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# Specialist schools: a second evaluation

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# Main findings

- The specialist school programme is now an established part of the national system of secondary education, and has grown and developed substantially since Ofsted carried out its first evaluation in 2001. The influence and challenges of the programme continue to be catalysts for accelerated school improvement, and five out of six of the specialist schools visited for this survey are now achieving the aims of the programme.
- Being a specialist school makes a difference. Working to declared targets, dynamic leadership by key players, a renewed sense of purpose, the willingness to be a pathfinder, targeted use of funding and being part of an optimistic network of like-minded schools all contribute to an impetus and climate for improvement.
- Compared with other schools, specialist schools do well against a range of indicators. Leadership and management have improved. Standards are higher and improving at a faster rate. That said, there is variation in performance between different types of specialism and between schools. Technology colleges show the most improvement and language colleges show the least.
- The rate of improvement in pupils' performance in specialist subjects is levelling off. There are various reasons for this, one of which is that raising standards from above average to well above average calls for concerted use of all the school's resources. In addition, while senior managers are closely involved in setting targets, middle managers, who are most involved in specialist subjects, are not sufficiently involved in the day-to-day work of monitoring and improving the quality of provision. Less than half the schools met their targets for these subjects. These weaknesses, identified in the last report, have not been tackled with sufficient rigour.
- The quality of teaching in specialist schools is generally better than in non-specialist schools, the exception being arts colleges, where teaching at Key Stage 3 is below non-specialist schools. The teaching of specialist subjects at Key Stage 3 has shown little improvement since the last evaluation and has declined in language colleges. There has been an improvement in teaching at Key Stage 4, particularly in arts and language colleges.
- The approach to inclusion has improved since the last report, but more needs to be done to establish comprehensive strategies. Most schools ensure that all pupils are offered suitable specialist subjects at Key Stage 4, but too few have strategies to avoid disaffection on the part of some pupils. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is uneven: although it is good in sports colleges, it is unsatisfactory in one fifth of technology, language and arts schools.
- There have been significant improvements in the community role of specialist schools, particularly in their work with partner primary schools and local community groups. However, as at the time of the last report, there remains more to do to create productive links with business and with other secondary schools.
- The range and quality of the curriculum have improved in specialist schools. More pupils participate in extra-curricular opportunities, especially in specialist subjects, than at the time of the last report. Pupils have a broader choice of options in lessons, especially from the age of 14, although vocational and work-related opportunities are still limited, especially in arts colleges.
- Although some key aspects of specialist schools have improved since Ofsted's first evaluation, some of the recommendations made have not been adequately addressed by a significant proportion of the schools across each of the specialisms.

# Recommendations

- Specialist schools should:
  - improve the quality of teaching in specialist subjects, particularly in language colleges in Key Stage 3
  - maintain the focus on raising standards in specialist subjects, particularly music and drama. Individual schools should focus on improving results in specialist subjects where results are lower than those in other subjects and targets are not being met
  - improve the quality of leadership and management in arts colleges
  - ensure that middle managers are better equipped to do their jobs effectively and are more involved in strategic planning
  - develop more positive approaches to counter disaffection, especially in specialist subjects. Schools should increase the range of vocational courses and work-related options in specialist subjects at Key Stage 4, particularly in arts colleges, and develop closer links with employers and local businesses
  - ensure that there is greater coherence between curriculum provision, extra-curricular activities and strategies to raise achievement, especially in specialist subjects
  - monitor the take-up and attendance of enrichment activities in order to promote inclusion, and to track these activities' impact on attainment
  - improve provision and access for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in arts and sports colleges.
  - improve support for partner secondary schools, especially those with weaknesses in their teaching and learning, and develop strategies to help partner schools gradually become independent of this support
  - strengthen strategies for monitoring progress in meeting targets and evaluating the value for money of specialist school funding.

# Introduction

1. The specialist schools programme is an important part of the government's plans to raise standards in secondary schools. It was launched in 1994 to help secondary schools develop strengths and to raise standards in a chosen specialism in partnership with private sponsors. From 1997 specialist schools have been expected to become a resource for other schools and for the wider community including business and industry.
2. In September 2004 there were nearly 2,000 specialist schools, representing over 60% of eligible secondary schools. Every local authority that has secondary schools has at least one specialist school, and there is evidence of increasing diversity of specialist provision in many areas of the country as the numbers of specialist schools increase.
3. The aim of the programme is to raise attainment for all pupils across the curriculum, both by strengthening and developing the quality of teaching and learning strategies in specialist subjects, thus improving standards throughout the school, and by extending opportunities for vocational learning and enrichment through specialist subjects. In addition, specialist schools should strengthen collaboration with partner schools and the wider community by sharing specialist facilities and resources, enhancing the quality of teaching, and developing and disseminating good practice.
4. In October 2001 Ofsted published its report *Specialist schools: an evaluation of progress*. The main findings were that:
  - the proportion of pupils achieving five or more A\*-C grades in General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) was higher in technology, language and arts colleges than in other maintained secondary schools
  - the teaching quality in specialist schools was about the same as in other schools, but was well above average at Key Stage 3 in language colleges
  - over four fifths of specialist schools had effective structures and systems for managing the programme, but there were weaknesses in middle management in a significant minority of schools
  - the organisation and management of enrichment opportunities varied, and monitoring was undeveloped
  - links with industry, businesses and other professionals varied widely
  - over three quarters of schools had made good use of the preferential grants to upgrade facilities, especially resources for information and communication technology (ICT). In a minority of schools, spending was not matched to targets
  - the community role was ill-defined: its objectives were vague and did not focus sharply enough on learning objectives, and its impact was limited.
5. The report recommended that specialist schools should improve the efficacy of middle management, including planning and monitoring targets and raising attainment by giving close attention to methods of teaching and learning. The report also asked specialist schools to improve the performance of pupils by exploring how specialist subjects could contribute to higher attainment, and to do more to share good practice and ideas with other schools. In addition, it called for specialist schools to develop effective links with the local community focusing on access, social inclusion and measurable gains in achievement, as well as strengthening partnerships with business and industry.
6. This report investigates how specialist schools have built on the strengths identified in the last report and how they have improved on the weaknesses.

# Pupils' achievement

## Key features

- Since 1998, pupils aged 16 in specialist schools have performed significantly better in external examinations than those in other schools, and the rate of improvement in these results continues to be faster in specialist schools than in other schools.
  - During the period 2000-2003 the proportion of pupils gaining GCSE A\*-C grades in specialist subjects was consistently better in specialist schools than in other schools, except in music and drama in 2003. However, the rate of improvement in specialist subjects has tailed off, and has declined slightly in some subjects.
  - The results in arts colleges fluctuate from year to year.
  - There are significant variations in performance across the different types of specialism and between schools. Technology colleges show the most improvement, while language colleges show the least.
  - Target-setting procedures are ineffective in around half the schools, with less than half the specialist schools visited meeting their targets in specialist subjects. This is a weakness that has persisted since the last report.
7. One of the key aims of the specialist school programme is to raise standards of achievement for all pupils in specialist subjects and across the curriculum.
  8. More pupils in specialist schools gain at least five GCSE A\*-C grades than in non-specialist schools, and there is a trend of gradual improvement in all specialisms. During the period 1998-2003 the percentage of pupils obtaining five or more GCSE A\*-C grades in specialist schools increased at a faster rate than in others, with technology colleges showing the greatest rate of improvement and language colleges the least (Table 1).
  9. Based on test and examination results in 2003, specialist schools added more value through Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 than did non-specialist schools.<sup>4</sup> Language and technology schools added more value than arts and sports schools, significantly so in Key Stage 3. Value added data from Key Stage 2 to 4 was not available for 2003.
  10. In 1998, the first year when the performance of all four types of specialist colleges could be compared with that in other schools, the average points score for specialist schools was already three points above that for non-specialist schools. In 2003 the gap had widened to almost five points (Table 2).

**Table 1. GCSE/GNVQ performance: percentage achieving 5 A\*-C grades.<sup>1,2,3</sup>**

Type of school	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Trend 1998-2003
Arts				45.7	47.2	47.8	49.4	51.3	53.8	1.6
Language		55.9	55.8	57.6	59.3	60.9	61.5	62.9	65.1	1.3
Sports				42.9	44.4	45.1	47.1	48.3	50.7	1.5
Technology	45.4	46.4	48.0	49.0	51.4	53.2	54.4	56.3	59.6	1.7
All specialist schools	45.4	46.9	48.2	49.4	51.5	53.0	54.3	56.0	58.9	1.6
All non-specialist schools	40.2	41.5	42.0	43.4	45.3	46.3	47.2	48.6	50.2	1.2
All schools	41.2	42.6	43.4	44.6	46.6	47.4	48.4	49.9	51.5	1.3

<sup>1</sup> This report analyses attainment and contextual data for 521 specialist schools designated and operating on or before September 2000. As a result, some schools prior to 2000 in the 'all specialist schools' category will not have been specialist schools and, conversely, data for 'all specialist schools' after 2000 do not include all specialist schools. For the sake of comparison, data from the same 521 specialist schools are analysed throughout the period. In this group there are 301 technology colleges, 99 language colleges, 65 sports colleges, and 56 arts colleges.

<sup>2</sup> The specialist schools programme has included specialist schools for languages since 1996 and for sport and the arts since 1997.

