

INSPECTION REPORT

LANCASTER GIRLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Lancaster

LEA area: Lancashire

Unique reference number: 119811

Headteacher: Mrs P G Barber

Reporting inspector: Mrs Sue Bardwell
2796

Dates of inspection: 3 – 5 April 2000

Inspection number: 184032

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Girls
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr P E M Oglethorpe
Date of previous inspection:	November 1994

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school is a girls' 11-18 foundation grammar school, situated in the centre of the county town of Lancaster. There are 829 girls on roll and it is of a similar size to most grammar schools. 1.6% of girls have English as an additional language, which is broadly similar to most schools. 2.9% of girls are entitled to free school meals, which is similar to most grammar schools. 1.3% of girls are on the school's register of special educational needs, which is well below the national average. The average number of girls for each teacher (16.9) is broadly in line with the national figures. The school is a designated Technology College and also has an International School Award from the Central Bureau. It is a selective school and gives priority for entry to girls from Lancaster and Lunesdale. Girls are selected using verbal reasoning, English and mathematics tests and on primary schools' recommendations and records. Whilst the girls' standards of attainment on entry to the school are well above the national average, they cover a broader range than typically found in grammar schools. Each year girls joining the school from other schools make up just over one third of the sixth form. The socio-economic indicators are generally positive for the school's catchment area. The school has increased in size since the last inspection and is over subscribed.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Lancaster Girls' Grammar School is a very successful school. The headteacher, governors and senior staff provide excellent leadership. Standards of attainment are consistently very high as a result of very good teaching and the very positive attitudes the girls have to their work. Resources are very well managed and used to the maximum benefit of the girls and the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards of attainment are consistently very high, especially at GCSE and A-level.
- A high proportion of teaching is very good, effectively focusing upon the promotion of high standards and very good quality of learning.
- A positive, purposeful and supportive ethos prevails, where both the personal and academic developments of girls have equal priority. Values of trust, honesty, fairness and care for others are effectively promoted. Girls are encouraged to aim high and think well of themselves and others.
- The headteacher, governing body and senior staff provide strong and visionary leadership. They have a united sense of purpose and work very hard in seeking to provide the best quality education possible for the girls.
- The very strong pastoral systems ensure that all girls are very well cared for and are extremely well supported.
- The school's designation as a Technology College and International School gives it a distinctive character which is clearly evident in its broad, vibrant and innovative curriculum, much enriched by a wide variety of extra curricular activities.
- Girls have a very positive attitude to the school. Their behaviour is excellent and they work very hard, showing initiative and taking responsibility.

What could be improved

- Although the school monitors and evaluates much of its work very effectively, it needs a more methodical approach to its review of teaching so that strengths can be clearly identified and best practice shared more widely.
- More whole school development targets should be directly linked to the work of the departments.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good progress since it was last inspected in November 1994. The very high standards in the tests for 14 year olds and in GCSE examinations have been maintained. A-level results have improved. The quality of teaching is much improved. Considerable progress has been made on all nearly all of the key issues identified in the last report. Good steps have been taken to enhance further girls' personal development. Much of the school's work is now carefully monitored and evaluated by governors, senior staff and some subject leaders, though there is scope for a more rigorous evaluation of teaching. There is effective use of information technology in most subjects. Teachers set tasks which are generally well matched to the abilities of all their pupils and the provision for the most able is very good. The accommodation has been very much improved; judicious use of funds has ensured that there are excellent facilities, particularly for technology and science. The addition of a large all weather area has effectively enhanced the provision for physical education, though there are still limited indoor facilities about which the school is, rightly, still concerned. Religious education is now provided for all up to the age of 16, though none is provided for Year 13 girls. The school has clear short and long term plans and is well placed to bring about further improvements in its provision and the standards that girls achieve.

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*	C
A-levels/AS-levels	A*	A*	A*	

Key

very high A*

well above A

average

above average B

average C

below average D

well below E

average

Results in the national tests for 14 year olds are consistently very high in English, mathematics and science in comparison with the national averages. In comparison with similar schools, the 1999 results are very high in English, well above average in science and above average in mathematics. Taking all three subjects together, results are well above the average for similar schools.

The school's results at GCSE and A-level are exceptionally good in comparison with all

schools. Girls' attainment places the school consistently in the top 5% of all schools nationally. In many subjects, all girls attain A*-C grades at GCSE; the percentage of girls attaining A* is very high in comparison with schools nationally. In most subjects at A-level, all girls obtain an A-E grade and a large percentage of girls gain the higher grades of A and B. At GCSE, results have risen over the last six years broadly matching the national trend of improvement. The school has met its GCSE targets for the last two years. The GCSE average point score is in line with that of similar schools for 1999. The school is seeking to improve this comparison by increasing the number of GCSEs girls take from 2000. It has set itself appropriately high targets for the future, based upon a detailed analysis of girls' prior performance.

