

STOODLEY KNOWLE SCHOOL

ANSTEY'S COVE ROAD

TORQUAY

TQ1 2JB

Reporting Inspector: Carole Raymond HMI

Date of Inspection: 5-9 February 2001

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Information about the school

Name of the school:	Stoodley Knowle
Type of school:	Roman Catholic
Status:	Independent
Association membership:	Catholic Association of Teachers, Schools and Colleges
Age range of pupils:	2.5 - 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Girls
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	223
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	13
Number of boarders:	12
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	None
Number of pupils with English as an	None

additional language:

Termly fees (day pupils): From £880 to £1472.50

Termly fees (boarders): From £1837 to £2077.50

School address: Anstey's Cove Road, Torquay, TQ1 2JB

Telephone number: 01803 293160

Fax number: 01803 214757

Headteacher: Sister Perpetua

Proprietor: Sister Benignus, Superior-General of the Daughters of the Cross

Chair of the Trustees: Sister Benignus

DfEE number: 880/6001

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

Information about the school

This inspection was carried out at the request of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, who has asked for reporting inspections to be undertaken of independent schools that provide publicly funded places. The purpose of the inspection was to advise the Secretary of State about the school's suitability for registration under the Education Act 1996. The report concentrates on those aspects of the school relevant to that purpose. The report covers English, mathematics and science in detail.

Stoodley Knowle School was established in 1925 and is set in 65 acres of wooded headland in Torquay. The school is a Roman Catholic foundation, and is run under the supervision of a religious order, the Daughters of the Cross, Plymouth. The school is organised in three phases, nursery, junior and senior. Numbers are increasing in the nursery and junior schools. Several improvements have recently been made to the accommodation.

The school has 236 pupils. There are no pupils with statements of special educational needs but a small number have learning difficulties. The school does not select on the basis of ability and the school's assessment data reflect the full range of ability. Admission is by interview, a report from the pupil's present school where appropriate and an entrance examination when it is deemed necessary. All girls who are baptised in the Christian faith are eligible for entry to the school unless there is a special learning or physical disability for which the school feels it does not have appropriate staffing or resources. These admission criteria are published in the school prospectus.

The school continues to offer boarding on a weekly and occasional basis. At the time of inspection, numbers in residence varied from six to 12.

How good the school is

This is a good school with many strengths. The school's published results and other performance data over the past three years show academic success at all levels. This is true in relation to the early learning goals, and at the end of each of Key Stages 1 and 2 in English, mathematics and science, and in all subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level (A-level).

The headteacher provides strong spiritual and pastoral leadership for the school. The purposes of the school are clearly set out in a mission statement, promoting an ethos based on Christian principles which is reflected in the very good relationships between staff and pupils. Relationships among the pupils are also very good.

What the school does well

- The school is successful in promoting its mission and ethos.
- Pupils make good progress. They attain standards above the national average in examinations and end of Key Stage 2 tests. Overall GCSE results are very good.
- The quality of teaching is good and often very good across the school.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent.
- The school is a well-ordered and friendly community with very good relationships.
- The Sisters and staff give generously of their time to provide a very rich extra-curricular programme.
- Provision for the early years is very good.
- The school has a very good partnership with parents, who support the school strongly.
- The school provides a stimulating environment for teaching and learning.

What could be improved

- The school development plans, by identifying priorities with clearly defined timescales, actions and targets, success criteria, costings and assigned responsibilities.
- As the school develops its management structure it needs to have clearer job descriptions for those staff with designated responsibilities.
- Monitoring and evaluation procedures, to ensure closer links between subject planning and whole-school policies and to enhance academic monitoring at Key Stages 3 and 4.
- The school's health and safety policy, especially procedures for monitoring its implementation and managing risk assessment.
- Opportunities for pupils to experience aspects of design and technology.
- The attendance registers are marked daily but not all staff distinguish between authorised and unauthorised absence, as required by the regulations.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

This is the first reporting inspection carried out at Stoodley Knowle School, but Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) have made a number of inspection visits for the purpose of advising on the school's registration as an independent school. The last of these was in May 1996. It identified the need to improve provision of design and technology and the need to develop handbooks and policies, in particular to provide more detailed guidance on such matters as monitoring the academic and pastoral progress of pupils. The school has made good progress in establishing handbooks and various policy documents and is developing aspects of design and technology and systems for monitoring academic progress.

In January 2000, Torbay Council Social Services Department undertook an inspection of boarding and reported that the school continues to fulfil the statutory requirements and made no formal recommendations. The nursery was inspected in October 1999. The report found that there were no significant weaknesses but made one point for consideration in the action plan, that when planning the educational programme the nursery should continue to plan a balanced curriculum for those children who do not attend on a regular basis. This has been successfully addressed.

In the same period as this OFSTED inspection the school was inspected by the Diocesan Religious Service, which focused on religious education, collective worship, provision for spiritual, moral and cultural development, and the school's Catholic ethos. A separate report was produced.

Standards

Early learning goals

Pupils in the nursery, early years, make very good progress in all areas of learning. They attain good standards in their personal, social and emotional development, their communication, language and literacy, their mathematical development, their knowledge and understanding of the world, their creative development and their physical development.

The table shows the standards achieved by seven-year-olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in	Compared with all schools in England					
	1998	1999	2000		Key	
Reading	-	-	A		well above average above average	A B
Writing	-	-	A		average below average	C D

Mathematics	-	-	B		well below average	E
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The table shows the standards achieved by 11-year-olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in	Compared with all schools in England					
	1998	1999	2000		Key	
English	-	A	A		well above average above average	A B
Mathematics	-	A	A		average below average	C D
Science	-	A	A		well below average	E

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds based on GCSE examination results.

Performance in	compared with all schools in England				Key	
	1998	1999	2000			
					well above average above average	A B
					average below average	C D
GCSE examinations	A	A	A		well below average	E

The numbers taking A-level are too small for meaningful national comparisons but results have been higher than the national averages for the past nine years.

Pupils' attitudes and learning

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' attitudes towards the school are very positive. From

	classroom observations, and from interviews with parents and with small groups of pupils, it is clear that they hold their school in high esteem and with great affection.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	The behaviour of pupils is exemplary, both in lessons and around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are very good.
Attendance	Pupils' attendance is good, with absence low, at 2.5 per cent. Pupils' punctuality is generally very good.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning throughout the school is good. In over half the lessons seen it was very good or excellent. Only one unsatisfactory lesson was seen.