<sup>3</sup> The trend is based on linear regression; the larger the number the faster the rate of increase.

<sup>4</sup> Based on the DfES methodology explained at [www.dfes.gov.uk/performanceables](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/performanceables) and in DfES statistical bulletin, issue no 02/04, July 2004.

**Table 2. Key Stage 4 GCSE average points scores.**

Type of school	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Trend 1998-2003
Arts				37.6	38.9	39.4	40.0	41.4	42.9	0.96
Language		41.4	41.7	43.1	44.1	45.1	45.4	46.4	47.7	0.91
Sports				35.9	36.8	37.3	38.0	39.2	41.0	0.96
Technology	36.7	36.9	37.8	39.0	40.4	41.3	42.1	43.1	45.0	1.0
All specialist schools	36.7	37.2	37.9	39.2	40.4	41.3	42.01	43.0	44.8	1.0
All non-specialist schools	34.1	34.5	34.9	36.1	37.4	37.9	38.3	39.1	39.9	0.76
All schools	34.5	35.0	35.5	36.8	38.0	38.4	39.0	39.8	40.6	0.79

### The performance of specialist subjects

11. From 2001 to 2003, pupils who followed specialist subjects in technology colleges, language colleges and sports colleges achieved higher percentages of grades A\*–C at GCSE than the national averages for these subjects. However, the rate of improvement in specialist subjects levelled off over this period, and in some subjects it has declined. The percentage of pupils achieving grades A\*–C in music and drama in arts colleges fluctuates from year to year, and in 2003 results in both subjects were slightly below the national averages. Since the last report, the performance of sports subjects has improved relative to the national picture (Table 3).

### Trends compared with neighbouring schools

12. Data taken from a relatively small sample of specialist schools demonstrate that levels of attainment in specialist schools are consistently better than in neighbouring non-specialist schools, where levels of attainment are slightly lower than the average compared with all non-specialist schools nationally. Overall, the average points score for the specialist schools in the sample used in this survey has increased by 17% since 1998. Over the same period, neighbouring non-specialist schools showed an increase of 9.5%, compared with one of 10.5% for all non-specialist schools.

**Table 3. GCSE 2001–2003: percentage achieving A\*–C grades at GCSE in specialist schools.<sup>5</sup>**

Type of school	GCSE subject	2001	2002	2003
Arts	Art and Design	67(63)	69(64)	71(65)
	Drama	70(68)	68(69)	63(65)
	Music	67(65)	71(66)	63(64)
Languages	French	62(45)	60(46)	58(43)
	German	62(52)	60(53)	57(50)
	Spanish	60(49)	63(48)	57(47)
	Other languages <sup>6</sup>	74(66)	78(69)	75(70)
Sports	PE/Sport	56(51)	56(53)	57(54)
Technology	Design and technology	57(49)	58(50)	60(51)
	Mathematics	53(47)	54(49)	54(47)
	Science	56(50)	56(50)	58(51)

<sup>5</sup> These figures are derived from validated pupil-level data. The figures in brackets are for other maintained secondary schools. In order to simplify the analysis, results in different group syllabuses have been aggregated.

<sup>6</sup> This has changed from 'Other European Languages' used in the previous publication. Consequently, more subjects are included in this group for this analysis.



## Target-setting in schools visited by HMI

13. All specialist schools are required to set performance targets at Key Stage 4 in each of the specialist subjects for the four years of their designation. Schools are expected to base targets on a secure knowledge of the ability of their pupils, and to use performance data such as key stage tests and teacher assessment data to set challenging and realistic targets.

14. Of the 52 schools visited by HMI, 30 had met or exceeded their performance targets for the percentage of pupils attaining five or more grades A\*–C at GCSE in 2003. Less than half the schools met their targets for the percentage of pupils attaining grade C or better at GCSE in all their specialist subjects, but few schools could adequately account for these shortfalls. This weakness was identified in the previous report.

## The contributions of specialist subjects to higher standards

15. As would be expected, the features of high attainment in specialist schools were broadly the same as those employed elsewhere, but some features were particularly prominent. These are listed below for each specialism.

### Technology colleges:

- setting earlier coursework deadlines in Key Stage 4
- more rigorous monitoring of pupils' progress in meeting intermediate targets
- showing pupils how to improve grades by analysing coursework criteria
- targeting underachievement in a regular and systematic way
- teaching pupils on the GCSE C/D borderline in single-sex Year 11 groups
- using industrial mentors to help disaffected pupils overcome design problems and learn technical skills
- building in 'coursework catch-up time' for Key Stage 4 pupils likely to underachieve
- providing targeted help for pupils to improve their

writing skills and extend their vocabulary

- ensuring good access to ICT facilities for all pupils, and using new subject-based interactive software.

### Language colleges:

- increasing the time allocated to modern foreign languages (MFL)
- increasing the number of language assistants to improve speaking skills
- improving access to and use of ICT to support speaking, listening and writing skills
- tackling underachievement by focusing on pupils likely to fall between two grades at GCSE
- setting up revision clubs at Key Stages 3 and 4
- using a wide range of teaching approaches, for example using drama to raise self-esteem
- monitoring pupils' progress and achievement rigorously.

### Arts colleges:

- improving the quality of accommodation and providing better access to resources and stimuli
- increasing curriculum time in Key Stages 3 and 4
- using a fast-track programme for gifted and talented pupils
- treating pupils as artists and ensuring that there is real purpose to their work, including the use of commissions
- where teachers are practising artists, sharing their experiences with pupils
- providing a wide range of relevant extra-curricular opportunities
- reducing the size of Key Stage 4 examination groups to around 20 pupils
- using ancillary staff effectively to support learning
- increasing the provision of, and access to ICT and subject-related software.

### Sports colleges:

- offering a wider range of accredited courses to ensure that all pupils' needs are met
- making effective use of data to set targets and track the performance of individual pupils
- using setting arrangements within year groups

- increasing curriculum time to more than two hours of physical education (PE) and sport per week
- providing a more balanced curriculum, including creative/aesthetic opportunities, health and fitness
- creating better links between PE and other subjects, for example using English to extend vocabulary and communication skills, and using science to reinforce understanding of forces and their effects and physiology
- providing good access to ICT facilities for research, for example monitoring and evaluating performance and the effects of exercise and training
- providing an extended extra-curricular programme
- using learning support assistants to help pupils with SEN in theory lessons
- building anatomy and physiology into Key Stage 3 units of study
- focusing on improving pupils' behaviour and attitudes through an enhanced reward scheme offering gold, silver and bronze awards
- using mentors for talented pupils.

16. Where standards in specialist subjects are declining or where targets have been missed by a significant margin, a number of common factors are evident. Some of these are outside schools' control, such as long-term illness of key staff, difficulties recruiting suitably qualified and experienced teachers, and periods of refurbishment that take specialist rooms out of use for substantial periods.

17. However, some issues are within schools' control but have not been adequately addressed. These include:

- weak target-setting procedures
- failure to identify underachieving pupils at an early enough stage
- weak leadership and management of specialist departments
- inadequate guidance for pupils choosing Key Stage 4 specialist options
- poor use of assessment
- poor specialist facilities
- inadequate access to ICT.

# The quality of teaching and learning

## Key features

- The quality of teaching in specialist schools is better than in non-specialist schools.
- The quality of teaching in arts colleges is poorer than that in other specialist schools, but is still in line with non-specialist schools.
- The quality of teaching is almost always better at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3.
- The proportion of overall good teaching observed by HMI at Key Stage 3 in language colleges has declined since the last evaluation.
- The percentage of good teaching in specialist subjects at Key Stage 4 in arts and language colleges has improved significantly since the last evaluation.

18. All specialist schools are expected to strengthen the quality of teaching and learning. They are expected to ensure that approaches to teaching and learning effectively underpin the declared objectives and targets by 'setting high expectations for every learner to succeed, making learning a stimulating and challenging experience, matching teaching techniques to a range of learning styles and using assessment, diagnosis and data to maximise pupils' attainment'.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 4. Data from Ofsted Section 10 reports for the period 2000–2003. The percentage of teaching in specialist subjects judged to be good and better in Key Stages 3 and 4.**

	Key Stage 3 % good or better	Key Stage 4 % good or better
All non-specialist schools	73	79
All specialist schools	87	89
Arts colleges	71	80
Language colleges	89	88
Sports colleges	88	92
Technology colleges	89	92

19. Overall, the quality of teaching seen in Section 10 inspections is substantially better in specialist schools than elsewhere, and is better at both Key Stages 3 and 4 in almost all the specialisms. The only exception is in arts

colleges, where the quality of teaching is slightly worse at Key Stage 3 than in other schools and the teaching at Key Stage 4 is only marginally better.

20. As part of the survey for this report, 250 lessons were observed in specialist subjects at Key Stages 3 and 4.
21. HMI judgements of teaching show there has been no improvement in the proportion of teaching in specialist subjects at Key Stage 3 that is good or better since the last report, except in sports colleges, where designation has helped raise teachers' expectations. By contrast, there has been a significant decline in the quality of teaching observed in language colleges. In part this is due to differences in the sample of schools. It is also because teachers are focusing more on the planning and delivery of Key Stage 4 lessons, which they hope will have a more immediate impact on published results. The quality of teaching observed at Key Stage 4 has improved in all types of specialist colleges, with the most dramatic improvements shown in arts and language colleges.