During the inspection the standard of the work seen in lessons and in girls' books reflected the very high attainment gained in external examinations and tests. Overall, girls make very good progress during their time at the school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Girls have very positive attitudes to the school. They work very hard in lessons and play a full part in the life of the school. They respond very well to the opportunities which the school provides for them to take responsibility and show initiative.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	The standard of behaviour is excellent. Pupils show a high degree of maturity and self-discipline.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils learn to take responsibility for their own actions and to help each other. This aspect of their personal development is supported by an emphasis in lessons on collaborative learning. Relationships between pupils and teachers are excellent, with many opportunities for social interaction through an extensive programme of educational visits and extra curricular activities.
Attendance	Attendance is very high in comparison with other schools and levels of unauthorised absence are well below the national average.

The school has a strong sense of identity and common values. It is a caring community, where pupils are encouraged to aim high and to think well of themselves and each other.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Very 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.

Overall the teaching and learning observed in the school were very good. All teaching seen was at least satisfactory. It was very good or excellent in 38% of the 58 lessons seen and good in a further 34%. Some exceptionally good teaching was seen in English, modern

foreign languages, history, media studies and physical education. Generally, the high quality of the teaching had a very positive impact upon girls' learning. This was particularly evident where teachers used their subject knowledge and infectious enthusiasm to challenge and inspire girls to deepen and extend their understanding in detailed discussions, problem solving and investigative activities. Occasionally, lessons proceeded at a rather slow pace with girls not making as much progress as they might. The teaching of literacy and numeracy observed was especially effective with teachers paying careful attention to individual girl's difficulties. Generally, the differing learning needs of girls are very well met.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school's broad and innovative curriculum provides girls with an unusually rich range of challenging academic and longer term vocational options. The inclusion of technology subjects, the effective integration of information and communication technology, and the range and quality of the international links contribute markedly to girls' academic success, provides them with appropriate skills and contexts for their personal development, and prepares them well for their adult and working life.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The school identifies girls with individual needs and provides for them very well. This applies equally to girls with special educational needs and to those with very high ability or special talents.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	There is very good provision for girls' personal development. Assemblies, lessons and extra curricular activities all contribute to girls' awareness of spirituality, their understanding of moral issues, their ability to play a part in society and their appreciation of their own culture and those of other countries and communities.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Child protection policies and other procedures to ensure girls' health and safety are very good. The very strong pastoral systems ensure that girls' difficulties are identified early and that all girls are very well cared for and extremely well supported throughout their time at school.

The school's curriculum has many strengths and effectively supports the school's aims and values. It successfully promotes girls' personal and academic development. In addition to the wide range of academic opportunities, girls also have good access to extra curricular activity of high quality particularly in music, drama, sport and foreign exchanges. The high levels of care and the enriching curricular opportunities ensure that girls' talents and attributes are effectively nurtured and fostered. The school makes good efforts to provide a daily act of collective worship, given the restricted size of the main hall. However, some form assemblies do not contain an act of worship and so do not meet statutory requirements.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school is exceptionally well led and managed. The senior management team's individual strengths and areas of responsibility complement each other and combine to make a very effective management team. Their work is clearly focused upon raising standards and ensuring the highest quality of provision.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors carry out their statutory duties effectively. They provide astute, highly informed and constructively critical support for the headteacher and senior staff. They are actively involved in development planning and contribute significantly to shaping the direction of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Much of the school's work and achievements is effectively monitored and evaluated by governors, headteacher and senior staff. As a result, strengths, weaknesses and priorities for development are identified and appropriate action is taken. Weaknesses are vigorously tackled. There is a programme for reviewing teaching but this needs to have more structure and rigour to enable the most successful practice to be more widely shared.
The strategic use of resources	The level of funding per pupil is high in comparison with schools nationally. The school's resources are very well managed and used to the maximum benefit of the girls. Spending decisions relate well to the school's priorities for development.

The headteacher makes an outstanding contribution to the continued improvement of the school. She is very well supported by dedicated, hardworking staff and governors. She has established a common sense of purpose which ensures that the school serves the needs of the community and which expects girls to aim high and achieve their best. The school development plan addresses the needs of the school but lacks some coherence. Some whole school development targets are not systematically picked up in the plans of individual departments and so are not sufficiently implemented at departmental level.

Standards of financial control and administration are high. Specific grants are used very effectively for their intended purposes, such as the development of the technology block as a centre of excellence. The school is well placed to apply the principles of 'best value' through its experience in detailed research of alternative courses of action and in its insistence on competitive tenders for goods and services.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What a few parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school expects their daughters to work hard and achieve their best. • Their daughters make good progress and standards are high. • The school helps girls become mature and responsible. • The school is well led and managed • The teaching is good. • Behaviour in the school is good. • Their daughters are happy at school and are very well cared for by staff. • The breadth of the curriculum and the range of activities provided outside lessons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount and quality of some homework, especially in Years 7 and 8. • More information about how their daughters are progressing. • The school working more closely with parents.