Teaching of pupils	Nursery	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS4	Sixth form
Lessons seen overall	very good	good	very good	good	good	very good

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

Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and balanced. Provision for aspects of design and technology is limited.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Girls with learning difficulties are effectively supported in classrooms and through individual attention. They make good progress and achieve standards of work commensurate with their abilities.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	This is generally very good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school is a caring community in which individuals and their needs are well known.

How well the school is led and managed

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides strong spiritual and pastoral leadership for the school. Day-to-day management, routines and procedures are clear and effective, so that staff and pupils work in an orderly and calm environment.
How well the school's Board of Trustees fulfils its responsibilities	The school's Board of Trustees effectively meets its responsibility to supervise the financial management of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Peer review of teaching takes place. The school analyses pupils' performance in external examinations against local and national trends and it uses National Curriculum tests to monitor standards at Key Stage 2.
The strategic use of resources	Resources for teaching are at least adequate and often good. They are well used throughout the school. The libraries are very modest and, although there are plans for improvement, in their present form they do not provide an effective resource.

Parents' and carers' views of the school

One hundred and forty replies were received to a questionnaire seeking parents' views about the school and 55 parents attended a meeting during the inspection. The majority of these expressed strong support for the school and the quality of education and care it provides.

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good progress is made.• Teaching is good.• Behaviour is good.• They feel well informed.• There are high expectations.• The school is well led and managed.• Children's personal development is good.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some parents would like the pattern of homework to take account of girls' sporting commitments.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

The school's published results and other performance data over the past three years show that the school has been very successful at all levels. This is true in the early years in relation to the national early learning goals, and at the end of each of Key Stages 1 and 2 in English, mathematics and science, and in all subjects at GCSE and A-Level. There has been a steady improvement over time and in 2000, the school achieved 100 per cent passes at A*-C in the GCSE examinations, compared with a pass rate of about 90 per cent in independent schools and 52 per cent of girls in maintained secondary schools nationally. The school has a particularly good record in GCSE passes at grades A*-C in art, English, mathematics, science, geography, drama, history, religious education and French and Spanish.

Most of the girls entered for A-level examinations in 1999 and 2000 were successful. Numbers entered at A-level are too small for meaningful national comparisons but results have been higher than the national averages for the past nine years. In 2000, they were particularly good in geography, art, PE and history.

Girls have successfully completed the annual English Speaking Board examinations, the Royal School of Music examinations and courses in information and communications technology (ICT).

Girls with learning difficulties are given effective support in the classrooms and through individual attention. They make good progress and achieve standards of work commensurate with their abilities.

Comment on standards of work in English, mathematics and science is included in later sections of the report. In the work seen, attainment in the early years is high in relation to the early learning goals. Attainment in classes in the junior school is always higher than national expectations and often very much higher. At Key Stage 1, attainment in class is well above that normally encountered and it is mostly high at Key Stage 2. At Key Stage 3 attainment matches national expectations and at Key Stage 4 it is mostly higher than the national norms. In the sixth form, attainment is predominantly above national expectations in all subjects in which work was seen.

Teachers receive good information on the girls' levels of achievement as this is passed from stage to stage within the school. However, for girls entering the school later in their education the information that is provided by their previous schools is of variable quality.

Attainment is good throughout the school overall, although the girls' individual levels reflect a diversity of ability. The girls clearly benefit from the high standard of teaching in many of the classes, from the small size of these classes and from their own very constructive approaches to learning.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

Pupils' attitudes towards the school are very positive. From classroom observations, and from interviews with parents and with small groups of pupils, it is clear that they hold their school in high regard and with great affection. Behaviour around the school and in class is exemplary. Relationships within the school are very positive; the girls report that the school has been quick to deal with any incidents of bullying and that

they are confident in and about the school. There have been no exclusions from the school. The girls are very positive about the personal, social, moral and health education at the school.

The pupils' handbook and tutorials give very clear messages about how the school expects girls to behave. Girls generally appear eager to come to school, and this is confirmed by the responses to the parents' questionnaire. The girls show interest in school life, and are involved in a wide range of activities that the school provides, including sport, drama, school trips and fieldwork, which have a very positive effect on their confidence. The relationships between the Sisters, staff and pupils are very good at all levels. Relationships among pupils are also very good: the girls are concerned for each other's happiness and well being. Parents report that, at this Roman Catholic school, pupils with other religious affiliations are made welcome.

Pupils' attendance is good, with absence low, at 2.5 per cent. The attendance registers are marked daily at the start of both the morning and afternoon sessions but not all staff distinguish between authorised and unauthorised absence, as required by the regulations. Pupils' punctuality is generally very good.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

The quality of teaching is good throughout the school. In over half the lessons seen it was very good or excellent. Only one unsatisfactory lesson was seen. Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly and usually share their objectives with the pupils. In the best practice teachers ensure that learning is reviewed and consolidated before pupils begin new work.

In the early years the quality of teaching is very good. Children are introduced to a wide curriculum through a range of activities which are well-planned and structured. Language is developed and skills constantly reinforced not only through stories and discussion but across all curriculum areas. Teachers take a firm lead, demonstrate, ask questions and reinforce learning. Children learn effectively through discussion and contribute well in their recall of past stories. Particular attention is given to reading. In number work the very youngest children listen, follow activities in number songs, and work practically. Older children in the nursery search for pattern, refer to displays and learn to count backwards and forwards.

In Key Stage 1, teaching is good overall. Some very good teaching occurs in English, mathematics and geography. Work is well planned and tasks are differentiated according to the progress and capability of groups of children. Reading is very well taught, and opportunities are taken to reinforce the development of language skills across much of the curriculum, especially with respect to spelling, vocabulary and punctuation. The attention paid to practical work in mathematics provides a sound basis for later developments. There is good questioning in mathematics in Year 2 lessons, developing the skills and understanding of all children, and also challenging the highest-attainers. In a minority of lessons, the pace of work is too slow and expectations of the amount of time pupils need to complete tasks are not sufficiently high. This reduces progress.

