

INSPECTION REPORT

PLYMOUTH HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Plymouth

LEA area: Plymouth

Unique reference number: 113532

Headteacher: Mrs S Martin

Reporting inspector: W J Powell
3174

Dates of inspection: 24 - 28 January 2000

Inspection number: 184213

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

© Crown copyright 2000

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Grammar (selective)

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Girls

School address: St Lawrence Road
Plymouth

Postcode: PL4 6HT

Telephone number: 01752 208308

Fax number: 01752 208309

Appropriate authority: Governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr D Connelly

Date of previous inspection: 13 February 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
John Powell	Registered inspector
Gill Anderson	Lay inspector
Anne King	Team inspector
Marie Gibbon	Team inspector

The inspection contractor was:

Quality Assurance Associates Limited
Herringston Barn
Herringston
Dorchester
DT2 9PU

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Registrar
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	11
There is clear educational leadership and an expectation of high standards. There is a substantial base of good teaching that promotes effective learning. There is a strong culture of care and support running through the school. Pupils have excellent attitudes towards learning	
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	13
Some teaching could be more closely matched to the learning needs of the pupils Although standards in science are well above average, some pupils could make better progress. The school needs to plan more effectively for information technology across the curriculum.	
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	16
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	17

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This selective grammar school, located near the centre of Plymouth, has 761 girls aged 11 to 18, making it smaller than usual. The school is over-subscribed and has grown by almost 40 per cent since the last inspection in 1995, with the sixth form doubling in size and offering a wide range of subjects as a result of links with three other schools in the area. Pupils are drawn from over 60 primary schools in a wide area of Cornwall and Devon. Most pupils are white; only nine pupils come from families where English is an additional language. There are only two pupils on the school's register of special educational needs, a low figure; both have a Statement of Special Educational Need for physical impairment. Although the overall attainments of the girls at entry are well above average, the range of attainment on entry is markedly wider than that usually seen in grammar schools. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school that has maintained the high academic standards overall seen at the last inspection. There are many areas of strength across the school, particularly in terms of encouraging the pupils to do well, and the very positive way in which girls relate to the school. Although some teaching could provide a wider range of learning styles, most is good or better; many models of good practice already exist across the subject range. The headteacher, who is in her first year at the school, together with an active governing body, provide clear and positive educational leadership. The school knows where its weaknesses lie and has good plans to deal with them in the coming months. Overall, the school provides good value for money. The sixth form is cost effective in terms of the results that it achieves related to spending. This has improved as the sixth form has grown, and because of course links with other local schools.

What the school does well

- There is clear educational leadership and an expectation of high standards.
- There is a substantial base of good teaching that promotes effective learning.
- There is a strong culture of care and support running through the school.
- Pupils have excellent attitudes towards learning

What could be improved

- Some teaching could be more closely matched to the learning needs of the pupils.
- Although standards in science are well above average, some pupils could make better progress.
- The school needs to plan more effectively for information technology across the curriculum.

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 satisfactory improvement since the last inspection in 1995 and is well placed to improve further. Academic standards have remained high and have improved in line with national trends. The school's strengths in its pastoral provisions have been maintained. Progress on several of the key issues has been rapid since the appointment of a new headteacher last year. A programme of refurbishment and new building has improved the quality of the premises; this is still going on. The issues of health and safety noted in 1995 have been tackled appropriately. The opportunities for cultural, social and aesthetic development have been widened. A wide ranging programme of monitoring and evaluation by the headteacher and governors has been successful in identifying areas of strength as well as key areas for further improvement. The school now has effective systems for its strategic development, which underpin its targeting of financial resources. Statutory requirements for religious education are now met at Key Stage 4, and should be met in the sixth form from September 2000. The good teaching and learning practices evident in many lessons are still not disseminated between subjects as widely as they might be; not all middle managers monitor teaching sufficiently. The use of information technology within subjects has improved thanks to building and re-equipment programmes, but there is still work to be done before all teachers are confident and competent users of computers, able to deliver suitably challenging work in the subject.