Parents are very positive about the school and applaud its efforts to provide their daughters with a high quality education. The inspection findings support this view. Parents' views about homework are mixed. Most are satisfied with the amount and quality, but a small proportion of parents of younger pupils feel the amount of homework teachers give is sometimes too much for the time allocated. Some parents feel that some tasks lack challenge or only require girls to finish off class-work. Inspectors found that generally homework was set regularly but that there was some inconsistency in its quality. Younger girls, particularly, would benefit from more guidance about how to use their homework time effectively. Parents are very pleased with the quality of the annual reports but some would value more regular information about how their daughters are progressing. The inspection team found that the school had worked hard to provide very informative annual reports and had established a good system of regular communication with parents via the homework diaries. The school makes good efforts to encourage parents to contact staff if they require any additional information about their daughter's progress. Parents' attendance at parents' evenings is monitored. Although attendance rates are very high, the few parents who do not attend are offered alternative meetings with staff. Some parents feel the school could work more closely with them. However, the inspection team found that the school is well aware of the importance of working closely with parents. It makes good efforts to involve parents in the work of the school; for example, through the home school agreement and special evenings for parents on curriculum issues or girls' welfare. There are regular newsletters and many social events for parents and girls. The school encourages parents to contribute to the work of the school; for example, parents give talks about their careers and their work in the community.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards of attainment are consistently very high, especially at GCSE and A level.

1. Generally, standards of attainment are very high at all levels.
2. Girls' results in the national tests for 14 year olds are consistently very high in English, mathematics and science in comparison with the national average. In comparison with similar schools, the 1999 results are very high in English, well above in science and above average in mathematics. Taking all three subjects together, results are well above the average for similar schools and have risen over the last three years in line with the national rate of improvement.
3. The school's results at GCSE are very high in comparison with all schools. Girls' attainment places the school consistently in the top 5% of all schools nationally. In many subjects, all girls attain A*-C grades. The percentage of girls attaining A* is very high in comparison with schools nationally. The school's GCSE results are also above those of other selective schools – in 1999, 99% of girls attained five or more GCSE A*-C in comparison with an average of 94% for selective schools nationally. GCSE results have risen over the last six years broadly matching the national trend of improvement. The school has met its GCSE targets for the last two years. The GCSE average point score for 1999 was in line with that of similar selective schools. The school is seeking to improve this comparison by increasing the number of GCSEs girls take from 2000 from nine to ten subjects. It has set itself appropriately high targets for the future, based upon a detailed analysis of girls' prior performance.
4. GCE A-level results in terms of both grades A-E and the average point score for girls are also very high in comparison with all schools and place the school in the top 5% of all schools nationally. The school's A-level results are also above the average performance of girls in selective schools, nationally. The percentage of girls gaining the higher grades of A and B is well above the national average and above that of girls in selective schools. A-level results have improved steadily since the last inspection in 1994.
5. During the inspection the standard of the work seen lessons and in girls' books reflected the very high attainment gained in external examinations and tests. Very high standards well above what might be expected for pupils of similar ages were observed in a number of subject areas at all levels. In English, many examples of high quality written work were observed. Girls' spelling and grammar are generally excellent and their work is well planned and structured. Girls write with confidence using mature vocabulary and a variety of appropriate literary styles. Their imagination and creativity are well demonstrated as was seen in an amusing version of *Adrian Mole's Diary* written in the style of Chaucer. Girls' reading skills are also very good and this enables them to make use of a wide variety of resources. This high level of literacy was observed across all subjects and throughout the age range, making a significant contribution to the high standards girls generally attain. In the sample of work seen in science, it was clear that girls of all ages have a secure, detailed knowledge and develop their independent research skills very well. In samples of mathematics' work girls' attainment across all aspects and in all years was judged at least

high and sometimes exceptionally high. In general, girls have a very good grasp of numeracy and use it very effectively to support their learning in other subjects.

