in the subject rooms are a welcome improvement but currently students do not use ICT as a matter of course. Its use would help presentation of work and be an aid to research. Staff are aware that there is a great deal to be done following the setting up of this new school. The head of humanities is clear about the subject development issues and some strategies have been devised. The priorities should now be priced in time and money so that a realistic, timed, implementation plan can be agreed.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

131. Students coming into the department at the beginning of Year 7 have an unsatisfactory experience of ICT. The level of attainment at that age is very low. By the time students reach the age of 14 they have improved their knowledge and understanding in the subject but their level of attainment is still below that expected. By the age of 16 years, although students have made sound progress, standards remain below average.

132. In Years 7, 8 and 9 students have a sound knowledge of the computers they use although their keyboard skills are underdeveloped. They use standard commercial software, for example word, excel, and access. Year 7 students are able to log on and load the required program, One Year 8 class observed was required to set up and organise a fundraising event. Part of the activity involved putting data into Excel, proof-reading, including headers and footers, sorting, adding and deleting records and carrying out a custom search.

A number of the class were able to put all the data into the program within the time allowed, however a significant minority managed only part of the task. Year 9 students showed a basic knowledge of vector graphics when designing a suitable logo for a similar fundraising event. Across the three years students do consider the benefit of ICT in a wider context although their understanding and ability to talk about its impact is limited.

133. Students in Years 10 and 11 have the opportunity to take office applications, business studies or information technology at GCSE. The GCSE results for office applications are good in comparison to other subjects within the school but are below the national average. Business studies results are poor in comparison to national performance. Given the level at which the students start, they achieve at a satisfactory level. They continue to develop their knowledge and understanding of the software packages, they also research using the Internet and make full use of CD-ROMs. Year 10 students are beginning to learn how to use PowerPoint, having produced a storyboard about electronic communications. The higher attaining students in the group are using a greater range of features, for example introducing sound along with a range of animations. Students are given the opportunity to use ICT in some other subjects, for example design and technology, but it is insufficiently developed across the curriculum. Students identified with special educational needs, both behavioural and learning needs, perform well in ICT and make good progress.

134. Overall teaching in ICT is good and much is very good. Specialist teachers have a good knowledge of their subject, making effective and appropriate use of the hardware and software during lessons. They manage the time available effectively and provide students with challenging but achievable tasks. They have high expectations. Objectives are usually displayed at the beginning of the lesson and reviewed with the students at the end. Lessons are thoroughly planned with the result that a swift start is made in most sessions. Teachers and support staff have a good knowledge of the individual needs of students which ensures that good progress is made by all students, including those with special requirements such as the gifted and talented. In some lessons there is a need to ensure that all students are attentive and following the teacher direction closely. There is insufficient student involvement in discussion on the uses and impact of ICT in society to help develop students to become more discerning users of technology.

135. Attitudes to learning within the subject show lethargy, for although students have an interest in the subject and appear to enjoy the work, a significant number have difficulty in sustaining that interest for an entire lesson. In all classes observed, the behaviour of students was at least satisfactory and often good with students relating well to staff. Relationships with other students are good, being demonstrated through the willingness to help each other when problems arise.

136. Students in the first three years gain a solid grounding in ICT with those in Years 7 and 8 receiving a generous time allocation, the benefits of which are evident in the progress made. Year 9 time is reduced although all students have further experiences in design and technology. There is currently too little ICT happening across the remainder of the curriculum. In the final two years of compulsory schooling students not taking information technology or office applications have few opportunities to further develop their ICT skills. The under-development of cross-curricular provision means that the school barely meets the

statutory requirements for the key stage. The school is aware of this and changes for the summer term should ensure increased provision.

137. The department monitors academic progress well. There is comprehensive planning and good use of ongoing evaluation and assessment. Staff know the students well and provide for their needs, including setting targets in lessons.

