

INSPECTION REPORT

JOHN F KENNEDY SCHOOL

Hemel Hempstead

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117557

Headteacher: Bernadette Jenkins

Reporting inspector: Valerie Jenkins
2037

Dates of inspection: 15th – 18th May 2000

Inspection number: 183879

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary aided

Age range of students: 11 - 18

Gender of students: Mixed

School address: Hollybush Lane
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Hertfordshire

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Dr David Toorawa

Date of previous inspection: November 1994

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

John F Kennedy is an average-sized, mixed, voluntary aided Roman Catholic comprehensive with technology college status on the outskirts of Hemel Hempstead in the Westminster Diocese. Many travel considerable distances to this popular, over-subscribed school with its 1058 students including 157 in the sixth form. The 5.9 per cent eligible for free school meals is below the national average. One fifth of students have special educational needs, about average, although the proportion with full statements is below average. Six per cent are of ethnic minority origin. Attainment on entry to the school is average, although there are many high attainers and relatively few of more modest ability.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school with many excellent features. The commitment to high standards in all aspects of school life is coupled with concern for the welfare and happiness of each individual student. Much teaching is very good. The headteacher's strong leadership and the welcoming ethos combine to make it a place where staff and students all enjoy working. The school gives good value for money, including the cost-effective sixth form.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Standards at GCSE are well above national averages and also those for similar schools.
- Boys gained excellent results in most GCSE subjects in 1999, far better than boys elsewhere in the country.
- Some dynamic teaching inspires students, particularly in English, theatre studies, mathematics and science.
- Good specialist teaching helps students with special needs make good progress.
- The school encourages boys and girls to be confident and articulate. They share with the staff a sense of fun and enjoyment in learning.
- Its high quality pastoral care supports students academically and socially.
- Excellent moral and social development is fostered by the strong sense of community, relaxed but respectful relationships, and trust.
- Wide-ranging extra-curricular activities enrich students' school experiences.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- The quality of some teaching in Key Stage 3 to equal that in the upper school.
- The monitoring of teaching and scrutiny of students' work, particularly at Key Stage 3.
- Marking, especially in Key Stage 3.
- Co-ordination of the provision and assessment of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) across all subjects and throughout the school.
- Aspects of the curriculum, specifically the length of the taught week, the timetable, the arrangements for teaching modern languages in Key Stage 3, the time given to the arts and the management and delivery of the sixth form GNVQ programme.
- Provision of a homework timetable and the use of diaries, particularly at Key Stage 3.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The 1994 report was good. Since then, attainment has risen. It has been consistently well above average at Key Stage 3; has improved still further at GCSE and, in 1999, improved also at Advanced Level. Teaching is also better, with two-thirds now good compared with a half in 1994. Boys' attainment was weaker than the girls in 1994 and some were inattentive. Behaviour is now exemplary and boys' results better than girls' at GCSE. The 1994 recommendations have been addressed, although development planning and the use of assessment data need further refinement. The school's effectiveness has been recognised by the Department for Education and Employment and the Technology College Trust. It has Investors in People status; recently gained a Sportsmark, and a Schools' Curriculum Award. It is committed to further improvement, ably led by the new headteacher and enthusiastic governors.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	All schools			similar schools*
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-Levels/AS-Levels	C	D	B	

Key

well above average **A**

above average **B**

average **C**

below average **D**

well below average **E**

* Those schools in England with a similar proportion of students eligible for free meals.

External results

The 1999 examination targets were all met and those for 2000 are appropriately ambitious. At **Key Stage 3** between 1997-9 students achieved results well above national averages in English, mathematics and science. The trend in improvement matched that nationally and the 1999 results were broadly in line with similar schools. Despite the unexpected fall in the 1999 English results, standards have not, in fact, declined.

GCSE results have steadily improved and at a faster rate than nationally. The performance of boys is particularly striking; in 1999 they gained more A*-C passes than the girls in all subjects except English and history. Girls continue to attain well above national average levels, but their performance is less consistent.

The results of students entered for two or more **Advanced Levels** improved in 1999 to just above national levels but between 1997-9 they were below average. There were high proportions of A/B grades in 1999 in sociology, physical education, economics, geography, art and mathematics, and good overall results in English and chemistry. **GNVQ** students gained below average results.