## Characteristics of good and better teaching and learning in specialist subjects

22. Where the quality of teaching is good, learning is well-paced and productive. Pupils understand how well they are doing and how to improve because assessment strategies are consistently applied and there are regular opportunities to set new personal targets.
23. Many of the characteristics of good teaching and learning are the same as reported in the first Ofsted evaluation, but the following additional features are noted in specialist subjects:

### In technology colleges:

- activities were well supported by business and industrial links such as 'engineering ambassadors' and other professionals working in the classroom and workshop
- teaching linked lessons to modern industrial and business applications

<sup>7</sup> *Specialist schools programme 2003/04: a guide for schools*, DFES, 2003

- literacy and numeracy were well integrated in teaching
- teaching assistants were trained to support pupils with a range of learning difficulties or SEN
- there was very effective use of a range of ICT resources, particularly electronic whiteboards, graphical calculators, multimedia and video-technology, CAD CAM and peripheral interface controllers (PICs).

#### In language colleges:

- teachers were good linguists and provided accurate models that encouraged high standards of pronunciation by their pupils
- teachers planned carefully and made effective use of ICT and a range of strategies including sharing learning objectives, interesting starters and overt teaching of grammar
- the contribution of modern foreign languages (MFL) to the development of pupils' ICT skills was carefully mapped
- schools made effective use of fast-tracking opportunities for very able pupils.

#### In arts colleges:

- teachers planned a progressive range of purposeful artistic activities that motivated pupils and developed their skills, knowledge and understanding in the subject
- there was evidence of deliberate use of, and gain in subject-specific vocabulary during lessons, which consolidated and built on previous knowledge
- adults other than teachers were used to extend pupils' work
- schools developed strategies for using the arts across the curriculum in order to develop a distinctive ethos: for example, drama was used in personal, social and health education (PHSE) to devise plays on the subjects of racism, sex education, drugs and bullying; science and genetics used filming and dance; and an MFL department used a French rapper to develop language skills.

#### In sports colleges:

- teachers focused on what pupils were achieving, not simply what they were doing

- teachers provided effective feedback to individuals and groups which recognised improvements in performance as well as challenging them further
- teachers paid particular attention to developing skills of observation and analysis as a tool for improving pupils' performance
- demonstrations and video feedback were used to show high standards of control, accuracy and precision in performance, and to promote evaluation and understanding of movement
- outside experts were used to enhance pupils' learning effectively in areas such as dance and karate
- teaching assistants provided good levels of support for pupils with motor skills difficulties.

#### 24. Common weaknesses in teaching and learning across the specialisms included:

- the absence of a consistent approach to lesson planning
- activities that lacked pace and purpose and had low overall expectations
- learning objectives that were not made clear to the pupils at the start of the lesson
- an absence of a plenary session at the end of the lesson to consolidate or evaluate understanding
- teaching all pupils in a class at the same level and pace, without any appreciation of their learning needs
- a lack of briefing about pupils' previous learning for temporary teachers
- too few opportunities for pupils to develop their observation and evaluation skills
- obvious connections to industrial and business processes were not made
- a lack of discrimination in the use of electronic whiteboards, especially when other methods would have been more effective
- pupils not being made aware of the criteria used by examination boards to assess their work
- in language colleges, not enough independent use of the target language by pupils.

# Choice and diversity in the curriculum

## Key features

- Technology, language and sports colleges provide increased choice in specialist subjects at Key Stage 4.
- Specialist schools continue to offer pupils a balanced curriculum and increased flexibility at Key Stage 4.
- The introduction of vocational and work-related opportunities at Key Stage 4 varies widely across the specialisms and in individual schools. Only a third have introduced vocational options in specialist subjects.
- Arts colleges have been slow to introduce new courses and broaden the range of vocational courses on offer.
- The range of specialist enrichment activities has improved since the previous evaluation, and continues to expand in all specialisms.
- Approaches to monitoring and evaluating enrichment activities remain weak in most specialist schools.

25. Specialist schools are required to introduce a broader range of courses in their specialist subjects, particularly vocational courses, and to develop links with business and further and higher education. Specialist schools are also expected to extend enrichment opportunities in the specialist area, and to encourage greater pupil participation.

26. The specialist schools visited as part of this survey offer pupils a greater choice at Key Stage 4 than non-specialist schools. The range of courses and qualifications available to pupils has been extended at four out of five schools, and take-up is at least good in three in five schools. However, this masks a disappointing response by nearly two thirds of arts colleges, which have not introduced any new courses since designation.

27. The introduction of new vocational courses at Key Stage 4 in specialist schools is taking longer than expected: only one in three schools has introduced or increased vocational options in specialist subjects. Provision after the age of 16 is slightly better, and staying-on rates in specialist subjects have increased significantly in nearly half the schools.

28. The range of enrichment activities in specialist subjects, both within the timetable and beyond the school day, is at

least good in seven out of ten schools. This is an improvement since the last inspection. A wide variety of activities makes a significant contribution to establishing a school's distinctive character, increasing pupils' interest and stimulating more cross-curricular work. However, few schools monitor attendance at extra-curricular activities or measure the impact of enrichment on achievement.

29. Specialist schools, particularly arts and sports colleges, increasingly use professionals and links with industry and commerce to support teaching and learning.

30. One third of schools offer early entry to GCSE examinations. In half the language colleges able pupils have the opportunity to sit an MFL GCSE examination in Year 10, and either to start an advanced supplementary (AS) course or study a second language to GCSE in Year 11. A similar pattern is used with gifted and talented pupils in other specialisms.

## Technology colleges

31. Since designation, five in six specialist schools have offered a wider range of Key Stage 4 courses in specialist subjects: for example, pupils may take General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) intermediate level in design and technology or, more recently, a GCSE in engineering or manufacturing. Some schools now offer three separate sciences to more able pupils, but few offer the new GCSE applied science course. In mathematics, the most frequent addition is GCSE statistics, often as an early entry at the end of Year 10.

32. A quarter of technology colleges offer a planned 'alternative' curriculum that incorporates key elements of the specialism at Key Stage 4. Where this is effective, it includes features such as:

- use of the Advanced Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and the Youth Award Scheme to accredit key skills
- part-time extended work placements and attendance at further education (FE) college courses such as 'Newstart', or at a local skills training centre

- allowing pupils to study a reduced number of GCSE courses so that pupils have extra time to complete course work and thus gain higher grades.

33. Only one third of schools has specifically developed a stronger vocational emphasis in the specialist subject for all pupils at Key Stage 4. The predominant approach has been through the use of GNVQ intermediate level courses as in the following example.

*One school developed an extensive range of GNVQ and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) courses in Key Stage 4. By becoming accredited as a NVQ assessment centre, it was able to provide a wider range of NVQ courses and to employ suitable staff. This work was effectively supported by the local Education Business Partnership (EBP) consortium.*

34. Two thirds of technology colleges offer a good or very good range of enrichment activities. These frequently include:

- enterprise days and Year 9 technology days
- asking visiting speakers to describe their work
- the engineering/science ambassadors schemes
- involvement in techno games and Robot Wars
- lunchtime and after-school clubs such as the Young Einstein Society and Young Engineers club, and involvement in the Creativity in Science and Technology (CREST) awards
- the Engineering Education Scheme for able sixth-formers
- visits to museums, sites of scientific interest and industries such as Jaguar cars
- participation in various local and national competitions such as the Perkins Engines Challenge, Formula Schools and various mathematics and science challenges
- effective use of the cognitive acceleration in science or mathematics schemes (CASE and CAME)
- use of the 'Star Dome' facilities for teaching astronomy.

35. The following example demonstrates how the three target-setting subjects in one school worked together on an enrichment activity:

*The mathematics department organised a cross-curricular day for Year 8 pupils called 'Bridging the Gap'. This was based around the design and construction of the Hollywell Bridge, Chippenham. Pupils had to take account of the design constraints and to work in teams to design, construct and test their bridge. The activity also required a presentation on how the team tackled the problem. Each specialist subject was involved: in mathematics, pupils considered the volume of earth that would be removed and the cost of the lorries used; in science, they studied the forces acting on the bridge and how these influenced the design; and in design and technology, they built a bridge to carry a defined and scaled-down load, tested it and used design software to make their final presentation.*

## Language colleges

36. In almost all language colleges, designation has increased choice and diversity of languages and courses offered. This includes a wider range of languages studied during school time (especially Spanish and Italian) or taught after hours (Russian, Japanese and Chinese), and, in a minority, a stronger vocational offer at Key Stage 4 (for example, the Certificate of Business Language Competence).

37. In all the language colleges, pupils study a first modern foreign language at Key Stage 4, and in more than three in five schools, all pupils study two languages at this key stage, with most pupils taking a GCSE in both languages. This compares very favourably with the picture in non-specialist schools, where the number of pupils studying one language at Key Stage 4 is declining, and the number studying two languages is low. Language colleges also offer a wider choice of languages.