In Key Stage 2, teaching is very good overall, and children respond well to the work. Outstanding teaching was seen in English, and some very good lessons were observed in art, geography, history, mathematics, physical education and science. Good use is made of the specialist expertise of individual teachers whose infectious enthusiasm for their subjects is reflected in the quality of the work of the children. Work is well planned, structured and managed. Teachers' questioning enables pupils to develop their understanding. A brisk pace is often set, but pupils receive much encouragement. Teachers intervene regularly in written work and their support for lower-attainers is good. Language development is very good in English and is evident in many other lessons. Good attention is given to numeracy, and the particularly good oral work in mathematics lessons encourages logical reasoning as well as the development of skills and understanding. Oral participation is good in many subjects, but some children are slow to organise themselves independently for written tasks.

In Key Stages 3 and 4, teaching and learning are both good overall, but in Key Stage 3 the teaching is more variable than elsewhere. Some teaching was outstanding in English, and very good in biology, drama, history, ICT, modern foreign languages and music. In many classes tasks are differentiated well to match the needs of pupils of all abilities. The questioning of pupils is mostly good, and at Key Stage 4 exceptional in its use to check background knowledge, develop understanding and promote confidence. However, this quality is rarely achieved in mathematics lessons and the teachers' intervention in written or practical work is not always incisive. In physical education, pupils have very good opportunities to develop their performance skills but there are insufficient opportunities for evaluation and analysis.

Pupils respond well to the quality of their teaching. They work conscientiously and participate readily in discussion. Their behaviour is excellent; they work confidently on individual tasks and collaborate well when group work is organised. Wherever pupils have confidence in their work a brisk pace is maintained.

In the sixth form, the teaching observed was always good and often very good. Outstanding teaching occurs in art, ICT and English, and some very good teaching in biology, geography, history and physical education. Much learning takes place through discussion. However, where group sizes are below three, the discussion is rarely lively. Note-taking is sometimes extensive and does not make best use of the available lesson time.

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

The school sets religious education at the heart of the curriculum and ensures that pupils have the opportunity to grow in their faith. The curriculum is broad and balanced. It is closely linked to the national framework of early learning goals and the National Curriculum, and is designed to offer a breadth of experience within a secure setting. The school is successful in achieving this.

In the nursery, the curriculum for the under-fives is appropriately planned around the national framework of early learning goals. The staff effectively use this curriculum to plan a comprehensive and varied programme of activities appropriate for the age and stage of development of pupils. Regular and effective assessment of pupils'

progress provides helpful data to assist the planning of future programmes and accurate records of pupils' attainments are kept.

In both the junior and senior school the curriculum is broad and balanced and covers the National Curriculum well, except in aspects of design and technology. Although aspects of three-dimensional work continue to be taught through art and design and project work in both the junior and senior schools, there is a weakness in pupils' understanding of shape and three-dimensional work in Key Stages 2 and 3.

In the junior school, the curriculum structures a balance between science, arts and practical subjects. All pupils study English, mathematics, science and religious education, along with history, geography, art, music, games, ICT and a developing programme in personal, social, health and moral education (PSHME). This breadth continues into the senior school where pupils in Years 7 to 9 also take courses in physics, chemistry and biology, drama, physical education, problem-solving, jazz ballet, and current affairs. As they move into Years 10 and 11, core provision continues, complemented by a system of guided options in an appropriate range of subjects. All pupils also study current affairs, physical education, singing, careers education and general studies. In Years 10 and 11, pupils have the opportunity to take an additional course that helps to develop their skills further in oral English.

An appropriate range of Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and A-level subjects are available for a small cohort of students and the school works effectively with the local grammar school to offer theology.

The time allocations for most subjects are appropriate. However, the diocesan inspection advised that while the time for religious education is satisfactory at Key Stage 1 it is more limited in other key stages. The current timetabling of mathematics in Year 3 means that it is taught for the last period on three afternoons of the week.

Provision for ICT is developing through a range of courses mainly related to applications in the world of work.

Pupils are introduced to an appropriate range of topics through their PSHME programme. The modules on sex education and drug awareness are of a high standard and good use is made of external speakers. The development of this programme would benefit from additional guidance to help teachers ensure continuity and progression through the school. Careers education is good and benefits from well-established links with the local careers officer. The pupils are given considerable assistance in their university applications.

There are currently nine pupils in the junior school and 12 in the senior school identified with learning difficulties; none have statements of special educational needs. Provision for this group of pupils is good. The learning support co-ordinator has overall responsibility to liaise with members of staff to ensure maximum help and support, and to monitor and review the success or otherwise of any provision that is made. In Years 1 - 3 pupils who experience difficulties with their learning are given appropriate in-class support. In Years 4 - 8 pupils receive extra lessons at lunchtime, after school and, in some cases, during holidays, and teachers keep a record of content

covered. The school keeps in close contact with the parents of pupils who receive additional support and, where appropriate, the school consults outside professionals.

The quality of curriculum planning is sound. The school is successfully using the frameworks of the national literacy and numeracy strategies to provide an effective base for the planning of work.

All subject areas across the junior and senior schools have schemes of work in place and where teachers have responsibilities across different phases, they plan well for continuity and progression. In some subjects where two or more teachers teach, continuity and coherence are less secure. For example, there is no long-term scheme of work on how each element of English is consistently developed in Years 1 - 6 and the handwriting policy does not provide details on how handwriting is to be taught. In other subjects the aims of the scheme are clearly identified but not always reflected in the scheme's content. For example, in physical education, the aims of the curriculum are clearly linked with the National Curriculum, with well-planned opportunities for pupils to develop their performance skills, but there are few structured opportunities for pupils to develop their selecting and applying, evaluating and improving skills.

In the senior school, pupils are given opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in geography, science and ICT lessons. For example, pupils in Year 7 used fractions competently when estimating cloud cover in a geography lesson and some older pupils interpreted line-graphs well to explain the principles of demography. There is, however, a need for teachers' planning to expand the range of these opportunities much more widely, both within and beyond mathematics lessons, if pupils are to tackle the uses and applications of mathematics with greater confidence. In particular, the use of ICT to assist in the solution of mathematical problems could be much further developed.