In lessons seen and work studied

Attainment was above average overall and rose in successive key stages. Effective teaching promoted high standards in the core subjects and in some history, French, information and communication technology, PE and economics lessons. Attainment, although average, is generally weaker in Year 8 and in GNVQ courses.

Students enjoy discussion and are skilled communicators. Most can read fluently and many expressively. Personal reading is insufficiently promoted. Students take pride in presenting their work neatly with reasonable technical accuracy and handwriting. Most can write fluently, imaginatively and at length. Numeracy and information and communication technology skills are above average.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Students say they 'love' the school. They expect to work hard and appreciate the support to help them do well. They like and respect their teachers, the many opportunities, the sense of community and feeling safe. Their only complaints were the limited space in the buildings and that girls cannot wear trousers.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Students are spontaneously friendly and courteous. They show mature and responsible attitudes to one another, to their work, the site and its facilities. Behaviour is exemplary in lessons, during the purposeful lesson changes, and at breaks and lunch when students are calm and relaxed.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Relationships are excellent. Boys and girls work well together. Older students are effective prefects and also support younger ones in class. They give generously to charity. Younger students could accept more responsibility.
Attendance	Good, above the national average. Punctuality is also good. Registers are well kept. Students interviewed were confident that if they tried to truant they would be caught!

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	satisfactory	very good	good

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

Teaching was at least satisfactory in 93 per cent of lessons and good, very good or excellent in 65 per cent of these. Good practice is widespread with the most consistently effective teaching in Years 7, 10, and at Advanced Level. Most of the unsatisfactory or poor lessons were in Key Stage 3. English teaching is good with some outstanding practice. In mathematics, skilled teachers with high expectations plan well, often using information and communication technology, to demonstrate abstract concepts. Science teaching is good with very effective use of assessment. Very good teaching was seen in some art, economics, French, geography, history, information and communication technology and PE lessons. It is inconsistent in information and

communication technology and design technology. Literacy is well taught in English and special needs lessons but not developed adequately elsewhere, especially at Key Stage 3. Most teachers make insufficient use of assessment data to plan. Numeracy is well taught in mathematics and developed in science, design and technology and geography. Information and communication technology is widely used, but insufficiently monitored. Most students make good progress, including those with special needs, helped by the consistent teaching of effective learning skills. They work diligently, both independently and with others, and have excellent concentration. The new approaches to teaching boys have yielded excellent results and brought general benefits.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory; statutory requirements are met. The taught week is short, with an imbalance of time between subjects. Vocational provision is limited and little emphasis is placed on the arts. The arrangements for teaching a second modern language at Key Stage 3 are unsatisfactory.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	The small cohort speak fluent English; are well-integrated and making good progress. Local education authority support for early bilinguals has been very effective in the past.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Spirituality is promoted admirably through assemblies, celebrations and the curriculum. Moral and cultural development are excellent. Students give generously to charity. Social development is very good as seen by Year 11's successful ball.
How well the school cares for its students	Very good. Students are well known by their tutors and year heads, and their social and academic needs are met well. They know where to seek help. Child protection procedures are fully implemented.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher is a strong pastoral and curricular leader. She gives clear direction, maintaining the school's strengths but emphasising change and further improvement. She is well supported by the new senior team and some very effective middle managers. Line management is inconsistent and accountability not yet fully established.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	The headteacher has increased the involvement of governors and they are developing their strategic role. They are committed to the school, work hard on its behalf, and are now much more involved in the curriculum.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Effective development planning produces appropriate priorities but success criteria are not quantifiable, nor are all costed. The use of performance data is developing. The monitoring of student progress is especially effective at Key Stage 4. The inadequacies of the timetable have not been addressed. Not all departments analyse results by teaching group or by gender.
The strategic use of resources	The principles of best value are well understood and applied. Financial control is good and planning is improving. The library is too small and its resources limited.

The new headteacher is approachable and a good role model. Staff feel fully involved in decision making. The senior team plans more systematic observation of teaching and scrutiny of students' work.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children are expected to work hard; • Staff are approachable; • Their children make good progress and are helped to become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework; • The range of extra-curricular activities.

Parents are generally very satisfied and the inspection team endorses their view of the school's strengths. Appropriate homework is set regularly, but the lack of a timetable makes planning difficult. There are many extra-curricular activities but not all are well publicised. Some parental concerns about Year 8 are justified in some subjects.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards at GCSE are well above national averages and also those for similar schools.