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	n/a

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

At the end of Key Stage 3, national test results have been very high (in the top five per cent of all schools nationally) over the period 1996 to 1999, and rising in line with the national trend. In comparison with other grammar schools, the results overall in 1999 are very low (in the lowest five per cent of similar schools); English is below average, mathematics is well below average, whilst science results are very low on this measure. However, there is a markedly wider range of attainment at entry than in similar schools. Overall, the pupils' achievements are broadly in line with their prior attainments. The limited evidence available suggests that whereas English and mathematics add broadly average value between Years 7 and 9, the value added in science is below average.

The school's overall General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results at the end of Key Stage 4 have been very high in relation to all schools nationally over the period 1997 to 1999. The average points score in 1999 is in line with that for grammar schools. Achievements at GCSE in 1999 in English, mathematics and science are very high in relation to the pupils' Key Stage 3 test scores in 1996. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, girls tended to do better in English, French, geography, German, history, mathematics and religious education than in the other subjects that they took. In contrast, they tended to perform less well in art, design and technology, and in science.

At the end of their sixth form courses, the girls have obtained overall results in the General Certificate of Education at Advanced level (A-level) that are well above average for all schools nationally in each of the years 1997 to 1999. The students' achievements are good, with the girls' overall A-level results in 1999 being better than would be expected from their GCSE grades in 1997, although a number of individuals' results in physics and biology are below expected levels.

Work seen during the inspection at all levels reflects the standards seen in tests and examinations, with science showing a wider range of achievement than English and mathematics, although still well above national levels by the end of Key Stage 4. Standards in all subjects are enhanced by the pupils' strong literacy skills. Reading, writing, speaking and listening are all above expected levels at Key Stage 3, and are well above expectations at Key Stage 4. In particular, writing amongst older pupils is strong because it is taught carefully, with an eye for detail, whilst reading develops because of the careful coverage of analytical skills. Writing at Key Stage 3 is secure in terms of basics, but some pupils lack purposeful control of language in their writing. At all levels, imaginative reading and writing are less well developed than they might be. Subjects such as art, mathematics and geography show many examples of effective writing. Numeracy skills are good because of the high quality of work in mathematics, enhanced in a range of subjects. Information technology standards are below expected levels because of a lack of co-ordination between subjects and the limited facilities available until the very recent past. Whilst the small number of pupils with special educational needs, and those with English as an additional language, achieve appropriately, higher attainers in some lessons are not always stretched sufficiently.

The targets set by the school for future tests and examinations are demanding, yet realistic in that they take proper account of the abilities of the pupils concerned when they enter the school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Girls of all ages are proud of the school and its work, and show a very positive approach to their studies; success is valued.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. The high quality of behaviour leads to a very positive atmosphere for learning in the classroom. The rate of exclusions is low.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. There are warm and constructive relationships between pupils and staff, and between pupils of all ages. The contribution that the sixth form makes to the life of the school is an important one.
Attendance	Very good. Attendance is above average whilst unauthorised absence is well below average.

The pupils show an exceptionally high regard for the school, their work, each other and the staff. The girls of all ages form a living, thriving and highly supportive community. A major strength is the house system, run by sixth formers, which builds most effective links between girls of all ages. It is clear that even the youngest pupils feel involved in the life of the school, and they give many examples of how older girls have helped them to settle happily into the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

Only a limited sample of teaching could be observed, focusing on English, mathematics and science. Teaching is at least satisfactory in 87 per cent of lessons, good or better in 66 per cent, very good or excellent in 21 per cent, but unsatisfactory in 13 per cent, in part reflecting teaching other than by the usual class teacher at the time of the inspection. The overall quality of teaching in English, mathematics and science is good, although all three subjects show areas that could be improved; science shows the greatest variability in teaching quality, ranging from excellent to unsatisfactory. Teachers in all subjects have very good subject knowledge and use this to promote high standards. The best teaching across the subject range occurs when teachers plan for what, and how, pupils of all abilities should learn. Weaker teaching usually focuses on lesson content and, as a result, does not always meet the needs of all pupils. Overall, the teaching of literacy and numeracy is effective, but as there are no whole-school policies to promote the development of literacy, numeracy or information technology, the lessons from the best work seen are not being used to promote even higher standards across the whole of the curriculum.