The extra-curricular programme is a strength of the school. The youngest pupils can choose from a wide range of extra-curricular activities such as ballet, jazz ballet and drama. The school day is extended for all pupils in the junior and senior schools so that preparation can be done and the pupils can participate in a range of extra-curricular activities. The Sisters and staff give generously of their time to provide a programme that gives pupils a wealth of additional educational opportunities. Sport plays a large part in the life of the school. Diverse activities include skiing, sailing, jazz ballet, cross-country running, team games, tennis, trampolining, competitive and recreational sport, inter-house competitions and local, county and national events. Other activities focus on design and technology projects in the science club, or the arts, including pottery club and drama, and many girls are involved in the school orchestra and choirs and a wide range of instrumental tuition is available.

Girls are frequently involved in field trips, theatre visits, external lectures and expeditions abroad, such as for skiing, practising Spanish in Santander, learning about landmarks in London, and camping in Wales. These experiences make a significant contribution to pupils' personal development. Some activities offer pupils opportunities to gain additional awards, for example, in word-processing, the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, Red Cross grand proficiency, speech and drama, ballet and sailing. Many pupils are also entered for the annual English Speaking Board

examinations and instrumental lessons lead to the Royal School of Music examinations.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

The headteacher has overall responsibility for promoting the welfare, health and safety of pupils and their pastoral care. The support and welfare of pupils in their care are of paramount importance to the Sisters and staff at the school. The school cares for its pupils well and prepares them for their future responsibilities. The Sisters and staff know pupils very well and pupils respond to positive praise and encouragement. The school environment is one in which pupils feel secure and valued as individuals. Parents and carers who returned questionnaires or attended meetings with HMI endorsed this.

Class and year teachers have a responsibility for the pastoral well-being of pupils in their care. A staff member in the junior school has specific responsibility for this and fulfils the task admirably. Older pupils have access to the headteacher, members of staff and a local doctor who acts as an independent listener.

The school has an appropriate child protection policy, designed in close liaison with the police child protection officer. The headteacher is the named point of contact. The school has effective procedures to deal with bullying, although incidents are few. All staff are checked by criminal police record and against records of suitability held by the Department for Education and Employment. Fire drills are conducted regularly and evaluated, and records are kept. Fire appliances are regularly checked.

Supervision during playtimes for younger pupils is good. An accident book is kept. There are designated first-aiders on both sites. Some Sisters are qualified nurses.

In the nursery, there is an effective system to assess pupils' attainment and progress in the six areas of learning and this information is used to guide teaching and planning. In the junior school, summative assessment is sound and the overall arrangements to assess pupils' attainment and progress are effective. In some subjects, target-setting is used very effectively; individual targets are set, interviews with pupils are held and targets are reviewed and revised. This strategy has been successful in raising attainment and increasing progress, as demonstrated by the Key Stage 2 English results.

In the senior school, Year 7 pupils are given a standardised non-verbal reasoning test and individual subjects have their own arrangements for assessing pupils. These involve end-of-unit tests that vary in their effectiveness. In mathematics the assessments are largely summative, using National Curriculum tests. Teachers are aware of pupils' individual subject strengths and weaknesses, but the extent to which they share this with pupils is more variable, particularly at Key Stage 4. There is insufficient formative assessment information held in a form that can be used to feed back to pupils. Examples of good practice were seen in geography, modern foreign languages, ICT, English and art. Physical education staff are developing a system that links assessment more closely with the National Curriculum levels. Generally, assessments are not used widely enough in a formative way to modify the taught curriculum or to set targets.

The school provides effective support and advice for its pupils, informed by the monitoring of their academic progress, personal development, behaviour and attendance.

The admissions register is accurately maintained but not all daily attendance registers comply with regulations in distinguishing authorised from unauthorised absences.

Boarding

The school offers boarding on a weekly and occasional basis. Numbers have reduced considerably over recent years and at the time of inspection numbers in residence ranged from six to 12. In January 2000, officers of Torbay Borough Council undertook a full inspection of boarding and reported the school continues to fulfil the statutory requirements. They made no formal recommendations.

The accommodation is suitable. Most girls have individual bedrooms which they decorate with their own personal belongings and they have access to a small common room with a television. Communal wash areas, lavatories, baths and showers are sufficient in number.

The headteacher and her boarding assistant oversee all aspects of the boarders' care. The staff handbook contains appropriate information. Policies on the welfare and protection of children are well established and have been completed in close liaison with the police child protection officer and comply with local Council's child protection guidelines. There is private access to a telephone and appropriate helplines are available.

The Sisters sleep in easy range of the girls and are available throughout the night. Meal arrangements are suitable; girls have a balanced diet and are encouraged to eat sensibly. The girls spoke very positively about their boarding experiences and felt well cared for in a small, closely knit community.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

Parents support the school strongly. A meeting held by HMI and attended by 55 parents considered that the school provided very well for a wide range of girls, including siblings with very different qualities. The 140 responses to the questionnaire were generally very positive. All respondents considered that their children were making good progress at the school, that the school expected their children to work hard and achieve their best. No parents disagreed with the statement that the teaching was good and virtually all parents considered that the school was well led and managed and that behaviour in the school was good.

Homework was a rather more contentious issue. Only 12 parents considered that their child did not receive the right amount of work at home but they were almost evenly split as to whether there was too much or too little. At the parents' meeting, the point was made that girls involved in sporting activity after school found that they had to start their homework quite late in the evening. Those not playing in teams had their supervised prep time and had finished their work by the time they reached home.

The school's links with parents are very effective. Apart from parents' evenings, which are well attended and highly regarded by parents, there are good opportunities to talk with staff at any time, especially the headteacher or her deputies, and to tutors responsible for pastoral care. The school's well produced magazine is an effective link with parents and the wider community.

Other means of communication with parents are sound. Reports seen were very well written, and gave a clear picture of the girls and their progress. There was an opportunity for each pupil to comment and evaluate her progress and set her own targets. This was always seen to be approached positively, with most expressing commitment to still further improvement. However, while these reports give comparative data for each class, as the range of attainment in successive year groups fluctuates, the information received gives only a limited picture. There is no space for parents to comment on the reports.