*One school offered pupils GCSEs in French, German, Spanish, Italian and Japanese, and all pupils study two foreign languages at Key Stages 3 and 4. The Certificate of Business Language Competence is offered in three languages as an alternative to GCSE at Key Stage 4.*

38. None of the language colleges offer an alternative or work-

related curriculum at Key Stage 4 because all pupils continue with at least one MFL to the end of that key stage. However, many schools give pupils the opportunity to study a choice of languages to different levels, and in one school there is a well-established programme of work experience in France, Germany and Spain. Some schools are planning to pilot the Edexcel Applied GCSE French Single Award course.

39. The range and variety of enrichment activities is good in four in five schools. Many MFL teachers have invested considerable time and energy in this area, and it is one of the most distinctive features of language colleges.

Activities include:

- twilight courses in minority languages such as Russian and Japanese
- language courses for parents
- after-school clubs run by foreign language assistants
- GCSE revision clubs.

40. Trips and exchanges to European countries also enrich students' learning.

*In one school with good MFL provision there was an extensive programme of exchange links and visits to Spain, France, Germany and the Czech Republic, as well as provision for the study of minority languages through twilight and Saturday morning sessions. In another school, sixth-form students could do work experience in France, Germany or Spain.*

## Arts colleges

41. Fewer than half the arts colleges have introduced new arts courses at Key Stage 4. However, all these schools offer a very wide range of courses, including GCSEs in art and design, ceramics, sculpture, photography, graphics, music, drama and dance, and GNVQ in art and design and performing arts.

42. Some arts colleges have introduced an arts entitlement at Key Stage 4, but only one in six schools with wide ability

cohorts has developed additional courses for less able pupils.

43. In a minority of schools pupils can take up to four GCSEs in arts subjects, some of which are offered outside school hours. Most arts colleges offer few vocational options - usually GCSE applied art and design or GNVQ performing arts - but some provide a broader range.

*In one arts college an initial award in performing arts was accredited initially by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and recently by another of the national awarding bodies. Another school used the ASDAN Youth Award, which includes an element of performing arts.*

44. One third of the arts colleges organise formal work-related programmes that include elements of the arts. Others organise such programmes on a case-by-case basis, usually for small groups of disaffected pupils, frequently boys. Some schools find it difficult to obtain work-related experience in suitable arts environments, but schools offering GNVQs, Advanced Vocational Certificates of Education (AVCEs) in performing arts and ASDAN Youth Award courses develop worthwhile vocational projects that introduce pupils to the world of work in the arts: for example, one GNVQ group developed a theatre in education programme centred on skills acquisition and business practice.

45. All the arts colleges visited provide a wide range of enrichment activities for their pupils. Generally these attract more girls than boys, but some arts colleges have successfully targeted boys for performance activities such as dance or, more often, musical theatre.

46. Examples of good practice in providing enrichment activities include:

- talent shows and competitions such as 'Pop Idol'
- trips to art galleries or to see dance, drama or music performances
- international tours by school bands
- visits abroad to paint and sketch in a different environment

- use of artists in residence, often with a targeted group and a specific design brief
- Saturday morning and summer arts schools.

47. Some of this work provides opportunities for talented pupils in the specialist school and its partners.

*One arts college delivered arts enrichment in a three-day work-related learning event for all Year 10 pupils, supported by the local EBP. The pupils took part in a simulation exercise, during which they formed a company, created designs and presentations, and budgeted for their requirements. All the exercises involved in the simulation were designed to practise and evaluate work-related skills endorsed by the EBP. A day of performing arts was built into this exercise so that all participants developed a range of skills. The simulation culminated in a performance by individual groups to the whole year group and another performance by professional artists.*

## Sports colleges

48. The majority of sports colleges have improved the curriculum in PE and are offering a wide range of accreditation opportunities that are suited to the needs of a wide range of pupils, including short and full GCSE courses, certificates in education, national governing body awards and leadership awards for Key Stage 4 pupils.

49. Physical education has benefited from additional curriculum time of at least two hours a week in both Key Stages 3 and 4, and as a result the breadth and balance of activities are much better. Although the majority of schools adequately cover all four aspects of the attainment target for the subject, pupils have limited opportunities to develop observation and evaluation skills. A few schools have improved the curriculum by providing longer units of work (8 to 12 weeks) that promote links between different areas of activity and improve continuity and progression. The following example demonstrates how one school enhanced progression to post-16 courses with the use of a range of additional qualifications.

*In one sports college all pupils take a GCSE course in PE and have additional opportunities to develop leadership skills through awards for junior and community sports leaders. Work with national governing bodies provides a system of nationally recognised qualifications in performance, officiating and coaching. Sports-related concepts are used in the study of other subjects, for example art and English. This has helped to establish the distinctive character and culture of the sports college and has supported the school's improvement strategy. Various post-16 options in PE and sports studies, such as Business and Technology Council (BTEC) national and diploma courses, are available either at the school or through other local providers, and these enhance progression routes at 16.*

50. One in three sports colleges offers an alternative or work-related curriculum in PE to disaffected pupils. In some cases, pupils use their newly acquired qualifications to gain part-time work as recreational assistants or coaches in local clubs and leisure centres.

51. Nearly all sports colleges provide a good or very good range of extension or enrichment opportunities. These include:

- a wide range of early-morning, after-school and evening clubs for pupils of all ages and abilities
- good use of coaches to support provision, for example, specialist dance artists for boys' street dance
- summer and half-term camps
- links with local sports clubs
- discounts on sports club membership.

*In one school nearly three quarters of the pupils were engaged in a wide range of activities before and after school, led by teachers and other adults, in which they could try out new sports or train for competitions or special events. In one example, Project 'Oarsome', a national initiative, involved 30 Year 7 pupils learning basic skills using Ergo rowing machines; over a third were selected to go on to wet rowing at the local rowing club. In another squad training helped the under 13s football team win the district and county competitions, while other pupils have*



*been chosen to be line umpires at the All-England Tennis Championships at Wimbledon.*

52. The effectiveness with which schools monitor attendance and participation at clubs varies widely. Although some schools collect attendance figures, few analyse the data or evaluate the quality of voluntary enrichment activities or the impact of additional provision on learning and standards.

# Inclusion in specialist schools

## Key features

- Barriers to learning are tackled successfully at nine in ten schools, which ensure that all pupils have access to suitable specialist courses at Key Stage 4.
- Many schools have no clearly defined strategies for inclusion, and too few schools have strategies to avoid disaffection that incorporate a carefully planned alternative curriculum at Key Stage 4.
- In the great majority of schools, all pupils have access to a good range of specialist enrichment opportunities.
- Provision and support for gifted and talented pupils is good or better in half the schools. Sports colleges are particularly successful in this area, but provision is unsatisfactory in nearly one in five technology, language and arts colleges. This is a worse picture than that depicted in the previous evaluation.
- Provision, access and support for pupils with SEN in specialist subjects is good in three quarters of schools, particularly technology and language colleges.

53. Specialist school development plans are expected to promote equal access to the full range of provision to all pupils in the school. In addition, Department for Education and Skills (DfES) guidance encourages specialist schools to consider strategies for removing barriers to learning, tackling under-achievement and examining why some subjects are less appealing to particular groups of learners.

54. At nine in ten schools, the specialist departments take positive steps to develop what they understand to be good practice in inclusion. More than half of these cover the ground effectively, often in the absence of a clearly defined whole-school policy. However, many arts and sports colleges are not putting the steps into practice by using data and other information about pupils for target-setting, tracking progress or addressing barriers to learning.

## Opportunities for specialist enrichment

55. At four in five schools, procedures are at least satisfactory for ensuring that provision of, and access to specialist enrichment activities is inclusive. This provision is a

noticeable strength in sports and language colleges.

56. Where provision is at its best, specialist schools ensure that all pupils have equal access to a very wide range of activities that match their different ages, interests and abilities. Examples of effective practice include suspending the timetable for all pupils at the end of Year 9 for several days of cross-subject specialist activity, arranging late transport for after-school clubs and providing funding for school trips for disadvantaged pupils.

57. However, only half the schools consistently monitor take-up and attendance, and take action to target pupils who miss out. Where practice is unsatisfactory, there is no agreed rationale or systematic whole-school approach to planning specialist enrichment. Subjects frequently operate in isolation, and consequently some groups of pupils, often reluctant learners or those with learning difficulties or disabilities, miss out on a whole range of important experiences.

## Dealing with disaffection

58. Just under one in six schools have good or better strategies for addressing disaffection. Departments that are successful in dealing with disaffected pupils use the following approaches:

- good use of data to identify and track underachievement, poor behaviour and poor attendance from an early stage
- analysis of the possible causes of disaffection and underperformance
- early intervention, support and monitoring
- use of learning mentors to provide guidance on anger management, study skills and revision techniques
- intensive literacy support when required
- a range of differentiated options in specialist subjects at Key Stage 4
- setting high expectations of behaviour, attendance and effort
- some single-sex teaching at Key Stage 4
- close collaboration with parents.

59. Too few schools consider the underlying reasons for disaffection and plan accordingly. Instead, the majority react to instances of disaffection on a case-by-case basis. When there is a risk of permanent exclusion or truancy, or where pupils are at risk of disengaging from school altogether, schools usually provide extended work placements and other off-site courses.