6. In many of the lessons observed, girls were very articulate, enjoying productive discussions and debates, based on very good knowledge of the subject matter, as was observed in a Year 13 English lesson on *The Taming of the Shrew*. Here, girls were developing their ideas by exchanging their opinions with each other in order to construct their arguments. Such skills were also evident in a Year 12 history lesson where girls drew upon their detailed background knowledge to engage in a high level debate about the impact of Calvin's Genevan Reformation. In a Year 8 French lesson, girls tackled conversation text in role very confidently, using accurate pronunciation of familiar and new vocabulary and utilising appropriate expression.
7. Girls were also observed reflecting upon their work with insight and understanding. For example, in a Year 10 science lesson, girls were observed discussing their work on measuring acceleration, identifying the errors which needed explaining and how they would deal with anomalies in their results. In a Year 12 media studies lesson, girls critically evaluated their projects and clearly explained how they had tackled their difficulties. In mathematics, girls used mental calculations very confidently and competently supplied answers to abstract questions. In a Year 13 lesson on linear transformation, girls asked questions about how different approaches might be used showing high levels of understanding. Year 8 girls demonstrated a very good grasp of key terms in their work on reflection and could make predictions based on their previous learning.
8. Girls make very good progress whilst at the school. They enter the school with attainment levels that are much higher than the national average though the range of attainment is generally broader than typically found in grammar schools. However, the results girls attain at GCSE and GCE are mostly above those of similar schools, reflecting the considerable gains girls make during their time at the school. This is due to a number of factors - some very good teaching which meets the full range of girls' needs; the strong pastoral support provided for the girls and some effective academic support. For example, there are clear signs of sustained improvement in the quality of girls' written work from Year 7 to Year 11. Errors are corrected and girls clearly learn from their mistakes. In Year 11, a smaller teaching group has been organised to support some girls' difficulties in English. Girls can also seek help with their mathematics through "MathAid", a support group run by sixth formers. Additionally, there is some well targeted teaching in Key Stage 4 mathematics to address girls' needs for the differently tiered GCSE papers. Across most subjects, higher attaining girls are very well challenged, as was exemplified in a Year 12 German lesson where a wide range of interactive resources was effectively used by the teacher to fully extend girls' learning. In a minority of lessons observed, standards were not as high as they might have been. This was evident where girls were not sufficiently encouraged to extend their learning such as in a Year 9 science lesson on muscle function where the task set only reinforced girls' previous knowledge.
9. The senior managers and governors of the school are very focussed upon raising standards. They analyse the school's examination and assessment results very carefully, comparing its standards with those of other high attaining schools. Senior managers also monitor girls' performance regularly against teachers' predictions and the girls' prior

performance. These strategies play a significant part in the school's continued success as they enable the school to identify areas for improvement and development. For example, resources are deployed or staffing changes are made to improve a subject's performance. Another outcome is the recent decision to enter girls for more GCSEs so that the school's average point score can compare more favourably with that of similar schools.

10. Senior staff and governors are not complacent about standards. They know the girls come to the school with levels of attainment which are above average but they are determined to ensure the school adds value to girls' attainment and that they make effective progress. Girls are expected to work hard and aim high. For example, in the sixth form, girls are set challenging targets above what might be expected. Teachers are also expected to play their part. For example, the senior management team is developing a database so that each teacher can consider girls' individual performance across the full range of subjects throughout Key Stages 3 and 4. This has the potential to help all teachers analyse girls' attainment on a more regular basis and to intervene to support girls when difficulties arise. Throughout the school, there is a strong work ethic which promotes high achievement and ensures the girls make very good progress. This stems from the very clear direction set by the school's senior managers and governors to raise standards. This is both acknowledged and valued by parents.

A high proportion of teaching is very good, effectively focusing upon the promotion of high standards and very good quality of learning.

11. Overall the teaching and learning observed in the school was very good. All teaching seen was at least satisfactory. It was very good or excellent in 38% of 58 lessons seen and good in a further 34%. Some exceptionally good teaching was seen in English, modern foreign languages, history, media studies and physical education.
12. Generally, the high quality of the teaching has a very positive impact upon girls' learning and the standards they attain. This was particularly evident where teachers used their subject knowledge and infectious enthusiasm to challenge and inspire girls to deepen and extend their understanding in detailed discussions, problem solving and investigative activities.
13. Such knowledge enabled teachers to select a variety of interesting resources to stimulate girls' learning as occurred in a Year 13 English lesson on *Sense and Sensibility* where the teacher used material which challenged girls' assumptions about the novel and caused them to reassess their opinions. In a Year 9 technology lesson on electronics, girls responded enthusiastically to the teacher's skilful use of a variety of computer-based resources to help explain circuits.
14. Teachers also used their subject knowledge to develop girls' responses by skilful questioning, as was observed in a Year 11 geography lesson where girls were required to explain how they used an Ordnance Survey map to identify why land might be used for different purposes. In a Year 7 science lesson, the teacher encouraged girls to develop their answers about the life style and habitat of animals by drawing upon their own knowledge and also ensuring they utilised the correct technical vocabulary in their explanations.