Parents have been involved with the work of the school through social events and their work has resulted in the provision of good facilities such as the woodland and climbing wall. The school has well-established links with the wider community and works closely with local agencies. Pupils have good opportunities in community service, through the Red Cross and the Duke of Edinburgh Award schemes as well as fund raising for different charities. The partnership between the school, its parents and the wider community has been a major factor in the success of the school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

The school's Board of Trustees has four members. The Board has responsibility for supervising the financial management of the school. It meets formally once every term or as necessary, but informally much more frequently and is chaired by the senior trustee, the Superior-General of the Daughters of the Cross.

The headteacher provides strong spiritual and pastoral leadership for the school. The purposes of the school are clearly set out in a mission statement and are reflected in the very good relationships and high expectations of pupils in the school.

The approach to management is to keep structures and procedures as simple and direct as possible and to recognise the professional capabilities of staff and enhance their confidence. This approach is successfully carried out; day-to-day management, routines and procedures are clear and effective so that the Sisters, staff and pupils work in an orderly and calm environment. However, since the school has grown in size, its management would benefit from more formal structures. The school has recognised this and a management structure is evolving with the designation of specific roles, for example, deputy headteachers, a curriculum co-ordinator in the junior school and a learning support co-ordinator.

Since the last inspection visit, the school has made good progress in establishing handbooks and policy documents. There is now a need to extend these to include assessment and curriculum policies across the school and to formalise the implementation and monitoring of these policies to ensure consistency and coherence across key stages and subjects.

The three school development plans identify a number of key areas in each of the school's phases, however, most of these cover only the current academic year and do not plan far enough ahead. The existing plans would benefit from streamlining and a more strategic approach: identifying priorities, with clearly defined timescales, actions and targets, costing and assigned responsibilities. Subjects also have their own development plans that mainly focus on three areas: curriculum, resources and personal development. These are not directly linked to the school development plans; few include timescales, resources costs or success criteria.

The development of the school buildings and the growth of the nursery and junior schools demonstrates effective financial management. There are no allocated budgets, but the headteacher has a clear overview of finance and welcomes requests from individual staff.

The school effectively analyses pupils' performance in external examinations against local and national trends and since 1996 it has used National Curriculum tests at Key Stage 2. It does not use National Curriculum tests at Key Stage 3. The school is considering the use of other tests to assist the monitoring process. Individual staff have their own assessment data but these data do not provide a sound basis for monitoring progress across the key stages and for informing curricular planning.

The school has had an appraisal system since 1993. This has been revised recently to include peer review and a cycle of classroom observations to encourage teachers to learn from each other and adopt a greater variety of teaching methods. Although this is an area identified in all three school development plans, it is not always clear in the plans what aspects of teaching and learning are to be improved and how. An example of good practice can be found in the junior school development plan which aims to improve teaching methods so that pupils have a more active part in lessons and teachers make more use of open questions.

The school has a health and safety policy, but the procedures for monitoring its implementation and managing risk assessment are not sufficiently thorough. Some subject areas have well documented risk assessments and these are set out in subject handbooks. A few potential areas of risk were identified during the inspection. Traffic comes quickly down the hill near the junior school; the school has recently introduced speed ramps and is currently reviewing the situation. The use of shared towels in some toilets and the lack of window restraints in the boarding area are concerns.

Staff are well qualified and their expertise is appropriately deployed to cover the curriculum across different phases. Many contribute to the school's wide and varied extra-curricular programme. Teaching staff have individual job descriptions that identify their general responsibilities and in some instances identify specific duties. It would be helpful to develop clearer job descriptions covering the responsibilities of the management posts as the management structure evolves.

Staff are encouraged to identify areas of personal development and to attend appropriate courses. Some individual teachers are making good use of these opportunities to develop personal expertise and to gain additional qualifications. The majority of in-service training courses attended are concerned with keeping up to date with changes in examination syllabuses. It would also be helpful to use training

courses to build up expertise in areas identified in the development plans or to target specific priorities. Some departments are using their own expertise effectively to share good practice with other colleagues, for example in English and mathematics.

The accommodation is very effective in supporting the curriculum; it is clean and well maintained. Recent developments have improved accommodation in the nursery and junior houses and extended the facilities for art with the purpose of developing three-dimensional work. Classrooms are adequate in size and some teachers arrange the furniture well to facilitate group work. Physical education facilities are very good and the nursery make extensive use of the outdoor area. The quality of displays around the school is very good and in the nursery and junior school classrooms excellent displays enliven the environment for learning.

Resources for teaching are at least adequate and often good. They are well used throughout the school. The development of ICT suites in the junior and senior school is making a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. There is little planned use of practical work in mathematics in the senior school and learning resources other than textbooks are few. Although there are some specialist book collections in classrooms, the school libraries are very modest and in their present form do not provide effective support for pupils' academic studies.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The school should:

- refine the school development plans and identify short- and long-term priorities with more clearly defined actions and targets, success criteria, costings, and assigned responsibilities;
- continue to develop management roles, particularly those relating to the deputy headteachers and subject co-ordinators, in order to improve the delegation of responsibilities and promote the long-term development of the school;
- formalise the monitoring and evaluation of school policies to improve consistency and coherence across subjects and key stages. This could also include, schemes of work, sharing good practice and target-setting, and the use of assessment information to inform planning;
- strengthen academic monitoring at Key Stage 3 and 4, including pupils' understanding of their own attainment, particularly at Key Stage 4;
- develop the procedures for implementing and monitoring the health and safety policy;
- improve curriculum opportunities in aspects of design and technology, so that pupils develop a greater understanding of shape and three-dimensional work;
- improve the school's libraries.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	86
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In addition to the observation of teaching and learning in lessons, inspectors examined pupils work, spoke to staff and pupils, scrutinised the school's policies and documents, visited extra-curricular activities. A questionnaire was sent to all parents and the results analysed. In addition, a meeting attended by 55 parents was held at the school.