The pupils are effective learners. The productive atmosphere in classrooms is a hallmark of the school, and the girls' questions show a commitment to improvement in their work. Concentration levels are high, and the overall pace of learning is very good.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Sound. The range of provision in the sixth form is a wide one because of joint teaching with two other schools. The curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 is broad, but there are some problems of balance and grouping.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The school is effective in meeting the requirements of the small number of pupils with special educational needs. However, the identification of such pupils could be more systematic.

Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The school meets the needs of such pupils appropriately.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provisions for social and moral education are very good; sixth formers in particular play an important part in the life of the school. Spiritual and cultural development are sound. Collective worship arrangements do not meet statutory requirements because of accommodation problems.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. This is a very caring school, where the pupils are well known to the teachers. Child protection arrangements are good. Health and safety concerns noted by inspectors in a workshop area were dealt with promptly.

The curriculum meets all statutory requirements, except for religious education in the sixth form. The large size of groups, particularly at Key Stage 3, and the lack of setting, contribute to the problems of matching work to pupils' needs in many lessons. Drama and personal and social education are under-represented at all levels. The planned new curriculum from September 2000 provides better balance between subjects, as well as improving provisions for personal development and fulfilling all statutory requirements. The strengths of the school's pastoral care arrangements, noted at the last inspection, have been maintained.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The governors and the headteacher provide very good educational leadership and vision. There is a clear ethos of achievement throughout the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. The governors are fully involved in the school's work, and play a major role in setting priorities for future developments.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. The headteacher and the governors have a very clear understanding of what works well, and what needs improving. Middle management shows more variation in reviewing the effectiveness of subjects.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The pattern of spending priorities matches closely the school's needs, drawing upon improved development plans. There are good arrangements for securing best value from spending.

The new headteacher has carried out a thorough review of the school's operations and many new initiatives are under way to deal with areas needing improvement. All of the findings of this inspection had already been identified by the school as a result of its own internal reviews. Improvements to infrastructure, such as the provision of computers, are well in hand, but the restricted nature of the site continues to cause problems for work in physical education. The increasing focus on the outcomes obtained by the school, and on comparative studies of spending patterns, mean that the school is effective in seeking best value from its decisions.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The high standards set by the school.• The good progress that pupils make over time.• The generally good standard of teaching.• The personal development of the pupils.• The behaviour of the pupils.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The amount of homework that is set.• The quality of information about the progress that the pupils make.• The limited range of extra-curricular activities provided.

Parents see this as a good school. The inspection team agrees with most of the positive views expressed by parents, although they feel that the variability in the quality of teaching within subjects could be improved. Whilst the basic arrangements for homework are sound, inspectors agree that these are not always being followed by teachers. Inspectors agree that reports could be improved; the school is already working on this. The team felt that the range of extra-curricular activities is a reasonable one given the very wide area served by the school and the reliance on public transport.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

There is clear educational leadership and an expectation of high standards.

1. The headteacher and governors demonstrate a clear commitment to ensuring that the highest standards are achieved by all pupils. Given the wider than usual nature of the intake, there is a good understanding of the idea of adding educational value over time. The new headteacher has made very good progress during her first year in the post. She has a clear view that the effectiveness of the school is best judged by the outcomes that it achieves, and is bringing a sharply analytical approach to bear. She has also undertaken a programme of observation of the work of all teachers in the classroom. As a result of this review, the headteacher has a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses, which have been shared openly with the supportive governors. New appointments to the governing body have brought fresh skills to its work. The recent reorganisation of governors' committees has emphasised a changing emphasis for governors' discussions, with a tighter focus on the impact that decisions have on learning and teaching in the classroom. There is a clear understanding that whilst there is much effective work going on in the school, the best practices - those that make for effective learning - are not yet evident in all areas.