15. A particularly effective feature of the teaching observed was the opportunities teachers provided for group and paired work which encouraged girls both to collaborate effectively and develop their independent learning skills. Girls are given good guidance about how to learn from each other and how to work successfully in teams. As a result they make real progress in this way of working. Three examples observed during the inspection illustrate this progress: girls in a Year 7 geography lesson were helped to organise a traffic survey by the teacher; in English, Year 11 girls were working effectively in groups to make presentations about the novel 'To Kill a Mocking Bird', with the teacher providing well timed interventions prompting girls to consider wider options; by Year 12, the media studies group was very competently operating as a full scale production team for a teenage magazine.
16. Teachers generally use time very well in lessons and have high expectations of what girls might achieve. This was typified in a Year 7 physical education lesson. At the start, girls were expected to take turns in planning and leading a sequenced, vigorous and well co-ordinated warm up session for the whole class. The lesson then proceeded at a very brisk pace. Girls were taught, by demonstration and experiment, a series of detailed athletic movements covering sprinting, hurdling and the triple jump. The teacher encouraged all the girls to succeed and gave the girls confidence, so that although the tasks set were very challenging, all girls carried them out to a high standard. Occasionally, lessons proceeded at a rather slow pace with girls not making as much progress as they might. This was observed in a Year 13 psychology lesson where too much time was spent on looking at examination techniques in isolation from examination questions.
17. Most lessons observed were well planned, with clear learning objectives that were shared with the class. A good example of such planning was observed in a Year 9 French lesson where the teacher took the class through a sequence of activities designed to combine girls' prior learning within a new context. Girls were very clear about what was expected of them and remained fully engaged throughout the lesson, feeling confident and enjoying applying their knowledge. However, sometimes, girls were not always clear about why they were carrying out tasks, as was observed in a Year 7 mathematics lesson on rotational symmetry.
18. Teachers generally prepare thoroughly, selecting resources and devising tasks to stretch and stimulate girls' thinking and meet the needs of all in the class. For example, in a Year 13 technology lesson where girls were working on their coursework, the teacher provided the appropriate individual support, equipment and materials to ensure all girls made effective progress.
19. Homework is set regularly but during the inspection, there was some inconsistency in its quality – an issue raised by some parents. Some homework appropriately enhanced class-work. For example, girls in a Year 10 English group studying two different versions of a writing genre were given ample scope to extend their learning by composing their own story plans using the elements explored during the lesson. On other occasions, girls were required to finish off class-work. For example, in a Year 7 mathematics lesson, girls who finished their classwork, started their homework in the lesson. As a result, those girls who worked at a slower rate had more homework. Discussion with girls revealed that the younger ones, particularly, felt this type of homework was unfair. Girls also felt they needed more guidance about how to manage their homework as some took much longer

than the allocated time to complete.

20. When the school was last inspected, there was insufficient use of information and communication technology across the curriculum. The school has addressed this most successfully and the new technologies are now used very well in a number of subjects. In modern foreign languages, the interactive white board is used to exploit a wide range of resources to extend girls' language experiences. In technology, the variety of equipment, including computer aided design and manufacture, is utilised extensively to enhance girls' designing and making skills and to stimulate their creativity.
21. Many examples were seen during this inspection where teachers' planned use of information and communication technology enhanced girls' learning. One such example was observed in a Year 9 history lesson where girls were researching the lives of individual World War One soldiers from the local regiment. Girls were challenged to build up a dossier on their soldier (chosen from the town's war memorial) using both the website of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and paper-based materials. Girls then contributed their findings to the production of a class database about the local regiment, which could be interrogated for further research.
22. Teachers generally assess girls' work thoroughly and give useful feedback in lessons about homework and tests. Some particularly effective and rigorous marking was observed in girls' English books, where mistakes were noted and followed up. However, in other subjects, comments in girls' books are rather cursory and are not as helpful as they might be in acknowledging strengths and assisting girls to overcome difficulties. Most teachers assess girls' capabilities well in lessons and provide appropriate support and challenge. Significant learning points are frequently well emphasised to the whole class either orally or on the blackboard. One good example of this was observed in a Year 13 chemistry lesson where the teacher followed up a series of experiments by reaffirming girls' ideas and correcting their misconceptions. Occasionally teachers do not intervene enough to promote learning as occurred in a Year 13 biology lesson where girls were left to work largely on their own with little teacher involvement.
23. Several departments are working effectively to establish a common understanding about standards by developing portfolios of work which act as guides for assessing girls' work. Masterclasses and other liaison opportunities with primary schools are making good contributions to teachers' planning for continuity in girls' learning to build rapidly and smoothly on what they learnt in their primary schools.
24. A key feature of the high quality learning evident in the school is the ability girls show to assess their own progress and manage their own learning. Girls are frequently asked to reflect on their own achievements and critically evaluate their learning. They are also taught how to improve their own learning through note taking, drafting and correcting their own work. For example, in a Year 11 English lesson, girls were encouraged to independently annotate their own copies of a text as they listened to the class discussion and as the teacher drew their attention to important points.
25. Much of the effective teaching observed during the inspection occurred where teachers paid due attention to developing girls' key skills – those of communication, application of number, information and communication technology, working with others, improving their own learning and performance and problem solving. Teaching time was invested in

helping girls acquire, refine and apply these skills in a variety of contexts. As a result, girls were highly motivated; they responded positively and creatively to challenging tasks and made significant progress. Less effective teaching provided fewer opportunities for girls to utilise these skills and as a result they were more passive learners.

A positive, purposeful and supportive ethos prevails, where both the personal and academic developments of girls have equal priority. Values of trust, honesty, fairness and care for others are effectively promoted. Girls are encouraged to aim high and think well of themselves and others.