<i>Summary of teaching observed during the inspection</i>						
Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
8	48	28	15	1	-	-
<i>The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.</i>						

Information about the school's pupils

Age group	Total
Nursery	41
Juniors	84
Seniors	111
	236

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year		Year	Total
		2000	11

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 2 and above	Total	11	9	10
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 2 or above	School	100	80	90.9
	National	83	84	90

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for	Year	Total
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the latest reporting year	2000	9
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National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 4 and above	Total	8	8	8
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 4 or above	School	88.9 *	88.9 *	88.9 *
	National	75	72	85

* one pupil was absent for the test

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 4 and above	Total	8	5	8
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 4 or above	School	88.9	55.6	88.9
	National	70	72	79

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Total
	2000	19

GCSE Results		5 or more grades A*-C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Number of pupils achieving the standard specified	Total	19	19	19
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	100	100	100
	National	49	89	94

Attainment in the Sixth Form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 who were	Year	Total
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entered for GCE A/AS examinations in the latest reporting year	2000	17
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Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent	For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent
	All	All
School	22.4	7.3
National	18.5	3.0

<i>Teachers and classes</i>	
Qualified teachers and classes	
Number of qualified teachers (FTE)	22
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	10:1
Average class size	15

Average teaching group size	
Nursery	8*
Key Stage 1	12
Key Stage 2	14
Key Stage 3	17
Key Stage 4	19
Sixth Form	6*

* variable: according to age in the nursery, but always within the guidelines; dependent on option numbers in the sixth form.

SURVEY OF PARENTS AND CARERS

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	223
Number of questionnaires returned	140

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	64	32	4	-	-
My child is making good progress in school.	69	31	-	-	-
Behaviour in the school is good.	70	29	1	-	-
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	51	40	5	4	1
The teaching is good.	42	57	-	-	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	57	40	3	-	-
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	33	64	2	1	-
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	43	57	-	-	-
The school works closely with parents.	52	46	11	-	-
The school is well led and managed.	79	21	1	-	-
The school is helping my child become	79	18	1	-	1

mature and responsible.					
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	78	19	3	-	1

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

AREAS OF LEARNING FOR CHILDREN IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE (NURSERY AND RECEPTION CLASSES)

The quality of teaching is very good. Staff understand how pupils learn and have attended training on the early learning goals. They put this understanding to effective use in a very well planned programme to meet the needs of all children. Activities are carefully explained to pupils and they are given opportunities to ask questions, encouraging independent thought.

The quality of pupils' approach to learning is very good. Pupils are eager to learn and explore new experiences in the stimulating environment. They have many worthwhile opportunities to engage in practical activities, which promote learning and that enable pupils to build on their existing knowledge and skills. Pupils make very good progress in personal, social and emotional development. They learn to share and respect the views of others. They develop good speaking and listening skills in communication, language and literacy. Their mathematical ideas and understanding are extended effectively through a wide range of practical activities. They make good progress in their knowledge and understanding of the world, physical and creative development.

There is a warm, friendly atmosphere in the nursery. Staff are kind and caring with pupils in their care, relationships are very good. Pupils are encouraged to show initiative and choose their own activities. They demonstrate independence, concentrate and persevere at their tasks and gain confidence. Pupils are encouraged to share and take turns during activities. Staff set high standards for behaviour, to which pupils respond positively.

The curriculum for the under-fives works towards the early learning goals defined by the national framework. The staff use this curriculum to plan a comprehensive and varied programme of activities appropriate for the age and stage of development of pupils. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

Regular and effective assessment of pupils' progress provides helpful data to assist staff planning of future programmes. Accurate records of pupils' attainments are maintained.

Personal and social development

Pupils' learning in personal, social and emotional development is very good. They are confident and eager. They are encouraged to respond positively and express their feelings. They behave very well, and understand the difference between right and wrong and how their behaviour may affect others. They respond positively to the staff

and to other pupils in the group. Relationships are very good and staff are sensitive to the needs of pupils. Pupils become independent; they are encouraged to choose activities and resources themselves and work well on their own. They work well in groups, sharing and taking turns during activities. Good manners are encouraged. Pupils have a good awareness of other cultures and beliefs, reinforced by craft and drama activities. Knowledge of their own culture is reinforced through a variety of activities and the celebration of Christian festivals.

Language and literacy

Pupils' learning in this area is very good. They listen attentively to stories and contribute enthusiastically when they anticipate what will happen next, joining in with well-known phrases. Staff encourage pupils to extend their vocabulary, listen to each other and take turns in discussions. Pupils are able to make connections between letters and sounds. Many older and more able pupils have begun to read using a commercial scheme and enjoy books. Staff use books well. There is a well-stocked book area with both fiction and non-fiction books from which pupils can choose for themselves. The youngest pupils quickly learn to recognise and write their names and older pupils write simple sentences and form letters correctly.

Mathematics

Pupils' learning in mathematics is very good. They show confidence with numbers, initiating number activities. They count well using everyday objects and confidently recognise numbers and use practical activities to solve simple problems. They are encouraged to use mathematical vocabulary. They sort, match and compare objects. An effective range of practical activities enables pupils to develop an awareness of addition and subtraction. Older and higher-attaining pupils have progressed to commercial mathematics workbooks. Pattern-making and recognition are effectively encouraged. Pupils recognise and confidently use names of shapes. Number rhymes and songs are an integral part of sessions and are effectively used to develop number awareness.

Knowledge and understanding of the world

Pupils' learning in this area is good. Through well-planned topics pupils are encouraged to investigate the natural and made world about them, and to look closely at patterns, differences and change. They are encouraged to ask questions, and to find out how things work and are made. They select from a wide range of materials to design and make a range of objects. Photographs of past and present events in the group help pupils gain an understanding of events in their lives and the passage of time. Pupils experience different cultural events. Technological resources such as computers are available which pupils use to support their learning, for example by matching numbers and patterns.

Physical development

Pupils' learning in physical development is very good. They move with confidence, control and co-ordination. They have many opportunities to climb and balance using a wide range of equipment in a very well resourced outdoor play area. Pupils show an

awareness of space and the motion of others as they move around the dance area during ballet. They have frequent swimming instruction from a specialist teacher either in the school's outdoor pool or a nearby indoor pool. Topics on food help promote an understanding of how to keep healthy. Fine manipulative skills are effectively developed using a wide range of equipment.

Creative development

Pupils' learning in creative development is very good. They have daily opportunities to explore colour, shape, space and form in two and three dimensions. Staff carefully mount attractive displays of pupils' work. Pupils enjoy music, explore loud and soft sounds and sing songs from memory. Percussion instruments are regularly used. Pupils are encouraged to use their imagination in art and design, to sing, dance and enjoy role-play activities, which are particularly well supported and developed by staff. Pupils freely communicate their own ideas, feelings and thoughts using a wide range of materials.