138. The very capable and enthusiastic head of department has made considerable inroads, in a short time, into improving the ICT provision. She has the support of competent staff and a clear vision for the subject. Informative displays are used to create a stimulating environment. The recent improvements in accommodation and resources are beginning to impact on other curriculum areas. The demands on the facilities should increase as teachers in the school receive further ICT training. There is insufficient co-ordination of cross-curricular opportunities, providing for increased use in all subject areas. Equipment levels match the national average but deployment is inadequate.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

139. The modern foreign languages department benefits from very strong, far-sighted leadership. Since its establishment eighteen months ago many bold new initiatives have been introduced which have as their central aim the raising of standards. The most significant of these is the decision to concentrate on Spanish as the main foreign language and to phase out French and German for the foreseeable future once students studying these languages have completed their course. The benefits of this decision are beginning to show in the strong achievements of students studying Spanish in Years 7 and 8, and the good standards of work in Year 10. The department is now very well placed to make further improvements.

140. Very few students were entered for GCSE examinations in a modern foreign language in 2000. The results of those who took French and German were very low, but the small number entered for Spanish were in line with the national average. The attainment of students at the end of Key Stage 3 is below national expectations in Spanish and French, although many students are achieving results that are well in line with their capabilities. In Spanish, for example, where teaching is strong and the foreign language is used consistently in the classroom, students understand the teachers' instructions spoken slowly and recognise a number of well rehearsed words and phrases. Some younger students in Key Stage 3 are willing to say a little about themselves in Spanish and those of higher attainment have good accent and pronunciation. Those studying French, however, and students with special educational needs in Year 9, are reluctant to speak and are capable of very limited single word answers.

141. By the time students reach the end of Key Stage 4 attainment of the relatively small number on GCSE courses in French, German and Spanish is below national expectations. In Spanish, however, some students are capable of good intelligible responses. They have been thoroughly drilled in GCSE role-play situations and are quite confident in a guided context. Most students of French and German lack confidence in speaking and have very elementary understanding of the language spoken at anything approaching native speed. These students are not achieving to their potential and need much better opportunities of listening to the language and of building up their confidence in speaking.

142. The overall quality of teaching is good. In a significant number of lessons it is excellent. This applies particularly to the teaching of Spanish. In some lessons, however, teaching does not promote satisfactory learning. Teachers are very proficient in the languages they teach, particularly where they use their first foreign language, and in such cases this is used consistently in the classroom and with sensitivity to what students can cope with. This generally results in a sound level of comprehension in the students and, in some cases, good pronunciation.

143. Much of the teaching is challenging and rigorous, expecting students to use the language themselves for everyday requests, such as asking for more paper; or pushing them to form full sentences instead of one word responses. Teachers have a good variety of methods and vivid home-produced resources for engaging students' interest and stimulating them into using the language actively. Most lessons are planned imaginatively allowing students ample opportunities to practise and build up new language. Students are generally managed with a successful blend of firmness and humour which results in a pleasant working relationship and good behaviour. In one Year 7 Spanish lesson, for example, a group of higher attaining students were reaching standards of speaking and listening above the national expectation, and their pronunciation was unusually authentic. Very clear and well organised teaching, mostly in Spanish, ensured that all were involved and had a chance to speak. Learning in this lesson was both swift and natural, and by the end students were able to recognise and say something about the different rooms in a house, clearly relishing the gains they had made.

144. Where homework is set it is generally demanding, well explained and sufficiently flexible to allow keen linguists to do more if time allows. Marking is mostly thorough and encouraging, although sometimes omitting to insist on students repeating sub-standard work or leaving out a grade.

145. The department has clear policies on certain aspects of teaching, such as the use of the language in the classroom, the stating of a lesson's objectives and marking for effort as well as attainment. Where these and other items of good practice are carried out the quality of teaching is of a high order. Occasionally, however, teaching does not reach these standards and lacks challenge and rigour, using the language inconsistently so that students have too little exposure to it, or failing to guide them to a fuller use of language. In such cases students could be stretched more by withdrawing written prompts earlier and thus challenging them to commit new language to memory.