2. The last report found shortcomings in the strategic management of the school. This is no longer the case. The current school development plan sets out a demanding set of targets to move the culture of the school towards one that is based on continual self-review. Appropriate steps are being taken to provide middle managers with the skills necessary to bring this about, for example in the observation of colleagues in the classroom or the analysis of performance data. The development plan now lies at the heart of the allocation of money. For example, the substantial shift in spending to provide better quality learning resources, particularly in information technology, is an important component of a longer term plan to increase the use made of individual learning in the classroom. Governors are becoming more familiar with comparative studies of both outputs such as test and examination results, and of inputs, such as analyses of costs. This is leading towards a clear evaluation of value for money in governors' decision making.

There is a substantial base of good teaching that promotes effective learning.

3. Effective teaching is not confined to a few subjects; all subjects sampled during the inspection showed lessons that were good or better. The major factor in determining teaching quality is the degree to which teachers plan their lessons around the learning needs of pupils rather than teaching tasks or syllabus coverage. The most effective lessons are those where the teacher has identified in precise terms what the pupils should know, understand or be able to do as a result of the lesson. For example, the plan for an excellent science lesson in Year 7 identified clearly the overall aim of the lesson, and then expressed this in terms of the more detailed learning outcomes that were required by the end of the session. Effective lessons see these learning objectives shared with pupils at the start of the lesson, or used to recapitulate previous work. For example, a Year 8 history lesson began with a clear statement of what was to be achieved over a series of three periods; the pupils had a clear picture of what they would be required to achieve. The final Year 11 English lesson in a series began with a brief but intense session of question and answer work that gave good support for pupils to clarify their understanding to date of the main themes of the book being studied, as well as checking on progress to date.

4. The use of question and answer work in the early stages is a common feature of successful lessons. It does not only serve as a reminder of what has gone before; it also sets expectations of a high pace of learning for the rest of the session. A Year 9 science lesson used closed questions to pick up the threads of earlier work; there was an insistence on the use of correct technical vocabulary and clear thinking. Gradually, the style changed towards more open-ended questioning - "What would you expect to see?" - as the lesson moved onto new work. Fired with a sense of enquiry, the girls started their own investigations. A similarly successful transition from revision to new work was also seen in a Year 11 mathematics group, where challenging questioning extended thinking so that girls were launched into further work with anticipation and evident pleasure.

5. Because teachers have thought carefully about what pupils should learn, successful teaching provides clearly focused tasks for pupils of all abilities. In the excellent Year 7 science lesson noted earlier, girls were grouped carefully, and each group given a different task that would provide appropriate stretch. The pace of learning in all groups was high because the work had been tuned to their needs. In other lessons, a common starting task is extended by skilful questioning. Thus a Year 8 religious education lesson on the Christian calendar developed the pupils' thinking by the use of challenging questions; the girls then added their own value when answering by posing further questions. The large size and mixed ability character of most groups at Key Stage 3 make it harder for teachers to target work effectively. However, the teacher of a Year 9 German class demonstrated thorough planning when providing different task sheets to pupils of differing abilities, and followed through with challenging questioning pitched at appropriately high levels. In such an atmosphere, all pupils made productive progress in their learning and remained focused on the work in hand since it matched their needs well.

There is a strong culture of care and support running through the school.

6. Pupils of all ages and their parents identify the pastoral and academic support for pupils as a significant strength of the school. This begins with the arrangements for entry into Year 7, when all pupils spend a day at the school. Staff visit primary schools to liaise over transfer. The focus of these discussions has been more on pastoral matters; information on curriculum coverage and attainments has been harder to gather systematically from the large number of schools involved. Although the school has now begun to build up data collection systems to track pupils' attainments over time, these are still at an early stage of development. None the less, form tutors and heads of year have a good knowledge of the pupils as individuals, and guide them supportively through the key decisions to be taken during their years at school. The school's arrangements for personal and social education are sound, and provide appropriate coverage of health and sex education, and of drugs awareness. They are being extended from September 2000 so that all pupils will have a weekly lesson. The quality of some of the work done in Year 11 personal and social education lessons is intellectually challenging and makes a significant contribution to their spiritual and moral development.