1. Results at the end of Key Stage 3 are well above national levels but remain in line with those in similar schools. By the end of Key Stage 4 standards are not only well above those nationally, as is the trend in improvement, but also well above those in similar schools. This shows clear added value from Key Stage 3.
2. At the time of the last inspection 48.8 per cent of students gained 5+ A-C passes. This proportion has risen steadily to reach its highest figure of 69.4 per cent in 1999 and a very high three-year average between 1997-9 of 63.9 per cent compared with a national figure of 45 per cent. The average points score, based on the total of each student's results not just the A*-C passes, has also been well above national norms. Boys' results have shown a consistent improvement whereas girls' results have fluctuated, although they remain well above the national average. The reasons for these fluctuations will need to be sought and eliminated.
3. In 1999 all subjects, with the exception of information studies, child development and home economics, gained results well above the national average in the A*-C range. In 1994, the majority of subjects also gained results above the national average in the A*-C range although French and design and technology were in line with national ones and music was below. Students in 1999 did particularly well in English, geography and French in comparison with their other entries. A high proportion of A*/A grades was obtained in 1999 in art, English, English literature, French, geography and physical education with the proportion of A* notable in English literature, geography and physical education.
4. It was not possible to see lessons in Year 11 as students were on study leave. However, a wide selection of work in all subjects was studied and students interviewed. Their work demonstrated strong effort, careful presentation and high standards. Some particularly striking examples were projects on alarm systems in design and technology, on coastal erosion in geography, and by lower attaining students in food technology, who analysed ready-prepared meals. Year 10 lessons were characterised by very effective teaching; over half was very good and three-quarters good overall. This led to above average attainment in most lessons and lower attainers were reaching average levels in a number of subjects.
5. The most talented and gifted students are guided towards specific extra-curricular opportunities in sport and music in particular, but more could be done within the normal curriculum to challenge and extend them still further.

Boys gained excellent results in most GCSE subjects in 1999, far better than boys elsewhere in the country.

6. At the time of the last inspection, girls were doing better than the boys at GCSE. In the last two years the position has reversed. Boys now gain a higher proportion of 5+A*-C passes and do better in most GCSE subjects in the A*-C range. Girls maintain a slight lead in points' scores. Boys' results have risen steadily and consistently whereas the girls' have been much more variable. Particularly striking results, which go against national trends, are the boys' results in English, especially in literature, where a remarkable 92 per cent gained a A*-C pass in 1999; in art, where 98 per cent of boys did so, and in French, where the boys and girls gained very similar results. Only in English and history in 1999 did girls gain higher results but, in the case of history, the department was unable to explain this.

7. The staff have considered gender issues and adapted their teaching methods to address the needs of boys. The acquisition of technology college status has brought much new equipment and software; such provision is of particular interest to boys. There is much very good discussion and students are probed and pushed in a lively and challenging manner. Facts are recalled by the frequent use of charts and spidergrams, and students are taught how to find relevant points in texts by selective underlining and highlighting. Much of the learning is active, including role-play, group work often with an element of risk-taking. A sense of fun is evident in many lessons. Younger students sit in mixed gender groups and this works well. All students enjoy learning in an atmosphere where they feel free to question and say if they do not understand. They are confident and mature learners. In this school there is no stigma about boys working hard and achieving.

Some dynamic teaching inspires students, particularly in English, theatre studies, mathematics and science.

8. The three core subjects benefit from dynamic leadership by very skilled practitioners who enthuse both their teams and the students.

9. In English, subject leadership and corporate planning are very strong. An effective Handbook guides practice giving a strong philosophical lead coupled with practical approaches. Students benefit from carefully chosen teaching groups and the selection of texts which match their interests and abilities. The best lessons are characterised by excellent relationships with teachers who are able to push students to their limits, using wit and gentle humour. For example, in theatre studies acting rather than just reading the text helped students understand characterisation and motivation far more clearly. "Read the text again.....listen to what he says.....is it?.....Yes!" Questions are fired like bullets and the charismatic style and humour ensure the attention and interest of all. Similarly effective techniques were used as Year 9 studied 'Pygmalion', where close attention to the various speech registers not only brought the characters to life but emphasised the social gulf between them. Their verbal dexterity was not matched by their movement skills, but students lack the benefit of regular drama lessons.