26. The school's aims place equal value on the promotion of girls' personal and academic developments. The school successfully fulfils these aims in many respects. Girls are encouraged to work hard and aim high, but not at the expense of supporting and caring for others. Throughout the school there is a very strong sense of community and shared values. There are many opportunities for girls to support each other, such as sixth formers acting as form prefects and older girls organising drama clubs for younger girls. Many girls demonstrate their consideration for others by instigating and carrying out their own charity appeals – during the inspection, two Year 10 girls, acting on their own initiative, set up a fast to raise funds for the street children of Guatemala.
27. The school does much to foster this sense of responsibility. Assemblies, lessons and extra curricular activities all contribute to girls' awareness and understanding of moral and social issues, their ability to play a part in society and their appreciation of their own culture and those of other countries and communities. Discussions with the girls revealed that they realise the importance of self-respect and respect for others and they acknowledged the efforts the school makes to treat everyone fairly. They also valued the support of their peers and the encouragement and scope the school gives to girls to take initiative, such as leading form and year group assemblies where they can focus upon social, spiritual or moral issues of their own choice. Girls know the difference between right and wrong and actively promote the values of honesty and truth in their school life. Girls spoke warmly of the secure, open and trusting atmosphere that exists in the school and appreciated the speedy efforts of staff to take action against anyone who breaks the school's moral code.
28. Relationships within the school are excellent. There is plenty of social interaction between staff and girls, particularly through the many residential experiences, educational visits, cultural events and sporting activities. For example, during the inspection, staff, girls and boys from a neighbouring school were enjoying rehearsing vigorously for a production of *Kiss me Kate*. Girls feel very well supported by staff and respond positively to each other when they work in groups or pairs. In many lessons, girls are encouraged to enter into dialogue with each other and their teachers to develop ideas and views. Several teachers skilfully create a climate of trust where girls can freely express opinions, as occurred in a Year 9 religious education lesson where girls were discussing death. The active junior and senior debating societies, run by the girls themselves, also contribute to girls' appreciation of other points of view.

The headteacher, governing body and senior staff provide strong and visionary leadership. They have a united sense of purpose and work very hard in seeking to provide the best quality education possible for the girls.

29. The school is exceptionally well led and managed. The headteacher makes an outstanding contribution to the continued improvement of the school. She is very well supported by dedicated, hardworking staff and governors. She has established a common sense of purpose which ensures that the school serves the needs of the community and which expects girls to aim high and achieve their best. The senior management team's individual strengths and areas of responsibility complement each other and combine to make a very effective management team. Their work is clearly focused upon raising standards and ensuring the highest quality of provision.
30. The headteacher provides a very clear vision of what the school should be. She spearheaded the school's application for technology college status so as to establish strong links with industry and to bring to the school facilities and resources of the highest quality. She rightly judged that this would enable girls to attain more highly across a broad range of subjects and aspire to challenging careers. She then encouraged the school to gain international status so that girls' horizons might be extended beyond their own environment. Additionally, she expects her teachers to know their subjects well and to teach them effectively. She invests heavily in professional development to ensure her staff are well qualified and motivated to promote effective learning. She spends a lot of time in classrooms, both informally and formally through a well established appraisal system. In this way she knows her staff and pupils well which helps her to plan strategically and make decisions.
31. Other senior managers provide excellent support for the headteacher. They effectively carry out their delegated responsibilities with thoroughness and dedication. The senior team have managed the numerous changes to the school most competently, always seeking to keep the girls' best interests at the centre of what the school does. Healthy, open and honest discussions are characteristic of the team's approach which means decisions are well founded and carefully thought through. A good example of this approach was the move to change the school day. The issue was well researched and discussed with governors, proposals identified and presented, consultations held with staff, parents and pupils, amendments made, action agreed and evaluation procedures identified.
32. The governors fulfil their statutory duties effectively. They provide astute, highly informed and constructively critical support for the headteacher and senior staff. The school benefits from their varied expertise and experience and their strong links with the local community.
33. Governors are actively involved in planning the school's development and contribute significantly to shaping the direction of the school. They review the work of the school through the analysis of examination performance, requesting and receiving reports from staff and, where possible, from evidence gained at first hand by visits to the school. As a result they know the school's strengths and weaknesses and are well placed to make decisions and take action. There is a very good working relationship between governors and the senior management team. They share the headteacher's vision for the school and play a significant part in sustaining the school's continued improvement.
34. This is well exemplified by the vigorous and determined way governors supported senior staff in tackling the improvement issues raised in the last inspection in November 1994. As a result nearly all of the issues have been well addressed. Good steps have been taken to

enhance further girls' personal development. Much of the school's work is now carefully monitored and evaluated by governors, senior staff and some subject leaders, though there is scope for a more rigorous evaluation of teaching. There is effective use of information technology across the curriculum. Teachers set tasks which are generally well matched to the abilities of all pupils and the provision for the most able is very good. The accommodation has been very much improved; judicious use of funds has ensured that there are excellent facilities, particularly for technology and science. The addition of a large all-weather area has effectively enhanced the physical education provision, though there are still limited indoor facilities about which the school is, rightly, still concerned. Religious education is now provided for all girls up to the age of 16, though none is provided for Year 13 girls. In addition, the very high standards in the end of Key Stage 3 tests and at GCSE have been maintained and A-level results have improved. The quality of teaching is much improved. Moreover, governors have clear short and long term plans to carry the school forward and are well placed to bring about further improvements in the school's provision and the standards girls achieve.