7. All pupils agree that the house system, run by sixth formers, is a major strength of the school. Houses contain girls of all ages, and provide a wealth of opportunities for promoting a strong sense of community, as well as giving senior students valuable experience of managing substantial events such as music or dance festivals. Pupils quoted numerous instances where they had received support from sixth formers via the house system, including dealing with work problems, social difficulties and general teenage worries.

8. There is a strong feeling that the school community values achievement. Girls want

each other to do well. Pupils value the reward system, based on commendations for good work and behaviour, and which contributes towards house points.

Pupils have excellent attitudes towards learning

9. Overall, the pupils' attitudes towards work are excellent. There is a quiet understanding of the school's academic expectations, which they share. A notable feature of almost all lessons is the way in which girls concentrate well on the work in hand. They are motivated to work, and on occasions, this means that they make progress in spite of weaknesses in teaching. Any conversation is almost invariably related to what they are doing. Pupils take an evident pride in their work, as in a Year 8 mathematics lesson on symmetry, where diagrams were neatly prepared with an effective use of colour and descriptions of their designs were written competently. The high quality of written work is a feature of exercise books and folders from pupils of all abilities. Notes taken in class are made as carefully as writing done for homework. Pupils react very positively to questioning by teachers, particularly when this involves a degree of challenge; they are not afraid to venture ideas of their own. For example, in a Year 11 history group working on the rise of Hitler, all but the lower attainers in the class answered and asked questions arising from a video extract. As a result, they developed a good understanding of how social and economic forces combined to affect the political situation, and consolidated their own knowledge from a range of other sources. Girls are persistent learners. In a Year 9 design and technology class, imperfectly cut angles were rejected by the pupils themselves before the teacher had seen them. They worked out why they had gone wrong, and tried again, this time successfully, rather than resorting to the tube of wood filler to disguise the mistake.

10. Behaviour in lessons is excellent and contributes to the calm atmosphere of learning that is a feature of most classrooms. Where noise levels rose, as in a Year 7 art group working enthusiastically on scratch paintings, a brief word from the teacher was sufficient to restore quiet. Behaviour remains good even on those occasions when teaching is ineffective and unchallenging. The low levels of bullying and exclusion, and the good attendance record, are further demonstrations of the high standards that pupils expect of themselves.

11. Relationships among pupils, and between pupils and staff, are excellent. A Year 9 pupil summed this up when talking about the good working atmosphere in the school: "It's not too competitive. Everyone helps each other". There is mutual respect, leading to a very adult level of conversation, for example during question and answer sessions. When the girls work in groups, they do so productively, sharing roles in a sensible manner. Moreover, they are keen to provide help in order that all members of the group understand what is happening. For example, a Year 11 physics lesson on motors saw pupils carefully explaining to each other why the home-made motor worked as it did, accompanied by much waving of hands to illustrate Fleming's left-hand rule. Older pupils put in considerable effort to ensure the success of activities such as house events or the school council.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Some teaching could be more closely matched to the learning needs of the pupils

12. Although the overall quality of teaching is good, a minority of lessons could be improved, given the very good work in other classrooms. At present, there are no effective systems to disseminate the best practice between and within subjects. Not all middle managers take a sufficiently active part in monitoring the work of their colleagues. The

commonest reason for weaker lessons is inadequate planning; this is also a feature of some lessons that are broadly sound overall. In such cases, plans tend to be lists of what the teacher intends to do, or the syllabus content to be covered; the focus is on teaching rather than learning. Almost always, such lessons are then marked by a predominantly lecturing style for most of the time. The involvement of pupils is limited to answering closed factual questions; as a result, their interest sometimes fades, the pace of learning drops and challenge disappears. Whilst the syllabus content has been covered, there is no certainty that pupils have actually learned anything.