146. The most effective teaching creates a busy ordered environment in which students are motivated to work responsibly and feel comfortable to express themselves. Most students rise to the challenge of rigorous teaching, co-operating with the teacher and each other, and eager to show what they have learnt. In some lessons where teaching lacks clarity and challenge many students, although sensibly behaved, are quietly subdued and reluctant to participate.

147. Teachers generally make good use of the sixty minute period. However, one consequence of these long lessons is to space out the two period per week allocation so that long gaps occur from one to the next, making it hard for some students to remember what they have learned. The overall allocation of time to foreign languages in Key Stage 3 is below the national average for secondary schools. The school's decision to make the study of a foreign language optional in Key Stage 4 has substantially reduced numbers taking Spanish in Year 10 this year, so that fewer than one tenth of the year group are now studying a foreign language. As a result of this a large number of students have little to show for the previous three years of language learning. If it is felt right to persevere with that decision there would be significant benefits in giving students some form of accreditation to recognise the work

they have done.

148. Management of the department is highly efficient and committed to improving standards. Development planning is realistic and self analytical. The Head of department gives very good support and encourages staff to observe each other teaching informally. In view of the current strength of teaching in the department, there would be benefits from more formal and systematic monitoring of teaching. Assessment of students' performance and the recording of their results is very thorough and encourages them to evaluate and set targets for future effort.

149. Recent initiatives for involving gifted and talented students, such as the excellent trip to Barcelona in the summer of 2000, and the week of language activities with Manchester Metropolitan University, have stimulated considerable interest in Spain and the Spanish language. These events, and students' work, are vividly celebrated in the fine displays in the department rooms and corridors. The weekly visit of Year 6 children from a feeder primary school to learn Spanish in one of the ICT rooms using interactive CD-ROM is helping to kindle enthusiasm for the language. A wider use of ICT, however, to include all students learning a foreign language, would help to sustain interest and motivation.

MUSIC

150. The number of entries for GCSE music in the year 2000 was too small for meaningful comparison with national averages. Current standards of attainment at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 are below national expectations.

151. At Key Stage 3, the students keep good time in performance, holding parts against a steady pulse. In Year 7 they play recorders well, reading notation accurately, however the level of difficulty of the music tackled is low. When singing, the students show good tuning and ensemble skills but the tone is weak in the high register and rather harsh in the low register. Composition work is very basic and melodies are usually based on chord notes. Keyboard skills are weak; Year 9 students still have to rely on letter names written on the keyboards to find their notes. There is very little written work during this key stage to reinforce the reading of staff notation. At Key Stage 4, students show a good sense of rhythm and the ability to play melodies on the keyboard in time with a rhythmic accompaniment; however they are mainly restricted to playing with one hand. Only one student in each group receives instrumental lessons from the visiting instrumental teachers. This means that extra time has to be allocated to performance during class lessons, which has an adverse effect on standards in composition and listening. The students' composing is limited in range, mainly restricted to simple melodic structures with the addition of single fingered chords on the keyboard. Part writing is weak but their melodies are usually well structured with an appropriate choice of chords for accompaniment. When listening to music, the students struggle to identify composers' use of composition devices and features of instrumentation and form.

152. The quality of teaching and learning is good at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Just over two thirds of lessons seen were graded good or better and the remainder were satisfactory. The class teachers have good subject knowledge and the instrumental teachers have good specialist skills on their respective instruments. Lesson planning is well thought out and generally effective but some times lacking in variety of activity. This can cause the students' concentration to flag later in the lesson. Explanations are very clear and work is very well graded so that all students are able to make progress. The tasks allow them to work at different levels and the high level of individual help given in lessons, particularly at Key Stage 4, enables students with special educational needs to make satisfactory progress. Expectations are generally sound but could be higher for some students, who could be

extended by the setting of tasks better matched to their prior attainment. The management of students is good and this promotes good behaviour that contributes to a good learning atmosphere where the students work productively with most completing the tasks set. The students work well independently, for example they use keyboards with headphones and are able to concentrate hard individually; on the other hand, when required they share keyboards and collaborate well. The teaching achieves a good balance between individual work and making music together. The assessment of students' work is systematic; marking is conscientious and thorough, containing helpful comments with suggestions for improvement. Students are aware of how well they are doing and are given grades for effort as well as achievement. Insufficient listening to music of the great composers is integrated into the class work to provide more variety during the lesson. Homework is insufficiently used in Key Stage 3 to reinforce learning. There are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls. Taking into account the standards on entry to the school and the very small number of students at Key Stage 4 receiving instrumental lessons, the progress of students at both key stages is satisfactory.