### Provision and support in specialist subjects for gifted and talented pupils

60. Provision and support in specialist subjects for gifted and talented pupils are good or better in half the schools, but are unsatisfactory in nearly one in five. The quality of provision is best in sports colleges and weakest in technology, language and arts colleges. This is a worse picture than seen in the first evaluation for two reasons. First, compared with the last report, this survey included few Excellence in Cities (EiC) schools that receive dedicated funding to improve provision for gifted and talented pupils. Other schools do not and some of these non-EiC specialist schools have no gifted and talented co-ordinator and have yet to realise that they need to identify their most able pupils and make better provision for them. Secondly, across the country, programmes teaching and supporting pupils talented in sports are better developed than they are in technology, languages or the arts.

61. Typical examples of good practice for gifted and talented pupils across the specialisms include:

- early entry to GCSE examinations in each specialism
- in language colleges, the opportunity to study a wide range of languages in different modes, for example by video-conferencing with other schools
- close working relationships with universities, particularly in technology and language colleges
- in sports colleges, specialist coaching for talented pupils, support by national governing bodies of sport, talent camps at Key Stage 4 and financial support through sports bursaries
- in arts colleges, commissioning work for the school from talented pupils, participation in youth theatre for

able actors, forming musical ensembles and working closely with artists in residence.

### Provision and support for pupils with SEN

62. Three in five schools ensure that pupils with SEN have ready access to the opportunities offered by the specialist subjects. This access is most common in technology and language colleges, but much less so in arts and sports colleges.

63. Examples of good practice in supporting pupils with SEN include:

- use of learning materials matched to pupils' needs and abilities
- effective liaison between heads of specialist subjects and the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCOs)
- use of learning support assistants in the mixed ability or bottom sets of specialist subjects to provide targeted learning support and to monitor progress
- timetabled study support sessions for pupils to ensure that they keep up with course work in GCSE subjects.

### Technology colleges

64. All technology colleges make satisfactory provision for pupils with SEN. Support is good or very good in 10 schools, which meet the needs of pupils effectively and help them to make good progress. In these schools all pupils with SEN have access to the subjects covered by the specialism, with very little use of disapplication. Integration is very effective. There is little use of disapplication. Where pupils do not make sufficient progress towards gaining a GCSE grade in the specialist subject, they often take entry-level qualifications or the ASDAN award system.

*An example of good practice was observed in one school, where the head of design and technology taught a GCSE course at a Pupil Referral Unit. Many pupils had experienced poor and sporadic education at Key Stage 3 and needed individual support to meet the requirements of the course. Careful planning between staff at both*

*establishments enabled 10 pupils in Year 10 to start a design and technology course, with some extra teacher time funded by the technology college. These links helped pupils to continue with their studies after the age of 16.*

### Language colleges

65. Provision for pupils with SEN is good or better in about four in five language schools. There is now virtually no use of curriculum disapplication; in one school, close liaison with the SENCO enabled re-entry to MFL for those for whom it had been disappplied earlier. Schools usually provide smaller teaching groups and learning support assistants (LSAs) or foreign language assistants, especially to help with oral work. In one school, this meant that all pupils usually achieved at least one grade G in MFL. In other schools, pupils with special needs were entered for Certificate of Achievement accreditation in one language in Year 10, then in another in Year 11.

*In one school, good provision and support for underachieving pupils and those with SEN was provided through the use of small classes and support staff. This included a dedicated MFL specialist and a foreign language assistant deployed to assist individuals or groups of pupils. The pupils also benefited by being involved in the school's mentoring programme.*

### Arts colleges

66. Less than a quarter of arts colleges make good provision for pupils with SEN in arts subjects. Surprisingly, many schools that have good learning support units do not fully develop the potential of the arts to motivate and improve the confidence and self-esteem of pupils.

67. Media studies, ITC and applied art and design attract pupils with SEN, many of whom achieve good levels of success, as in the following case study.

*In one school that was developing an effective programme of support, the SENCO identified eight pupils who would benefit from additional support in the arts. Music, art and drama therapy sessions allowed these pupils to express how*

*they were feeling in a safe environment with people they knew. Another opportunity was provided for 10 pupils in Year 7 to develop their organisational and social skills through regular dance sessions, which led to a noticeable improvement in their self-esteem and social skills in the classroom.*

### Sports colleges

68. Half the sports colleges offer good support for pupils with SEN. To meet these pupils' needs more effectively, the schools often provide a broader range of equipment for different activities, reducing or increasing the size to suit pupils' needs.

*At one school, the SENCO, a qualified PE teacher, used trained LSAs to support pupils with motor difficulties in a daily one-to-one fitness session. Individual education plans included health and fitness targets linked to personal motor skills programmes designed for pupils who were dyspraxic or who had attention deficit disorder. Teachers introduced a baseline test to measure how much progress the pupils had made, and parents reported improvements in pupils' physical and social skills, enabling them to mix with other pupils more confidently.*

69. Because teachers feel under pressure to move on to the next stage of PE activities, the progress of pupils with SEN is often inhibited because repetition and consolidation of skills are frequently neglected.

# Leadership and management

## Key features

- In 2002/03 management was better in specialist schools than in non-specialist schools, and had improved slightly since the last report with five out of six specialist schools visited achieving the aims of the programme.
- There is more ineffective management in arts colleges than in other specialist types.
- Planning and managing systems for the specialist school programme are good in four in five schools. This is very similar to the findings of the previous evaluation.
- Only half the schools have good systems for monitoring progress to meet targets or monitoring value for money from their specialist school funding.
- The quality of middle management varies considerably across schools and specialisms. Weaknesses in the quality of middle management identified in the last report have often not been addressed well enough.
- One in five schools does not make good use of middle managers' expertise or involve them in strategic planning.

70. The importance of good leadership and management pervades every aspect of the specialist schools programme, from planning for designation to implementation and self-review, and is fundamental to school improvement, inclusion and impact.

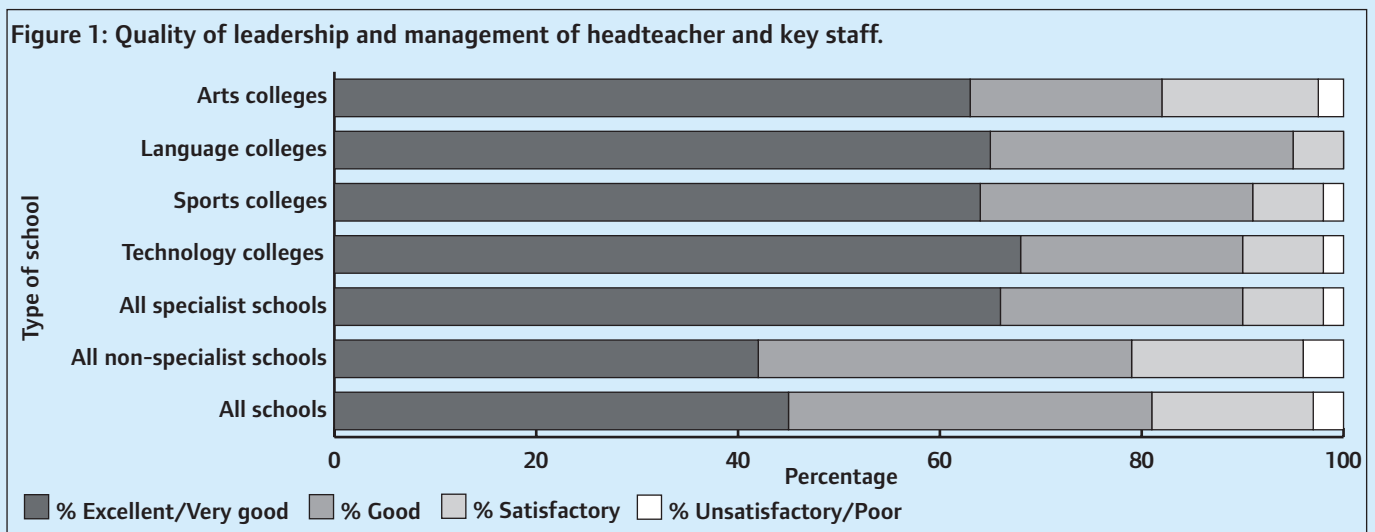
71. Ofsted section 10 reports for each type of specialist school

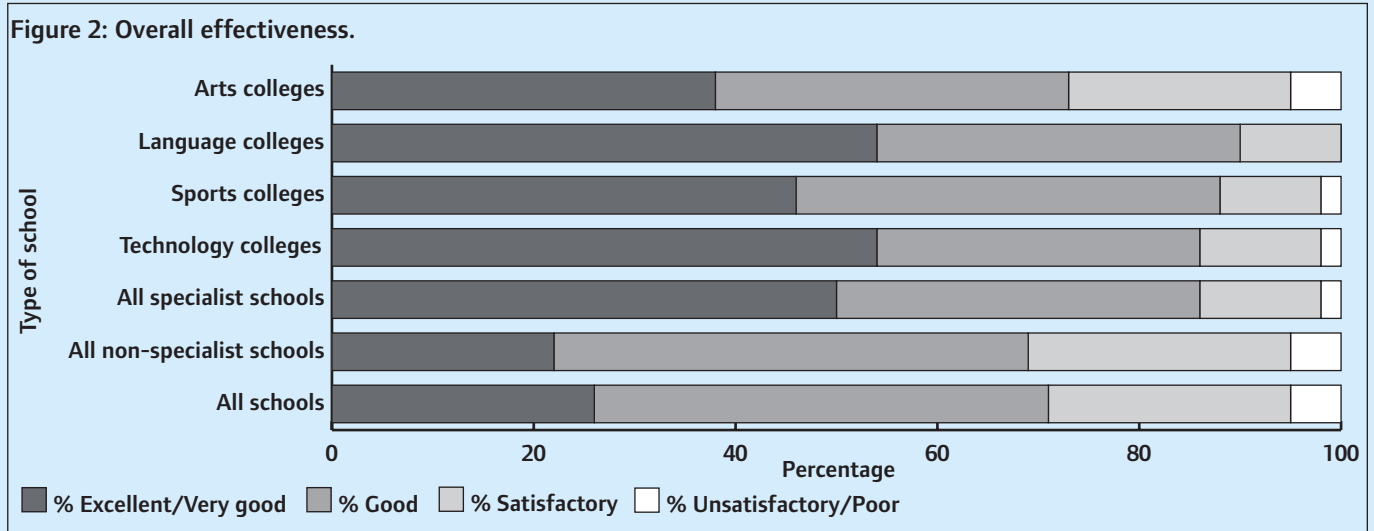
inspected between 2000 and 2003 show that leadership and management by the headteacher and key staff were significantly better than in all non-specialist schools.