10. In mathematics also, teachers have high expectations and lively teaching, coupled with careful planning, enables students to attain at a high level, well above national standards and those in similar schools at Key Stage 3. Almost all reach the expected Level 5, but 25 per cent reached Level 7 in 1999 in comparison with 14 per cent nationally. Similarly high standards are reached at GCSE. At Advanced Level, results have been improving steadily and a number continue to university to study mathematics. Students respond enthusiastically at all ability levels. Students in a class of average attainers in Year 10 were challenged by an authoritative and stimulating approach to Pythagoras in which they were helped to 'discover' the rule for themselves rather than simply being taught it. The use of information and communication technology enlivened the lesson, as it did also when a Year 8 group were introduced to algebra by a PowerPoint demonstration based on friends shaking hands at a party. A top set also in Year 10 were pushed to work speedily and rigorously—"Come on...keep going.... Let's see your answers". Their levels of concentration were very good and they constantly asked demanding questions.

11. Standards in science have also been rising, despite a dip at Key Stage 3 in 1999. In the majority of lessons seen, teaching was very good, and it was good in the remainder. Teachers use assessment well to ensure students make progress, and they supplement this with the new and very effective logbooks. Information and communication technology is very well integrated into schemes of work. Students are helped to be well organised and purposeful. They are able to concentrate for long periods. A Year 7 class studying the effects of burning magnesium demonstrated their awareness of safety measures and their ability to collaborate and draw sound conclusions. The teacher outlined the purpose of the lesson on the board as well as emphasising it orally. Good organisation and the degree of student involvement led to the sound learning evident in the final plenary. Help given to a student with special educational needs by a Learning Support Assistant was also effective. A Year 10 lesson on sound reproduction started with a brainstorming exercise in which the teacher developed ideas, targeted the silent class members and created a climate in which students could say when they had not understood. An effective demonstration of the vibration of a candle flame near a loudspeaker clarified concepts and, by the end, all understood the processes of sound transmission and several could explain why it cannot travel through a vacuum. In Advanced Level physics, students demonstrated good use of information and communication technology, and a real working 'buzz' was apparent as they worked through the experiments with a pendulum and datalogger, with effective teacher intervention during group work and a useful plenary at the end.

Good specialist teaching helps students with special needs make good progress.

12. The department continues to provide a very good service and makes a significant impact on the progress of all students at all stages of the Code of Practice. Statutory requirements are fully met. The school publishes information on special educational needs provision to parents, explaining the aim of providing support for students to follow the National Curriculum within the mainstream classroom, although some withdrawal takes place for students at the early stages of acquiring full literacy.

13. There are 196 students with special educational needs and 14 with full statements; this is relatively low for a school of this size. The numbers with serious literacy problems are small and, as a result, the school is able to invest significant time in helping them, often individually or in small groups.

14. Students with statements benefit from high quality individual tuition. The support is organised in a variety of ways: basic skills tutorials, workshop sessions, lunchtime reading club, support in the classroom and membership of a reading-support group.

15. Other students with special needs receive effective support from well-qualified teachers. There is careful identification of their individual needs; progress is regularly and appropriately assessed. In the current year, the school has disapplied six students in Years 9-11 from French. Limited help is available in Key Stage 4, and students there with special educational needs do not receive help with organisation and study skills unless this is mentioned in their statements.

16. Students with special educational needs can also attend lunchtime clubs, where they have opportunities to learn to co-operate with others through word, numeracy and puzzle games.

17. The department encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and achieves this, in part, through realistic tasks and target setting. It uses praise judiciously; awards credits to motivate and stimulate learning, and creates a secure environment. Parents are invited to become fully involved in their children's education.

18. The department is very well organised, with roles and responsibilities clearly defined. The staff work well as a team and also relate well to the link co-ordinators in each department. The comprehensive, clear and practical individual education plans are valued and well used by teachers throughout the school. Learning support staff make positive contributions to class work in all curriculum areas and complement and enhance subject teaching. Many sixth formers also give time to work with younger students and the relationships they forge with them are very positive.

19. The comprehensive handbook, good learning resources and base room all help provide a basis for effective teaching. Information and communication technology is a key aspect of the programme and 'Successmaker' is used effectively.

20. A successful two-week summer school, which started in 1998, helps about 30 primary age students with weak numeracy. The proposed pilot schemes in both literacy and numeracy at Key Stage 3 are positive initiatives.