153. The head of department provides good leadership and the subject is well managed with well thought out schemes of work that take account of current curriculum developments. There is a good level of resources except for a lack of computers and software, which is hampering the use of ICT at both key stages, particularly Key Stage 4.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

154. Overall attainment is average at both key stages. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 show attainments of boys and girls in line with the national average although the range of attainments is wide. All students entered for GCSE in 2000 were successful in obtaining a pass grade in the range A* - G although the proportion reaching the higher grades was very low compared with national averages. Standards of work in Key Stage 4 are now in line with national averages.

155. In Key Stage 3 most students, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. Year 8 boys can control the hockey ball well and handle the stick effectively. Year 8 girls do not progress so quickly. Slow skill development is related to low levels of self-confidence in groups of lower attaining students. In basketball girls make better progress. Overall levels of personal fitness are sound and most students show through the warming-up activities that they understand how regular exercise can contribute to a healthy lifestyle. In Key Stage 4 levels of personal fitness are above average. In Year 10, students in an indoor athletics session achieved well in a planned fitness/strength test with very little difference between girls and boys. In Year 11 badminton most boys were able to sustain rallies to a good standard. GCSE students have good attitudes to practical work and achieve good standards. In badminton boys demonstrate a good standard of play. They have a wide range of shots and a good command of tactical play. Standards of work in students' folders reflect the inconsistent attitudes of some students towards academic work. Satisfactory progress is being made in some areas but too often progress is erratic.

156. The consistently high standard of teaching is a strength of the department; it is always good, sometimes very good. In all classes students know exactly what to do in order to improve as a result of the teachers having set, and displayed, the learning objectives quite clearly at the beginning of each lesson. The teachers know their subject well and devise activities expertly enabling all students to make progress. Lessons are well planned and students are well managed. Most respond positively and eagerly to the energetic, engaging and encouraging style adopted by all teachers. Standards of behaviour are good as are relationships between students and teachers. Individual students with special educational needs are well known to members of specialist staff so that there is a clear understanding and a good response to their different learning needs.

157. The requirements of the National Curriculum are met at both key stages. The programme of extra-curricular activities is very good and the department staff have made a significant contribution to building a good reputation for the school in the community. The involvement and success of the school in a broad sports programme has a positive effect on students. The programme has been particularly successful in extending the skills of gifted and talented students. Consequently, individual students and teams have been successful in competitions in the region. Links with primary schools have been improved through success in attracting New Opportunities Funding to support work in this area. The work of all students is thoroughly assessed and their progress is monitored by procedures that have been developed recently. Assessment arrangements are in line with whole school policies. The department is beginning to make use of assessment information to guide the learning objectives of lessons and to inform parents of standards of work. Leadership of the department is very good. The documentation is in very good order, the department is well organised and all activities run smoothly. The head of department has clear vision and understanding of longer-term developments and has led the team most effectively to achieve considerable success in the short time since the school opened.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