72. The quality of planning, managing and monitoring of most systems for the specialist school programme was effective in four out of five schools visited by HMI. This is a similar picture to the first evaluation.

73. Some improvements in the overall effectiveness of specialist schools have been made since the last evaluation. A higher proportion of schools are good or better overall, compared to non-specialist schools. Common features of effective whole school management of the specialist programme across the specialisms include:

- a strategic vision linked to whole school improvement shared by the staff, sponsors and partner schools
- a designated senior specialist school manager with full responsibility for planning, day-to-day management, co-ordination, communication, liaison and quality assurance
- full involvement of heads of specialist subjects, as a team, in setting targets
- a clear job specification and time for the senior manager to do the work involved
- a strategic link between the school plan and the community





- planning, managing, implementing and monitoring the programme
- establishing regular meetings to enable all respective parties to be involved in planning and monitoring
- ensuring the active involvement of governors and sponsors in monitoring the impact of the programme
- reporting important developments regularly to parents, for example when targets have been met at important milestones.

74. The general effectiveness of management in delivering the specialist school programme is at least satisfactory at five in six schools in this survey, a slight improvement since the last evaluation. The majority of those that are not effective are arts colleges.

75. In half the specialist schools, heads of department are fully involved in all aspects of planning, managing and monitoring the plan. In these schools there is a well-understood structure with clear lines of accountability, and middle managers work as a team with a designated senior manager. However, one in five schools does not make best use of middle managers' expertise, and does not involve them fully in strategic planning or review. This is similar to the findings of the previous evaluation and shows no improvement.

76. The quality of management at faculty and department level varies considerably. Although no particular patterns emerge, there are some interesting contrasts: for example, about two in three technology and language colleges make good use of performance data to set targets and monitor pupils' performance, while arts and sports colleges are generally weaker in these areas. Conversely, heads of department in arts and sports colleges make better use of external resources, such as other professionals, compared with some technology and language colleges. Overall there are more examples of good management in language colleges than in the other specialisms.

77. The most common weaknesses in departmental management, especially in arts colleges and sports colleges, are:

- poor use of performance data to set targets and monitor pupils' progress
- low quality documentation that fails to give direction to the department
- weak systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning
- inadequate provision and maintenance of the learning environment.

78. Just over half the schools inspected have good or very good systems for monitoring progress in meeting specialist

**Table 5. Percentage of specialist departments where management was judged to be good or better.**

Aspects inspected	Technology colleges	Language colleges	Arts colleges	Sports colleges
Use of performance data	60	64	23	25
Quality of the learning environment	77	71	46	42
Quality of documentation	70	71	38	25
Incorporation of specialist targets into departmental plans	42	50	38	42
Working as a team	30	71	60	75
Lesson planning systems	46	64	46	25
Monitoring the quality of teaching and learning	46	64	46	42
Use of external resources	54	28	92	83

targets, but one in seven schools has ineffective approaches that are unlikely to keep the programme on track. These figures are very similar to those at the time of the last evaluation.

79. The characteristics of effective whole school systems for monitoring the progress and impact of the specialist programme are:

- the extensive provision and use of pupil-level data to monitor specialist subjects
- procedures that track individual pupils and groups across the curriculum to identify underperformance in subjects
- a rolling programme of departmental reviews
- the analysis of GCSE results by a teaching group, to identify where improvements need to be made, and by whom
- termly meetings of specialist school managers/directors with subject leaders, to review targets and decide on any remedial action
- the use of external evaluators, such as LEA advisors or a consultant
- the active participation of governors in monitoring and evaluation.

80. Good practice in monitoring by specialist departments is characterised by:

- all staff having a clear understanding of value-added measures and how pupils' attainment can be predicted
- a programme with specific dates on which progress is reviewed

- the use of a system of levels supported by statements that pupils can understand, to help them set their own targets
- ensuring that target grades are known by individual pupils so that they can have control over targets and progress
- well-established systems for tracking progress as pupils move up the school, particularly of GCSE coursework requirements
- intervention and support, such as 'catch-up' classes, when pupils show signs of underachievement or disaffection
- systems for monitoring the performance of borderline pupils and providing mentors if progress falters
- the analysis of pupil participation rates at out-of-school-hours clubs, festivals and other activities, showing a breakdown of the participation of boys and girls
- surveys of pupils' views about their participation in, and enjoyment of, activities such as school sports
- the collection of portfolios of evidence, including photographs of events or pupils' performances.

81. Only half the schools visited have good systems to demonstrate that they are getting value for money from additional funding. As at the time of the last report, few schools can demonstrate a clear link between the allocation of these additional resources and improvements in standards and increases in levels of motivation and participation.

### Technology colleges

82. In technology colleges where management is effective or very effective, the headteacher invariably places great emphasis on raising standards across the curriculum, and communicates the specialist school vision with passion to the schools' partners and the wider community.
83. In the best schools, a senior member of staff is given responsibility for strategic planning and monitoring the specialist schools programme, and is often responsible to a steering group of staff, governors, partners and sponsors. This structure ensures that the programme's momentum is maintained, that resources support implementation, and that the various initiatives are well co-ordinated. For effective planning, heads of specialist subjects work as a team with the technology college manager, staff are closely involved in decision-making, and there are good examples of cross-subject working, bringing unity of purpose, consistency and a clear sense of direction.
84. In just under half the schools visited, objectives and targets from the original application are systematically and comprehensively incorporated into school and departmental development plans. In good examples, high-priority objectives in departmental plans include raising standards, meeting technology college targets, improving the quality of teaching and disseminating good practice. All plans use the same format and are shared between specialist subjects.
85. Well over three quarters of schools provide good or very good learning environments to support teaching and learning in each specialist subject. Many of the ideas for upgrading and improving accommodation are the result of imaginative ideas by heads of department, especially in design and technology.

### Language colleges

86. The management structure for MFL is effective in over four in five schools inspected. Language college steering groups, which include governors and partner primary headteachers, generally work well. In one example, two

schools have formed an international team that includes colleagues from other curricular areas, encouraging other subjects to become integral parts of the distinctive ethos and culture, and enabling staff to share the task of organising and leading visits abroad with MFL staff.

87. Heads of MFL are closely involved in planning and monitoring school and community plans in five in six schools. In half the schools visited, there is a separate language college manager or experienced administrator who takes responsibility for managing areas such as the community brief, the primary school language programme and initial teacher training. This system operates effectively in that the head of MFL understands strategic decisions and helps to shape them through regular meetings with the steering group or language college manager, focusing specifically on teaching and the curriculum.
88. In half the schools, language college objectives feature strongly in departmental development plans. The best schools link objectives to actions, make costings, and identify lines of responsibility, deadlines and expected improvements in results. Where planning is weak, problems relating to improving pupils' speaking and listening skills are not adequately addressed.
89. The stronger aspects of management are maintenance of a high quality learning environment, documentation and team working. Features of weaker subject management include ineffective use of performance data, poor development planning and insufficient monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning.

### Arts colleges

90. The management structure is effective in only a quarter, and unsatisfactory in half of the arts colleges visited. Management is most effective where there is a designated person in a senior position, such as an arts college director, whose enthusiastic approach can often be a major contributor to the development of a distinctive arts ethos.