35. Standards of financial control and administration are high. Specific grants are used very effectively for their intended purposes, such as the development of the technology block as a centre of excellence. The school is well placed to apply the principle of 'best value' through its experience in detailed research of alternative courses of action and in its insistence on competitive tenders for goods and services. The level of funding per pupil is high in comparison with schools nationally. The school's resources are very well managed and used to the maximum benefit of the girls. Spending decisions relate well to the school's priorities for development.

The very strong pastoral systems ensure that all girls are very well cared for and extremely well supported.

36. Teachers know their pupils very well and respond to them positively, meeting their needs effectively. Pastoral staff meet very regularly to review girls' progress, making good use of the detailed records of girls' achievements. As a result, girls' difficulties are identified early and appropriate support is provided. This support is sustained throughout girls' time in school. Girls arriving new to the school such as in Year 7 and in the sixth form are sensitively supported, adjust very well and make very good progress. Outside agencies, such as the counselling services of the YMCA, are also used effectively to enhance the school's own provision. Parents value the efforts the staff make to ensure their daughters settle quickly. The great majority say their daughters like school and are very happy.
37. There is a strong sense of the importance of health and safety of the girls. This was well exemplified when Year 7 girls were carrying out traffic surveys in the streets around the school. The teacher gave the girls clear instructions about any potential risks and hazards and what to do if an emergency arose. He also ensured that an extra member of staff accompanied his supervision of the girls while they were outside the classroom. In physical education lessons, teachers carefully manage girls' learning, sometimes in the quite cramped conditions of the gym, without inhibiting girls' natural exuberance. Throughout the school, risk assessments are carried out meticulously and the child protection policies and procedures to ensure girls' health and safety are very good.
38. The school systematically reviews and amends its pastoral policies, often using

questionnaires to ascertain girls' views. Pastoral staff regularly attend inservice training to ensure that the school's policies and procedures are as effective as they might be. The school's development planning takes account of pastoral developments; for example, in 1999, the promotion of girls' self esteem was a key target for action. Special information evenings on girls' health and welfare are arranged for parents. These features reflect the high priority the school gives to fostering girls' welfare and safety.

The school's designation as a Technology College and International School gives it a distinctive character which is clearly evident in its broad, vibrant and innovative curriculum, much enriched by a wide variety of extra curricular activities.

39. The school's curriculum has many strengths and effectively supports its aims and values, successfully promoting girls' personal and academic development. The curriculum is both broad and innovative, providing girls with an unusually rich range of challenging academic and longer term vocational options. The inclusion of technology subjects, the effective integration of information communication technology, and the range and quality of the international links contribute markedly to girls' academic success and provides them with appropriate skills and contexts for their personal development and prepares them well for their adult and working life.
40. Since the last inspection, the school has carefully planned and developed its curriculum to provide more breadth and opportunity for girls. For example, German has been successfully introduced and there is now more varied foreign language provision; the range of technology options has been extended through exploiting fully the productive industrial links and enhanced facilities which came with the school's technology college status; subjects such as psychology, theatre studies and media studies are now part of the at A-level provision in response to a survey of girls' needs. The school is now planning to broaden girls' sixth form options by offering them a wide range of AS courses and it is expected that a significant number will take four full A-levels, in addition to general studies in Year 13. At the time of the inspection, as part of the school's international policy, all departments were planning activities for a week long International Fair including things such as video-conferencing with schools in different parts of the world.
41. In addition to the wide range of academic opportunities, girls also have good access to high quality extra-curricular activity, particularly in music, drama, sport and foreign exchanges. A variety of clubs, societies and events sustain girls' individual interests. For example, the Arkwright scholarship scheme and Young Engineers club set girls challenging problems to solve and enable girls to work alongside industrial engineers; girls produce a 'Links' magazine which has articles about other countries, partner schools around the world and the foreign experiences of girls and staff. Sixth formers are actively encouraged to take a 'gap' year before going onto higher education so that they might travel and undertake voluntary service abroad. Such enriching curricular opportunities ensure that girls' talents and attributes are effectively nurtured and fostered.
42. Overall, the school's curricular provision effectively meets statutory requirements and successfully promotes girls' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school makes good efforts to provide a daily act of collective worship, given the restricted size of the main hall. However, some form assemblies, whilst they provide good moral and social guidance, do not contain an act of worship and so do not meet statutory requirements.