The school encourages boys and girls to be confident and articulate. They share with the staff a sense of fun and enjoyment in learning.

21. The school has developed an ethos in which all students are valued for the individual contributions they make, whatever their particular talents. Delight in the celebration of success is apparent in the range of presentations, ranging from year-group to whole-school assemblies and formal presentation evenings. The high quality of display, most featuring the work of students, is testimony to the sense of pride and pleasure the school enjoys by sharing good work and good news.

22. Students prepare their Progress Files with great care and are proud of them. The files demonstrate a wide range of achievement, both academic and social. They are excellent documents.

23. Year 11 students benefit from a year council where they can raise any concerns, plan social events and organise charity collections. Those interviewed were articulate and open. As examples of improvements they have brought about, they cited: changes to the range and price of school meals, a reduction in homework during major revision periods, and acquiring soft toilet paper! The failure of the much wanted school telephone, and ongoing concerns about the 'no trouser rule' for girls helped their appreciation of the democratic process. They feel privileged to belong to 'a lovely school', with 'really nice teachers' and excellent opportunities. They respect its concern not only for academic success but also for their happiness. They were looking forward to their ball, which was a great success, and the production of an American style year-book. Both are good instances of their organisational skills. They were enthusiastic about joining the sixth form and some had recently undergone training in peer mentoring so that they could help fellow students in difficulties.

24. Students in all year groups enjoy discussion and the group interviews were characterised by honest, lively responses with much laughter. This was also true of the staff interviews. A general feeling of contentment permeates the whole school.

25. In class, students benefit from the quality and quantity of discussion in pairs, groups and with the whole class. Free expression of views and open debate are encouraged. Students feel sufficiently confident to say if they have not understood, and their learning obviously improves as a consequence.

26. Two sixth formers addressed a full school assembly on supporting a South American charity. They spoke with confidence and passion and their fellow students listened attentively and clapped them spontaneously.

Its high quality pastoral care supports students academically and socially.

27. Students are well known by their tutors, and those interviewed were clear that any problems would be referred first to them. They were also seen as people who take a real interest in the students' work. The well-established system of appraisal interviews, when students discuss their progress each term with their tutors, is an example of good practice and one which is valued by the students. In Key Stage 4, this process is intensified, three staff being allocated to each class by using some governors and retired staff. Staff say any potentially lazy students are 'pursued', and all the evidence from the examination results shows the positive outcomes of this practice.

28. The heads of year are a committed and effective group who feel very positive about the school – "It's a fabulous place to work" - and their enjoyment and sense of corporate working are conveyed to the students. Some very detailed and high quality records kept by a year head were seen which chart the academic and social progress of individuals during this school year. However, these are not integrated into the main school records and the task of obtaining a full record of an individual's progress is too complicated at present. Year heads have limited time in which to carry out their role. Parents value the close relationships the school has established with them and find the staff very approachable if they have any problems or questions.

29. Regular, well-attended and focused parents' meetings are held. These are for both discussion of progress and consideration of themes relevant to particular year groups, such as Curriculum 2000 or issues in Year 8.

30. A further example of good practice is the individual interview for students in each of Years 9-11 with senior staff. In Year 11, for example, each student meets a deputy head after mock examinations to consider their results, entries, estimated grades and forthcoming revision plans. Any student demonstrating problems has a further interview to which parents are invited. By this stage students have a detailed awareness of their standards in all subjects. The practice could valuably be transferred to lower years.

Excellent moral and social development is fostered by the strong sense of community, the relaxed but respectful relationships, and trust.

31. The sense of belonging to a community or family was mentioned frequently in interviews with both staff and students. Many of the staff and governors have or have had their children in the school and enjoyed a relationship with it over many years. The practice of involving older students with younger ones also adds to the feeling of shared responsibility for learning. Students give willingly and generously to a host of local, regional, national and international charities. These range from collections for the needy in the parish, sick people in a local hospice, sufferers from cystic fibrosis, and the orphans in Romania.