91. A well-founded vision for the development of the arts is lacking in half the schools. In some, the community aspect is managed by the arts manager; in others, this responsibility falls to a different person, which leads to a lack of coherence and poor use of resources.
92. The quality of management of the specialist subjects is good in fewer than half the schools, and less than half of specialist subject development plans provide a well-focused list of priorities. One of the most significant problems facing schools is the constant change in staffing and the ensuing lack of familiarity and lack of ownership of the development plan. About half the schools incorporate specialist school targets into their development plans, but not enough take sufficient account of the needs of different cohorts in planning implementation strategies.
93. The use of performance data is the weakest aspect of arts college management. Less than half the schools have good strategies for monitoring teaching, learning and planning lessons.
94. The use of external agencies, such as artists in residence, is the strongest element of management of the arts subjects, which is good or very good in nearly all schools. Arts colleges use professional musicians, dancers, artists, theatre companies and media companies to inspire pupils and develop different aspects of work.
95. The standard and maintenance of learning environments for the arts subjects are good or very good in less than half the schools.
97. In sports colleges with effective management, several features are regularly in evidence. These include:
- clear roles and responsibilities for staff
  - a steering group with representatives from all partnership groups, including governors and sponsors
  - a regular cycle of meetings
  - focus groups for developing different aspects, such as community coaches.
98. The management of PE and school sport is good in almost half the schools visited. Strengths in subject management generally include staff working as a team, and effective use of external resources. Many schools use funding to reward different areas of responsibility effectively, for example by providing the co-ordinator for the community or extra-curricular programme with an enhanced salary.
99. Aspects of departmental management that need improvement in most schools include:
- the use of performance data
  - the quality of policies
  - development plans and schemes of work
  - lesson planning
  - the evaluation of the teaching.
100. In schools where monitoring and evaluation is very good, schools analyse their assessment information rigorously to determine improvements in standards; others collect baseline assessments of pupils' attitudes, attendance and achievement to help them measure impact.

### Sports colleges

96. The management of the sports college plan is good or very good in just over half the schools visited. All schools have a director of sport with responsibility for managing the day-to-day work, and in eight schools, this person is also a member of the senior management team. Despite this, however, most directors of sport have not fully developed their role in relation to whole-school improvement.

# The community role

## Key features

- The community role of specialist schools has improved considerably since the last Ofsted evaluation and is now a strength of the programme.
- The quality of liaison between specialist schools and their partners is good at four out of five schools.
- Support for primary schools is good, but links with other secondary partners are more varied in quality.
- Many community groups benefit from additional support, but specialist schools often find it difficult to establish links with local businesses.
- Only half of specialist schools have strategies to help partners become independent of support over time.
- About half of specialist schools have good systems for evaluating the impact of the support they provide.

101. The community role has had a very important place in the specialist schools programme since its introduction in September 1998. Specialist schools are required to draw up plans for collaborating with a network of partner schools to help develop high quality learning and to raise standards. In addition, specialist schools are required to facilitate high quality learning experiences for groups within the school's wider community, including local businesses.
102. The community role has improved considerably since the 2001 report. The majority of schools now deliver a purposeful and effective community programme to local schools and the wider community. There is considerable evidence of the beneficial impact of support in partner primary schools, but the impact is more varied in secondary schools.
103. Nearly four in five community groups that benefit from support report that standards across each of the specialist subjects have risen as a result. Nearly all groups in the wider community report improved levels of motivation and self-confidence.
104. Procedures for identifying the needs of partner schools and community groups are good or better at nine in ten schools, and are at least satisfactory in the rest. The quality of liaison with partners in planning, managing and monitoring is good or very good in four in five schools.
105. In the majority of specialist schools, the headteacher initiates discussion on partnership and support with local primary, secondary and special schools. Heads of specialist subjects and subject co-ordinators in these partner schools then identify needs and carry out more detailed planning.
106. Where well-targeted support is provided to the wider community, schools spend time researching the existing provision by talking with other agencies, such as local adult education and community officers, housing and social services departments, and local representatives.
107. Schools often experience difficulties establishing links with local businesses, although some language colleges have made successful contacts with, and provided useful business language courses for local firms.
108. The support meets a gap in provision that is not provided by other sources at three in four schools, with little variation across the specialisms. Similarly, four in five community activities provide support that is not available locally, indicating that specialist schools have identified local needs effectively. The most common forms of support provided across all the specialisms are:
- teaching support for various projects and courses
  - professional development opportunities in specialist subjects for staff in partner schools
  - funding for supply cover when time for professional development and planning is required
  - learning resources
  - a helpline both during the period of support and when the schools or groups continue independently.
109. The survey shows that just over half of all the schools have good or very good systems for involving recipients in evaluating the impact of the support provided. However, in too many cases schools and community groups are not

given a copy of the agreed community plan, which prevents partners from playing an effective part in evaluation and long-term planning.

110. Some community activities failed to take off and were abandoned. In three quarters of these instances, the failure was the result of poor research, over-ambitious plans, imprecise learning objectives, overstretched staffing or inadequate resourcing.
111. Most of the weaknesses in the community role identified in the last report have been addressed. However, further work is required to support partner secondary schools, and these schools should be involved more closely in evaluating the quality and impact of support against agreed targets.

### Technology colleges

112. In the most effective technology colleges, the technology college manager regularly meets headteachers of partner schools to review the quality and consistency of support. Some better schools have a separate community liaison officer to set up and co-ordinate planning and to monitor activities.
113. When setting up a community link, in most cases a specialist teacher from the specialist school plans activities with the subject co-ordinator and class teachers from the primary school. In this way, primary and secondary teachers are equal partners and benefit from collaboration.

*One technology college was asked by its partner primary schools to support design and technology in Years 5 and 6, working on controllable vehicles. The head of design and technology met with primary subject leaders to agree on the most appropriate way of organising and providing the support and the resources required. This developed into a project using programmable chips to control a vehicle. Staff devised a training programme for primary teachers and provided a full set of equipment for each school to continue with developments once the initial support was completed.*

*The head of the faculty also provided additional support in three primary schools.*

114. Half the technology colleges ensure that partner schools are well prepared to continue an initiative once the support ceases. The impact of this is greater where support meets well-defined curricular needs, and primary schools subsequently include the work in their development plans. Sustainability is often aided by good training for primary teachers by specialist school staff, which includes advice on suitable resources.
115. There are many examples of good practice where support has enhanced learning provision in ICT skills for Key Stage 2 pupils involving multimedia presentations, data handling, spreadsheets, research, measurement and control. There are also good examples of support at this key stage for designing, making and testing structures in design and technology, construction work in basic electricity and simple circuits in design and technology and science, and aspects of plane and solid geometry and practical applications in mathematics.
116. ICT is the most common type of provision for the wider community, with some adults gaining recognised accreditations.

*A particularly good example was observed at one technology college, which worked closely with a tutor from the LEA Adult Education Service and a Youth and Community worker to set up a beginners' ICT course for senior citizens. The course was held after school in the school's learning resource centre and led to accreditation in ICT. A very effective feature of the provision was one-to-one support from Year 10 pupils: the course members appreciated the extra help, and the pupils related very well to the adults and enjoyed the experience. The school used this as part of its active approach to citizenship.*

### Language colleges

117. Language colleges have a key role to play in the government's plans for MFL entitlement for all Key Stage

2 pupils by 2010. All the schools visited have identified and established programmes of MFL support for their partner primary schools, usually after careful negotiation between the college and primary headteachers. This support is usually in the form of:

- teaching a range of languages by language college staff, including advanced skills teachers and foreign language assistants, normally for Years 5 and 6, in the best cases with the primary class teacher present
- guidance on schemes of work
- in-service education and training (INSET) of teachers and materials provided for primary teachers of MFL, including attendance at the national Primary Languages Show
- access to the language college's website and resources.

118. Liaison is generally effective in all schools. Examples of good practice include regular review meetings with partner headteachers, meetings for primary MFL teachers, and effective transfer of information on primary pupils' progress and attitudes in MFL.

119. Where links are well developed, pupils are making good progress in listening and speaking skills, and in picking up accurate pronunciation and intonation. In one scheme, all Year 6 pupils in nine partner primary schools are taught French and German by language college staff, and receive certificates of competence equivalent to National Curriculum Levels 1 and 2 at the end of the year. In another scheme, the Year 7 programme of work has been re-written to reflect the higher standards of pupils who have transferred from feeder primary schools.

120. This was the main, and usually the only, regular external provision of MFL teaching in all the primary schools supported by language colleges. In some primary schools, headteachers were committed to continuing MFL from their own budgets, but others reported that they could not afford it. As is the case nationally, planning for primary MFL is a complex issue that most primary headteachers are only just beginning to address.

121. The important role of language colleges in supporting the National Language Strategy is demonstrated in the following example:

*Part of the community plan in one specialist school provides a programme of beginners' classes in French, German and Spanish for all pupils in Years 5 and 6 in five feeder primary schools. Each class is taught for an hour a week for six weeks by secondary language staff, assisted by the class teacher. The specialist school also provides support to encourage primary staff to teach the LEA's language bridging unit in the final term of Year 6. The MFL lesson is carefully planned with the primary school, and the quality of teaching observed was very good and promoted significant interest in languages.*

122. The value of support for partner secondary schools experiencing serious problems with the standard of language teaching is seen in the following example:

*One of the steps taken to improve the quality of language teaching in one school was to use staff from the language college. To do this, timetables were harmonised so that staff could swap classes between the two schools. An advanced skills teacher from the language college provided management support, helped to re-write the scheme of work and provided teaching materials. Morale and take-up of MFL has risen at the partner secondary school, and there are now plans to reintroduce a second MFL.*

123. There were several good examples of wider involvement in local or national initiatives, including:

- classes in business German and French for local firms
- evening classes in MFL for the local community
- provision of LEA training for primary and secondary MFL teachers
- links with initial teacher training providers
- involvement in the MFL Key Stage 2 Pathfinder project.