ENGLISH AND DRAMA

In National Curriculum assessments in 2000, all Year 2 pupils attained the level expected for average pupils of this age and just over 40 per cent attained the level above. At Key Stage 2, all Year 6 pupils attained the level expected for pupils of this age and half attained the level above.

Standards over the last three years at GCSE English Language and English Literature have been high. In 2000, all students in both subject areas achieved a grade C or higher, 64 per cent achieving grade B or higher in English Language and 73 per cent in English Literature. These figures compare favourably with national levels. Standards in speaking and listening are high and most pupils in Key Stage 4 are able to articulate their ideas and feelings in appropriate ways across a range of styles.

Performance at A-level English Literature has been consistently good and generally reflects steady progress from GCSE.

By the end of Key Stage 1 in the work seen, the standard of pupils' work is above that which is expected nationally. Reading standards are good and pupils have good levels of phonic knowledge and have secure strategies for learning new words. Most pupils are confident independent writers who can write interesting stories with good content, spelling, punctuation and grammar. Standards of speaking and listening are well above average.

At the end of Key Stage 2 and by the end of Year 8 overall attainment is above average. Pupils of all abilities attain well. They read expressively, fluently and with understanding both for pleasure and information. They write for a range of audiences at increasing length and complexity of style, grammar and content. For example, Year 6 pupils can analyse similarities and differences between fables and write their own legends. Year 8 pupils write character descriptions, which are detailed, analytical and full of insight. Speaking and listening skills are very good.

At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils are working at and above the level expected, and writing and reading with assurance. There is strong emphasis on presentation and pupils maintain helpful spelling and vocabulary notebooks which contain useful, if potentially difficult words. At Key Stage 4 pupils speaking and listening skills are high and most pupils are able to articulate their ideas and feelings in appropriate ways across a range of styles. Pupils working at both AS- and A-level are able to grasp complex ideas and express them articulately both orally and on paper. Standards of listening, note-taking and responding to questions are high. The higher attaining pupils are capable of pursuing lines of enquiry at length and with considerable perceptiveness. The emphasis on reasoned analysis and substantive argument is giving pupils opportunities to develop their thinking skills.

Pupils attitudes to their work and their behaviour are strengths at all key stages.

At Key Stage 1 the teaching is good; the teaching of the Year 1 pupils is very good. Lessons are generally well managed, resources are used well and the teaching of literacy, including phonics, is a strength. In a minority of lessons in Year 2 the pace is too slow and expectations of the amount of time pupils need to complete tasks are not sufficiently high. This reduces progress. They do not make sufficient progress in handwriting, as a cursive script is not introduced early enough.

At Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 the teaching is consistently very good. Objectives for lessons are clear, expectations of the pupils are suitably high and lessons are conducted at a well judged pace. Organisation and management of the pupils are very good and on-going teacher assessment informs the teaching of individuals and groups of pupils and supports the attainment of higher standards. Pupils who experience difficulty with their learning or who are particularly capable are provided with appropriate support. Homework is set regularly and contributes to attainment and progress.

At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, teaching is very good overall. There is a strong emphasis on the imparting of knowledge through shared exploration and understanding. Teaching is based on very good subject knowledge, accompanied by both general and specific understanding of the needs of the pupils. Inflection of voice, use of the board and a variety of activities help to sustain interest and concentration. Pupils are involved in reading aloud and writing on the board. There is little use of ICT.

Marking and assessment are frequent, on-going and detailed. Work is marked according to well understood criteria and mark schemes. Marking is encouraging but also provides pupils with information as to how their work can be improved.

The curriculum for English is broad and balanced. Effective use is made of the National Literacy Strategy, which forms the main basis for the planning of work in Key Stages 1 and 2. However, there are no long-term schemes of work which show how each element of English is to be taught and developed across Key Stages 1 and 2. This reduces consistency and, for example, results in no agreed approach to the formation of letters and handwriting style. Medium- and short-term planning are of sound quality overall; they are of very good quality in Years 4-8 and are detailed and

comprehensive. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, curriculum planning and schemes of work are wholly appropriate to the examination syllabuses followed.

There is an attractively produced school magazine, extensive displays of pupils' work, thriving after-school clubs, such as drama, for a variety of age groups, school plays and many theatre visits that enhance the curriculum.

Pupils' progress is carefully monitored and recorded. In Years 4-8 target-setting is effective. Each half-term each pupil sets four targets for improvement and these are reviewed and revised. This is a successful strategy.

English is well managed. At Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 a specialist teacher acts in a consultant capacity for Years 1-3, sees planning and provides advice and training, for example regarding the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy. This co-ordinator's role is evolving but merits clearer definition and involvement in the monitoring of teaching and learning. More thought needs to be given to the co-ordination of Key Stage 1. The teacher of Years 7 and 8 liaises very closely with the head of the English department, who teaches Year 9 upwards.

The provision for drama is good on the evidence of lesson and club activity seen. The teaching was dynamic, effectively organised and the space used to good effect. Relationships between the teacher and pupils are excellent and pupils are given considerable responsibility for their learning. The work seen effectively supported pupils' exploration and understanding of personal and social issues.

MATHEMATICS

Standards in mathematics are high in the junior school, and generally sound or better in the senior school. In previous years most children have reached the level expected of the average 11-year-old at the end of their junior school education; in the current Year 6 many pupils are working well above this level. The progress of many pupils throughout their nursery and junior years is very good. In the senior school many pupils make good progress; in previous years many pupils have achieved more highly in GCSE than predictions based on their performance in standardised tests at age 11. Very few students currently continue with the subject into the sixth form, and this is a weakness. In previous years, a small number of students have obtained good results at A-level. Throughout the school there are a few pupils whose attainment is low, but who make steady progress.

In Key Stage 1 standards are variable, but at best they are high. A few children in Year 2 exhibit excellent reasoning skills when solving numerical problems. The progress made in Key Stage 2 is exceptionally good and high standards are both expected and acquired. By Year 6 many children have very good facility with mental arithmetic, and the high quality of their oral explanations and written responses indicate that they acquire both skills and understanding across a wide range of mathematics.