32. Students behave responsibly both in and out of lessons. There are no fixed rules, but common sense and respect for others and property are well embedded. The staff provide good role models of caring adults who work hard to create a community based on gospel values. Students understand the systems for both praise and punishment and accept that punishments are fair, with the exception of the whole-class detentions, an issue also raised by

parents. Reconciliation rather than conflict is the guiding principle. Students are trusted to use the classrooms and the building during breaks, and do so quietly and sensibly. They behave well at lunch and queue calmly, with no pushing or jostling despite the limited space. Supervision is unobtrusive and voices are rarely raised. Students interviewed stated that behaviour was getting better. None had any concerns about bullying and said they were sure any attempts would be dealt with severely by staff. They felt the same about racism and sexism. They regard the school as a safe place. Boys and girls work well together with no evidence of any tensions or awkwardness.

33. Governors believe in a policy of inclusion and are reluctant ever to exclude a student. The numbers are low, as are those of students excluded for misbehaviour in lessons, using the orange slip system. A governors' committee sees any students at risk of exclusion with their parents and discusses ways of dealing with the problems presented. This is another example of good practice.

Wide-ranging extra-curricular activities enrich students' school experiences.

34. Parents had some concerns about the range of activities and others felt unsure. In fact, provision is wide-ranging and also well supported. There are many sporting, musical and other cultural activities, as well as field trips and other visits in England and abroad. A curriculum enrichment week is about to take place. Students have the opportunity to engage in competitions with other schools in sports and debating, or to join the Neighbourhood Engineers scheme; such enrichment opportunities benefit all students with some targeted at the gifted. There are also regular drama, gymnastics and musical evenings when students demonstrate their skills. Companies and firms have supported work in information and communication technology, or helped with aspects of the curriculum such as oil in both science and geography. The range and quality of display around the school testify to the value given to all aspects of school life.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The quality of some teaching in Key Stage 3 to equal that in the upper school.

35. Most teaching is good, and in Key Stage 4 it is very good. However, some unsatisfactory and poor teaching was seen in the lower school, mostly in Year 8, where three of the ten lessons seen fell into this category. The lessons had in common a failure to consider the learning outcomes; as a result the introductions and questioning lacked focus and challenge. Individuals were given too little individual help and lost interest or the whole class activity failed to engage the attention of the majority. Low level tasks such as colouring or copying kept students occupied but taught them little. This was very different from Year 7, where there was no unsatisfactory practice. The dip in expectations reported by parents was found to be justified in some subjects. The work seen shows that higher attaining students continue to make good progress in most subjects although more could be expected of others especially in Year 8 and the beginning of Year 9.

The monitoring of teaching and scrutiny of students' work, particularly at Key Stage 3.

36. A discussion paper on monitoring prepared by a group of heads of department correctly identifies the need to spread good practice, but it avoids the issue of their accountability for the quality of work achieved by teachers line-managed by them. It emphasises a 'bottom up' approach and 'ownership' so that staff do not feel threatened. The suggested observation sheets are useful, but it is unclear what happens to them, or whether the headteacher receives a copy of a written report as required under the statutory appraisal system.

37. At present, approaches are too variable. Although there are examples of very good practice, some senior and middle managers are neglecting direct observation of teaching and also scrutiny of work, by Key Stage 3 students in particular. There are plans to refine the monitoring process, but currently known weaknesses in teaching and lower standards in some subjects have not been dealt with adequately.

Marking, especially in Key Stage 3.

38. The generally unsatisfactory quality of marking at Key Stage 3, with its lack both of diagnostic comments and of attention to technical accuracy, is of concern. The younger students are given too little written guidance about the quality of their work as most marking, although regular, consists of ticks and a brief comment, such as 'good', or a request to be neater or to finish an exercise. Few teachers suggest to students the steps they could take to improve their work. In most cases, especially in Years 7 and 8, students have no grades or marks to guide them. Although some teachers do grade work using the school system and include the grades in their mark books, they do not share these with the students. There were very few examples, other than in English, where the warm comments expressed to students orally found their way onto the page. There was little evidence of dialogue between the teacher and the students, and often the commands to finish work went unheeded. A number of students interviewed found it difficult to identify their best work and chose the neatest or the subject they liked best. Others were unsure of their ability, describing themselves as 'average' when they either had full statements indicating learning problems or were attaining at a very high level. This situation eased in Year 9, when most were aware of likely National Curriculum levels.

39. Although marking was better in Key Stage 4, much still lacked diagnostic comment and the use of estimated grades was also limited. The good relationship between staff and students was characterised by one boy who wrote in his mathematics book, "HELP-please!" and the teacher's response of "Don't panic; we'll be going over this on Monday". Students' targets sometimes lacked precision, for example 'To write more', and closer attention to these issues could guide some students to even higher attainment.