158. Standards of students' attainment in religious education are below the expectations of the Locally Agreed Syllabus and lower than national averages for GCSE. The newly opened school has not, as yet, entered any students for GCSE in religious studies and therefore it is not possible to report on trends. There are five students in Year 10 who are taking the GCSE option. The school predicts that three out of the five will attain A* - C grades and the other two will gain grades below the C grade. However, the standard of work in GCSE lessons is below that expected partly because the students have poor literacy and retention skills and partly because their religious education in earlier years has been interrupted by lack of continuity in teaching staff. The boys outnumber the girls in the GCSE class but the standards of work are very similar. The GCSE students have a good knowledge and understanding of the narrative of the gospels and have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the better known miracles and parables. They are weak in their knowledge and understanding of the symbolism behind the narrative. Students' knowledge of contemporary moral issues is sound but students struggle to explain and record the Christian viewpoint and 'answers' to such issues as euthanasia, abortion and environmental concerns. The quality of students' homework indicates that insufficient time and commitment is given by the students to this important facet of their education. The progress of students with special educational needs is unsatisfactory despite the good attention and support given by the teachers of religious education.

159. The standards of students' work by the end of Key Stage 3 are below the expectations of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. The Year 9 students are not much further forward than the Year 8 students. Year 7 and 8 students have benefited from two years of uninterrupted good quality teaching from two qualified, enthusiastic and capable members of staff and have begun to cover the Locally Agreed Syllabus for the teaching of religious education in depth and breadth. These younger students have a sound knowledge of Christian belief, symbolism, baptism, miracles, parables, rites of passage and festivals. They have insufficient knowledge of the Hindu and Sikh communities' beliefs and styles of worship. Students' knowledge and understanding has been much enhanced by members of the local Eden project who have worked with the teachers to provide well-planned, high quality, informative and relevant lessons.

160. The quality of teaching at both key stages is good. The two teachers have a very good grasp of the subject and plan their lessons thoroughly. They provide a good variety of written and practical lesson activities often using video clips and ensure that students of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, have relevant work to do. The GCSE students, ably assisted by members of the Eden project, were taught about adult believers' baptism in an engaging, imaginative and accurate manner. The other Year 10 and 11 students, not taking the GCSE course, were taught about the horrors of the holocaust and the theories of evolution in a rational and objective manner. Students are encouraged to think through spiritual and moral issues for themselves and given ample time to reflect. Students respond well to strong class management – they pay attention and stay on task.

161. Key Stage 3 students are taught equally well. Much of the work was based around Christian belief and practices. Year 7 was taught well about the character of God. Teachers took Year 8 through some creative dramatic scripts in order to learn about the prodigal son and the concepts of jealousy, forgiveness, repentance and respect. The teaching of the conversion of St Paul was imaginatively captured and preceded the engaging lesson on contemporary conversion to faith. The teachers choose well known contemporary sporting and media events to bring the topic alive. A weakness in the teaching is the lack of research and resources devoted to world faiths such as The Sikh, Hindu and Moslem faiths. Although time allocations are appropriate the depth of coverage for these religions is currently shallow. Teachers set homework regularly and mark students' books thoroughly but homework exercises are not as yet sufficiently challenging and do not extend students' knowledge with sufficient rigour.

162. The attitudes to learning of students who regularly attend school in both key stages are satisfactory. Although there are few signs of high aspirations and some clear signs of disaffection the students generally settle to religious education lessons well. Students' behaviour in class is generally good and marked by good relationships with the teachers.

163. The curriculum time for the subject is appropriate at both key stages. Both teachers are well qualified and committed. The religious education teaching and learning makes a sound contribution to students' spiritual, moral and social education. The opportunities presented in the Eden lunchtime club enhance the timetabled curriculum by providing students with wholesome, enjoyable and engaging quizzes, competitions, music and talks. The Eden group's activities are well planned, well presented and a positive model of school and community partnerships.

164. The department is well led by an experienced teacher. He supports his assistant ably and the two work well in harmony. Although the assistant's lessons are not, as yet, formally observed and monitored there are good examples of team teaching and collaborative planning. The department does not as yet use school-wide data on students' attainment with sufficient rigour although the GCSE students are set targets. The department has not used ICT to enhance teaching mainly because there are no resources at present available. The department has achieved much in a short time and has established strong and secure foundations. It is now prepared and determined to raise standards of students' attainment by setting a more rigorous and demanding pace to the teaching and learning of world faiths - other than Christianity – and by using performance data to inform curriculum planning.