Standards in Key Stage 3 are very variable. Many pupils make very good progress across a wide range of skills. However, few pupils learn well how to use and apply the mathematical skills that they acquire. Some data-handling is good; pupils in Year 8

are able to work independently with confidence and competence when designing, organising and conducting practical work to establish probabilities empirically. However, in lessons observed throughout the senior school, but especially in Year 7, standards of mental arithmetic are low for too many pupils. Many pupils have weak number knowledge and basic concepts such as place value are not sufficiently established; these weaknesses substantially impede their progress. A few older pupils rely too heavily on their calculators to complete elementary work in number. Many pupils have poor three-dimensional spatial awareness, and several in Year 9 have difficulty in interpreting diagrams.

By the end of Key Stage 4 standards in a range of skills are generally sound. Many pupils solve routine numerical, algebraic and geometric exercises well. Through regular practice all pupils learn routine techniques thoroughly and can reproduce these skills well in similar contexts. However, although the highest-attaining pupils reason logically, especially in their coursework, problem-solving is generally under-developed. Many pupils rely heavily on memory and are not adept at working from first principles; inevitably several lack confidence in mathematics.

Work for A-level in the sixth form is progressing well, but very few students choose mathematics at this level.

Throughout the school the small groups enable teachers to know the work of their pupils and to offer support to both low- and high-achievers. Lessons at all levels are thoroughly planned. In the nursery and junior school much work is practical and children acquire a sound basis for further progress. The teaching in Key Stage 2 is exceptionally good with high expectations of the children. The teachers' specialist knowledge is used to very good effect. The children are well managed and organised to acquire skills, knowledge and understanding. There is particularly good use of oral and mental work at this stage. Children respond well to the oral opportunities; they give reasons for their methods and explain their work well, and in the process learn not only for themselves but, by listening, from the explanations of others. The children rise well to the challenge of tough problems and enjoy their many successes.

In the senior school teaching is planned systematically and the syllabus is thoroughly covered. Most learning occurs by listening to the teacher, especially when examples are discussed at the board, and by the practice of routine work both in class and at home. The range of learning opportunities is narrow. For example, there is little planned use of practical work, and learning resources other than textbooks are few. However, pupils work conscientiously and make steady progress. Their excellent behaviour is a weakness in one respect; too few are prepared to ask questions when they fail to understand, and they attempt to hide their inadequacies. Their acquisition of skills is often good, but their knowledge and understanding are much less secure.

In the senior school pupils are given opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in, for example, geography, science and ICT lessons. For example, pupils in Year 7 used fractions competently when estimating cloud cover in a geography lesson and some older pupils interpreted line-graphs well to explain the principles of demography. There is, however, a need to expand the range of these opportunities much more widely, both within and beyond mathematics lessons, if pupils are to tackle the uses and applications of mathematics with greater confidence. In particular,

the use of ICT to assist in the solution of mathematical problems could be much further developed.

Throughout the school, work is marked, much of it appropriately in class with the pupils. Pupils learn well from the comment made and from the indication of where errors have occurred. The use of end-of-year assessments enables teachers to have a good knowledge of pupils' overall attainment against national averages for each year group. It would be helpful if more of this information were shared with pupils and their parents, so that targets for individual progress could be planned at all levels.

SCIENCE

At the end of Key Stage 2 pupils are working in line with and in many cases above national norms.

In GCSE examinations in 2000, the science results were very good. In particular, all pupils entered for the double science course attained grades A*-C, with over half of the pupils gaining A* or A grades.

At A-level, the results were sound. There was an increase in the proportion of students attaining the higher grades.

In lessons the pupils demonstrate sound and often good levels of subject knowledge and understanding. By the end of Key Stage 2, the pupils have sound or better levels of subject knowledge and understanding and good skills of scientific investigation. Pupils understand the concept of a fair test and the need for it. They are able to classify in different ways, are developing their understanding of the concepts of mass and weight and can correctly label force diagrams. They have developed investigative methods that should form a good basis for investigative work in Key Stage 3.

In Key Stage 3 pupils gain knowledge of the idea of some important science concepts. At times, the pupils have dictated notes and so it is hard to estimate their true understanding of what they have written, or to enable the pupils to raise points for clarification, except when answering the teacher's questions. The investigative skills that pupils have gained in Key Stage 2 are not well used or developed. By Year 9, levels of knowledge are adequate and sometimes good.

At Key Stage 4 the girls are able to show what they know and understand through their response to questions and by participating in discussion as well as in their written work. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on genetics, the pupils were able to show what they understood both by responding to directed questions from the teacher and in their written answers to examination questions.

The quality of the teaching is at least good and often very good. Lesson planning is never less than adequate and often good. It is most effective when the learning objectives for the lesson are clearly identified and shared with the pupils. Teachers set high expectations of the pupils who respond with enthusiasm and commitment.

Teachers have very good subject knowledge. Exposition is a strength. For example, in a Year 6 lesson on forces, the teacher built effectively on previous work, encouraging

the pupils to apply their existing knowledge to new and unusual situations. Exposition is often enhanced by the skilful use of demonstration experiments. For example, in a Year 8 lesson, the teacher used a number of simple but effective experiments to demonstrate the process of convection in liquids and gases. The pupils assisted in the experimental work and took part in discussion linking their observations to their existing knowledge of the process of transfer of heat energy.

Teachers generally make very good use of practical work to support the development of scientific understanding. The pupils also have good practical skills. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, the girls were studying exothermic and endothermic reactions. They were able to follow instructions, work safely and make accurate measurements and observations. In the ensuing discussion the pupils used their results to assist in the development of their understanding of such reactions. In Year 1, pupils learning about waterproof materials would have benefited from more opportunity to explore their own ideas.

The pupils' work is regularly marked and helpful, constructive feedback helps them to further improve the quality of their work.

Teachers are well aware of the pupils' individual strengths and weaknesses. However, the extent to which they share this with the pupils is more variable. The pupils, particularly in Years 10 and 11, need to have a clearer understanding of their potential in the GCSE examination.

There are schemes of work for all aspects of science. While, in general, the schemes are sufficiently detailed, some elements of the schemes need to be written to a common format. In particular, more detailed references should be made to the pupils' primary science experiences as a foundation for the Year 7 programmes, the identification of learning outcomes and the role of investigational work.

Currently the department does not have the services of a technician. The head of science, relatively new in the post, has identified the key development issues for the department. However, the current subject development plan does not assist in prioritising issues, or in identifying costs or the criteria that will indicate success.