### Arts colleges

124. Most schools hold extensive discussions with their partner

schools prior to writing their plans. Arts colleges respond in different ways to contacts with partner schools: some audit the needs of the partner schools and create a menu of arts services for the schools, which often works well; arts colleges often engage specialist staff, community arts workers or artists in residence to provide intensive programmes or regular weekly sessions; and some specialist schools provide partners with ICT equipment and training to initiate new arts activities.

*One school engaged a professional media company to deliver its partner school programme. The media company provided every partner school with a computer, printer, digital video camera and staff training to operate the equipment. It then led workshops for the children that could be consolidated and extended by the staff. Another arts college ran after-school arts clubs for its partner schools, while a third provided arts enrichment activities by visiting performance groups.*

125. In one in three arts colleges, the community plan is a significant part of a wider and more integrated approach involving a number of other initiatives. The majority of arts colleges community programmes have some links with:

- local agencies, such as the police, youth service, social services and fire service
- social regeneration budget initiatives, including those where pupils work with artists in residence, for example to paint a bus shelter
- master classes and summer schools for gifted and talented pupils
- adult education classes
- local centres for GCSE and A-level teaching and examinations
- community bands
- local Education Action Zones, Excellence Clusters or Excellence in Cities partnerships where the performing arts are a priority.

126. Where schools have community arts officers, they contribute very well to the planning, recording and

evaluation of the specialist school's community work, providing detailed evaluations in the form of reports, photographs and video evidence.

*The appointment of two community arts workers at one arts college with a 0.5 teaching commitment enables the school to provide a wide range of arts support, not only to partner schools, but also to the local area. The workers provide tailored support to class teachers and run arts summer schools, Saturday morning performing arts clubs and dance, drama and music festivals. They also provide support to vulnerable groups in the wider community in partnership with social services, leading sessions for adults with learning difficulties and providing role-play sessions in parenting skills classes.*

127. Although this is a promising picture, the activities provided are sustainable by partner schools in only one arts college programme in five. Many partner schools regard arts colleges only as providers of resources and not as providers of training, and this will have a deleterious effect on sustainability.

### Sports colleges

128. The community programme of sports colleges continues to be a strength of the specialists schools initiative: sharing resources, good practice and expertise with partner primary schools are some of the most successful aspects of community work. All sports colleges visited have effective links with other schools, sports clubs and national sports bodies in their communities.

*In one sports college, Key Stage 4 pupils provided a specialist coaching course for talented pupils from partner primary schools, who were identified by their class teachers as having the capacity to improve their skills level in various sporting activities. Over a period of six weeks, a specialist teacher and junior sports leaders supported these pupils with training in running, jumping, throwing, climbing and canoeing skills. While the younger pupils developed their skills and confidence, the secondary pupils improved their communication, organisation and leadership skills at*

*the sports college. The same school also worked with a nearby special school, providing teachers and leaders to work with pupils with SEN in a range of activities, including table tennis, boccia (a type of bowling), polybat and table cricket.*

129. Although many partner primary schools are involved in discussions about the support they need, this is not always the case, with only two in three primary schools being adequately consulted about identifying needs.
130. The support provided by specialist schools for primary class teachers is good or better in all the schools visited. However, occasionally primary teachers fail to make good use of training opportunities, preferring to observe rather than take an active part in the training.
131. The headteachers of primary schools that benefit from specialist support report improvements in teachers' subject knowledge and gains in confidence, which in turn lead to improvements in the standards achieved by pupils.
132. Most sports colleges have a partner school and community co-ordinator who successfully maintains regular contact with different groups. Where sports colleges have become the hub sites for implementing school sports partnership programmes, they have linked the community role with the partnership development manager to provide greater coherence.
133. Most sports colleges have developed good links with community sports providers. As a result, out-of-hours provision is better and pupils have access to a wider range of recreational and competitive opportunities to develop their skills and gain experience in new contexts. Teachers also benefit from specialist coaching and access to the improved range of facilities.
134. Most sports colleges have established extensive contacts with national governing body clubs and local voluntary clubs and organisations. Some sports colleges have also worked with national governing bodies to establish centres of excellence on the school campus for specific sports campus; the most common of these are cricket, tennis, football, rugby and basketball academies, which involve specialist coaches working with talented pupils.
- One sports college publishes a calendar of events at schools and clubs for everyone involved in the school sports partnership. This provides a very good structure for the programme of activities, as schools, clubs and pupils know well in advance what is available, and where and when it takes place.*
135. Some sports colleges use specialist coaches to support activities, sometimes in less accessible sports, such as ice-skating, horse-riding, martial arts and golf, both in lessons and out of school. The identification of a nominated person to liaise with specific clubs or co-ordinate provision is a significant factor in improving the colleges' relationships and work with community sports clubs.
136. Increasingly, sports colleges are developing links with universities and other institutions of higher education to give teachers and pupils opportunities to work on research projects.

# Annex A. The survey

The purpose of this survey was to:

- analyse trends in standards of attainment in specialist schools and compare them with the national pattern
- investigate whether specialist schools affect trends in the performance of neighbouring schools
- investigate the quality of education in specialist schools
- evaluate the extent to which specialist schools increase choice for pupils and provide diversity
- evaluate the degree to which specialist schools extend opportunities for all their pupils by maintaining a sharp focus on inclusion, disaffection and underachievement
- examine whether specialist schools have successfully addressed the recommendations identified in Ofsted's first report, *Specialist schools: an evaluation of progress* (October 2001)
- investigate how and in what ways specialist schools contribute to education in the wider community.

For this survey HMI analysed performance data relating to the 521 designated specialist schools operating in September 2000. The range of data included Section 10 inspection reports, development plans and progress reports from these schools to the DfES, and other evidence from inspection visits by HMI.

In addition, from October 2003 to May 2004 HMI visited 52 specialist schools - 13 technology colleges, 14 language colleges, 13 arts colleges and 12 sports colleges - all of which had been operating as specialist schools for at least three years. These schools are listed in annex B.

All the schools in the survey were around average size, with a mixed comprehensive intake. Pupils entitled to free school meals averaged 13.3%, and pupils on the register of SEN averaged 16.5%. The sample of schools was distributed reasonably evenly across the country and included schools in rural, suburban and inner-city areas.

As part of the survey, a questionnaire was sent to all partner schools and community groups named in the community plans of the schools visited. There was a response of over 65%.

## Annex B. Schools visited

<b>School</b>	<b>LEA</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>LEA</b>	<b>Status</b>
All Saints	Barking and Dagenham	Voluntary aided	St Johns School	Wiltshire	Foundation
Angmering School	West Sussex	Community	St Laurence School	Wiltshire	Voluntary controlled
Barking Abbey	Barking and Dagenham	Community			
Belper School	Derbyshire	Foundation	St Martins School	Essex	Foundation
Benfield School	Newcastle upon Tyne	Community	St Mary's	Leeds	Voluntary aided
Biddick School	Sunderland	Community	Standish School	Wigan	Community
Bishopshalt School	Hillingdon	Foundation	Stourport	Worcestershire	Community
Bohunt School	Hampshire	Foundation	The John Bentley School	Wiltshire	Foundation
Bridgewater	Warrington	Community			
Brookway School	Manchester	Community	Thistley Hough	Stoke on Trent	Community
Chalvedon School	Essex	Foundation	Trinity School	Cumbria	Voluntary aided
Cheadle Hulme	Stockport	Community	Tudor Grange	Solihull	Community
Cotham	City of Bristol	Community	Wheatley Park	Oxfordshire	Community
Dame Alice Owen School	Hertfordshire	Voluntary aided	Whitefield School	Barnet	Community
Davenant School	Essex	Voluntary aided	Wolfreton	East Riding of Yorkshire	Community
Dunraven School	Lambeth	Foundation	Worle School	North Somerset	Community
Fred Longworth School	Wigan	Community			
Greenfield College	Durham	Community			
Guthlaxton	Leicestershire	Community			
Hailsham School	East Sussex	Community			
Harton School	South Tyneside	Community			
Harwich	Essex	Foundation			
Heathfield School	Somerset	Community			
Icknield	Luton	Foundation			
John Wilmott	Birmingham	Community			
Leon School	Milton Keynes	Community			
Lymm High School	Warrington	Voluntary controlled			
Mirfield	Kirklees	Community			
Ninestiles School	Birmingham	Foundation			
North Leamington	Warwickshire	Community			
Notre Dame	Norfolk	Voluntary aided			
Poltair	Cornwall	Community			
Ripley St Thomas	Lancashire	Voluntary aided			
Ryton School	Gateshead	Community			
South Dartmoor	Devon	Community			
Southam	Warwickshire	Community			
St Albans School	Suffolk	Voluntary aided			
St Clement Danes	Hertfordshire	Voluntary aided			



## Annex C. Further information

Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)

*Specialist schools: an evaluation of progress* (October 2001)

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

*Specialist schools programme 2004/05: Applications: a guide for schools*

Website: [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/specialistschools](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/specialistschools)

Specialist Schools Trust (SST)

Website: [www.specialistschoolstrust.org.uk](http://www.specialistschoolstrust.org.uk)

Youth Support Trust (YST)

Website: [www.youthsupporttrust.org.uk](http://www.youthsupporttrust.org.uk)

The National Centre for Languages (CiLT)

Website: [www.cilt.org.uk](http://www.cilt.org.uk)

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