Co-ordination of the provision and assessment of information and communications technology across all subjects and throughout the school.

40. The school benefits from good and increasing provision, with a wide variety of up to date hardware and software. The school's Technology College status has given considerable benefits in terms of staffing and equipment. It has also helped fund extensive staff training, including work with teachers from local primary schools.

41. In many departments the range of activities involving information and communication technology is very good, and almost all make some contribution and one which is increasing. It is particularly effective in mathematics, science and design and technology. The requirements of the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum are met, although this is not coherently mapped. Year 11 has produced some high quality project work, including the sophisticated use of information and communication technology in mathematics, design and technology and geography.

42. The main weakness is the lack of consistent monitoring of provision at both key stages, with tabulated evidence of how, where and when the various strands are being delivered. Coverage is wide, but it lacks a systematic approach and is too dependent on the initiatives of individual heads of department. Thus, although standards are above average, they could rise further if the provision was co-ordinated to ensure progression and eliminate duplication.

43. The assessment of information and communication technology at Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory. Although the head of department meets regularly with subject leaders, there is no agreement on standards related to national norms, and no portfolios of students' levelled work, which can be used to confirm these standards and act as benchmarks for new teachers.

44. The head of department has little time in which to carry out the monitoring and assessment requirements across the curriculum.

Aspects of the curriculum, specifically the length of the taught week, the timetable, the arrangements for teaching modern languages in Key Stage 3, the time given to the creative and performing arts and the management and delivery of the sixth form GNVQ programme.

45. The taught week is below the Department for Education and Employment's recommended 25 hours at both key stages, and in Key Stage 3, students lose more time each Wednesday because of the early lunch arrangements. The governors' curriculum statement endorses breadth and balance but provides no guidance on the overall curriculum with their views on which subjects should be prioritised. Although it recommends the provision of vocational courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, little progress has been made to implement these. A revised statement, which takes into account changes at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, and also determines the relative importance of subjects, particularly the arts and languages, would help guide future decisions on the overall programme.

46. The timetable is unsatisfactory. The 30-minute module is inherently difficult, especially on a large site. Many 30-minute lessons result from the timing of morning break. Some staff described these as a 'nightmare' which restrain teaching styles and use of resources. Some classes in Key Stage 3 have seven to nine of these short lessons a week, and sometimes experience all their teaching in a subject through such units. On the other hand, some staff find triple periods too long, and the occasions when they see classes too spread across the week as a consequence.

47. German is introduced to one third of Year 8. Consequently, the majority of the year group have two additional English lessons, often with a different teacher from their mainstream one. Students in the bottom French sets have only three lessons instead of five with the other two allocated to yet more English lessons. Thus they are unlikely to move up a set as they have had less teaching of French. Some students are receiving nine lessons of English a week, which is too much. The imbalance between the languages, with French receiving six periods and German only two, makes coverage of the programme of study overly demanding in German, whereas the allocation to French is very generous. The heavy investment in the teaching of languages does not lead to large numbers continuing with two languages at GCSE, or even one in the sixth form.

48. Art and music receive less than the recommended time each week in Key Stage 3 although that given to design and technology and physical education is generous.

49. There is no discrete teaching of drama or dance, so those students who have an interest or aptitude cannot pursue these subjects to examination level. It is surprising, therefore, that theatre studies is offered at Advanced Level where it is both popular and successful, but that a similar course is not available to younger students. Observation in class revealed them to be expressive and confident speakers, but awkward when asked to stand and embarrassed when moving. Progressive teaching of movement skills as part of drama or dance would help.

50. Some sixth form and younger students who were interviewed spoke about the limited range of courses in the sixth form, and some of the younger ones said they would have to go to college to get a wider choice; they regretted this. The provision of courses at Advanced Level is reasonable, although there are few additional elements such as general studies. However, it is at GNVQ that provision is most limited. There are currently only two courses available, both at advanced level and with very low numbers. In addition, a number of the students recruited do not stay on the course and others fail to complete within the two-year period. As yet students and their parents are not convinced of the value of these courses.