Girls have a very positive attitude to the school. Their behaviour is excellent and they work very hard, showing initiative and taking responsibility.

43. Girls have very positive attitudes to the school. They work very hard in lessons, are highly motivated to succeed and play a full part in the life of the school. They respond very well to the opportunities which the school provides for them to take responsibility and show initiative. In a number of lessons observed, girls were asking questions to further their understanding. They were using their own background reading and preparation to contribute to the class discussion and were co-operating with each other to solve problems. Girls learn to take responsibility for their own actions and to help each other. Girls respond well to the opportunities provided to show initiative. For example, during the inspection, a sixth former was choreographing the dance elements for the school production. In their discussions with inspectors, girls commented upon how much they enjoy the inter-house competitions where they can organise and manage their own contributions.
44. The standard of behaviour is excellent and attendance is very high in comparison with other schools. Girls show a high degree of maturity and self-discipline both in lessons and around school. Parents are particularly appreciative of the school's expectations about behaviour and its efforts to help girls grow into sensible, considerate and responsible citizens. They value the ways in which their daughters readily do their homework, their keenness to attend school and their willingness to participate fully in school life.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Although the school monitors and evaluates much of its work very effectively, it needs a more methodical approach to its review of teaching so that strengths can be clearly identified and best practice shared more widely.

45. Much of the school's work and achievements is effectively monitored and evaluated by governors, headteacher and senior staff. As a result, strengths, weaknesses and priorities for development are identified and appropriate action is taken. Weaknesses are vigorously and appropriately tackled.
46. The school's process of self-evaluation includes monitoring the quality of teaching. There is a well-established system for appraisal of staff performance, and all teachers are required to observe someone else teaching. These strategies have been used effectively to help some teachers improve their teaching; and teaching is generally very good throughout the school. However, in order to improve the quality still further and ensure that teaching standards are as high as possible in all departments, classroom observation needs to have more structure and rigour. For example, observations do not always have a sufficiently sharp focus. The criteria used for observing teaching are not as clear as they might be in helping teachers as observers and observees to identify and explain strengths and weaknesses. In general, the most successful teaching practice could be more easily highlighted, and shared more widely by the adoption of a more systematic approach to observing teaching and its impact on learning .

Whole school development targets should be linked directly to the work of the

departments.

47. Overall, the school's processes for planning its further development are thorough and extensive. Priorities are identified from effective monitoring and evaluation of the school's progress and a strategic approach to meeting the school's needs.
48. However, it is not clear how some whole-school targets will be implemented by individual departments and individual teachers. The annual plan contains whole school targets and departments' targets. Some of the whole school targets are built into departments' plans, such as the integration of information and communication technology, but in general there is some lack of coherence between the two aspects of the school's plan. For example, the 1999/2000 whole school target to develop girls' self esteem only appears in one department's plan. It is, therefore not clear how each department will contribute towards this target, nor how individual teachers might address the issue. The 2000/2001 plan has monitoring the new assessment policy as a whole school target but few departments' plans make reference to this target by stating how they will monitor and evaluate their assessment strategies. In general, the planning process would benefit from some refinement so that whole school targets impact more directly on the work of departments.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

49. To continue the very good improvement the school has made, the governing body and staff should:
- (i) adopt a more methodical approach to its review of teaching so that strengths can be clearly identified and best practice shared more widely;
(see paragraphs 45, 46)
 - (ii) refine the school development plan so that more whole school targets are directly linked to the work of departments.
(see paragraphs 47, 48)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	59
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	29

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
17	21	34	28	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	560	269
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	24	0

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	1	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	9	2

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	13

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	14

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	3.6
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	0	112	112

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	111	111	111
	Total	111	111	111
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99* (100)	99* (100)	99* (100)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	98* (98)	99* (98)	96* (98)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	112	112	112
	Total	112	112	112
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (98)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

* One pupil was absent for the test.

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	0	112	112

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	111	112	112
	Total	111	112	112
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	99 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	46.3 (44.4)	90.7 (89.6)	95.7 (95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	60.5 (62.2)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0
	National	N/A

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	0	116	116

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	0	27.3	27.3 (29.4)	0	10.0	10.0 (6.8)
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 pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	0
	National		N/A

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	0	N/A
	National	N/A	82.5

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	0
Indian	15
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	808
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	56
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	7
Total aggregate hours worked per week	193

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74%
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	26
Key Stage 4	23

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	2,291,125
Total expenditure	2,153,155
Expenditure per pupil	2652
Balance brought forward from previous year	223,620
Balance carried forward to next year	361,590

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	829
Number of questionnaires returned	390

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	49	44	6	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	65	34	0	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	57	40	1	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	38	48	10	2	2
The teaching is good.	56	41	2	0	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	43	43	12	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	58	31	8	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	88	12	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	38	46	11	2	3
The school is well led and managed.	67	30	1	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	62	36	1	0	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	54	37	5	1	3