51. GNVQ students have suffered from staff changes and an uncertain approach to the demands of the course. The teaching is less successful than that at Advanced Level, where standards and approaches are better understood. Staff are not specifically GNVQ teachers or experienced in handling the new approaches. There is no overall co-ordinator. Key skills are not being well embedded and insufficient time is given to their acquisition. Students need more rigorous monitoring and support to ensure they complete their assignments on time as too many, at present, defer units and fail to gain full accreditation. The lack of a base room precludes a sense of identity. Although students have benefited from learning about local businesses and health care, a more co-ordinated approach to work experience is also needed.

The production of a homework timetable and improved use of homework diaries to provide a more effective link between home and school.

52. The aspect of the school with which parents were most dissatisfied was homework. In fact, students are set adequate homework and of an appropriate nature. The problem, particularly at Key Stage 3, is that the lack of a timetable makes it difficult for the students to plan their week. They and their parents referred to 'bunching', which meant that they had too much on some nights and worried about it.

53. The homework diaries are useful, well laid out books, but their potential is not fully utilised. Not all students complete them diligently, particularly at Key Stage 3; nor do all tutors and parents sign them regularly. Their use at Key Stage 4 as part of the self-appraisal interviews and target setting is more consistent. They could become a much more instrumental link between home and school for younger students and the first place for praise and concerns to be noted, as is proposed in the helpful Home-School Partnership document.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

54. In order to raise standards still further, particularly at Key Stage 3, the governors, headteacher and staff, with the help of the local education authority and Diocese, should:

- Agree and implement a systematic strategy for the regular monitoring and evaluation of both teaching and the quality of students' work, and take action on the outcomes. This should begin with Years 7 and 8 and the GNVQ courses, and consider the appropriateness of teaching styles, the quality and quantity of work produced, and its marking and assessment;
- Ensure that the teacher in charge of information and communication technology has the time to prepare a plan detailing when and where each strand is to be taught; also that students' work is assessed across the curriculum, and portfolios are completed showing the standards reached;
- Prepare a revised curriculum statement, which clarifies priorities and seeks to deal with the problems caused by the second modern language, by the limited emphasis on the arts and vocational courses, and by the range of provision in the sixth form;
- Consider extending the school week and changing the length of lessons;
- Prepare a homework timetable and monitor its use and that of homework diaries, especially in Key Stage 3.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	67
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	74

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4	31	30	28	6	1	0

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

Information about the school's students

	No of students
Students on the school's roll	
Number of students on the school's roll	1058
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	66

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

Number of students with statements of special educational needs	14
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	196

English as an additional language

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	18

Student mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	19

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.2
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.1

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	81	89	170

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	40	66	53
	Girls	79	74	62
	Total	119	140	115
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	70 (89)	82 (72)	68 (71)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	24 (65)	57 (55)	31 (34)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	67	56	63
	Girls	86	72	70
	Total	153	128	133
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	90 (83)	75 (75)	78 (79)
	National	64 (61)	64 (64)	60 (61)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	54 (56)	54 (42)	29 (39)
	National	31 (30)	37 (37)	28 (30)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	76	84	160

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	54	73	76
	Girls	57	81	83
	Total	111	154	159
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	69 (62)	96 (97.5)	99 (99)
	National	46.6 (44.6)	90.9 (89.8)	95.8 (95.7)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	45.5 (42.9)
	National	38 (36.8)

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	39	29	68

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		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	18	18.4	18.2 (15.8)	8	-	8 (4.7)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	3	66
	National		N/A

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	10
Black – African heritage	21
Black – other	0
Indian	23
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	11
White	981
Any other minority ethnic group	11

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	1	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	5	0
Other minority ethnic groups	1	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y 7– Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	61.1
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.3:1
Average class size	22.1

Education support staff: Y 7 – 13

Total number of education support staff	15
Total aggregate hours worked per week	324

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1998-9
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	£
Total income	2814092.00
Total expenditure	2734935.00
Expenditure per student	2684.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	112226.00
Balance carried forward to next year	191383.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1058
Number of questionnaires returned	284

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	49	45	4	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	61	35	3	0.3	0.7
Behaviour in the school is good.	44	47	6	0.7	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	52	15	1.5	0.5
The teaching is good.	56	41	2	0	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	53	39	7	0	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	65	31	2	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	78	21	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	58	37	4	0	1
The school is well led and managed.	56	39	2	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	61	35	2	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	40	42	10	1	7