13. Lessons do not always take sufficient note of the previous attainments of the pupils. For example, parents and higher attaining Year 7 pupils comment that some of the work in lessons is pitched at a lower level than they had been doing at primary school, particularly in mathematics and information technology. In part, this problem arises because the school has considerable difficulty in obtaining, sufficiently early in Year 7, information about what has been achieved at Key Stage 2 in the 60 or more primary schools involved. Whilst all pupils are visited in their primary schools in Year 6, discussion tends to focus on pastoral rather than academic matters. The school now carries out its own diagnostic tests early in Year 7, but the use made by these data by all departments is limited at present. Overall, subject teams could make more use of the wide range of national comparative figures that are now available for pupils at all levels.

14. In a minority of lessons, higher attainers are not sufficiently challenged. This occurs across a range of subjects. Whilst the root cause of this lies in insufficiently careful lesson planning, the way that the school groups pupils plays a part. There is no grouping by ability in Year 7, and thereafter, only mathematics teaches in setted groups. Pupils at both ends of the attainment spectrum speak of being able to make significantly better progress in mathematics once they move into groups that have a narrower ability range. Observation of lessons and examination of written work supports this view. Homework is not always being used effectively to provide appropriate challenge. Several cases were seen where homework consisted of finishing off work being done in class; this meant that higher attainers had little, if any, work to do at home. In one mixed ability lesson, where all pupils worked on the same task, higher attainers finished early; they were allowed to do their homework for the rest of the lesson, rather than having extra work that would stretch them in the classroom.

Although standards in science are well above average, some pupils could make better progress.

15. Whilst science results are well above average in the Key Stage 3 tests, and at GCSE, more detailed analyses show a tendency for some pupils to underperform in science relative to their other subjects. For example, at Key Stage 3, the gains made in science between Year 7 and Year 9 are somewhat below expectations for the school's intake. In contrast, English and mathematics add value at broadly average rates. When the pupils' individual GCSE results are analysed, many tend to do less well in science than in the other subjects that they take. In the sixth form, a plot of A-level grades against each pupil's GCSE performance shows underachievement by some girls in physics and biology; chemistry results broadly match expectations.

16. The curriculum time available for science is slightly more generous than usual at Key Stage 3, broadly average for Key Stage 4 dual science and in the sixth form, but more generous than usual for the one group in Years 10 and 11 following separate science courses. The length of lessons is appropriate for practical work at Key Stage 3, but can limit what can be achieved at Key Stage 4. Schemes of work are somewhat dated and focus on content rather than how they are to be delivered, although a new programme has been

introduced at Key Stage 3 which offers greater opportunity for individual learning. Pupils in Year 9 are still working on an older scheme.

17. The greatest variable in science is the quality of teaching; excellent work coexists with that which is unsatisfactory. There is no subject wide view on how science should be taught; too much is left to the individual teacher. Overall, the subject requires more cohesive management to ensure that what clearly works very well in some classrooms is promoted in all lessons. Teaching in science shows rather more of the weaknesses that are found in the school as a whole. Too many lesson plans concentrate on syllabus content and the sequence of teaching activities, rather than what pupils should know, understand and be able to do by the end of each piece of work. Nor are the teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve always sufficiently high, given their previous attainments. As a result, higher attainers in particular are not always being stretched sufficiently, for example through different or additional tasks. Whilst some teachers are skilled at asking open questions to promote understanding and challenge, others use questioning that is aimed at a more mundane factual level. There is a tendency for some teachers to talk too much, resulting in a lacklustre pace of learning.

The school needs to plan more effectively for information technology across the curriculum.

18. This was a key issue at the time of the last inspection. Whilst some progress has been made, the place of information technology across the curriculum is still not secure. In part, this reflects the limited access that pupils have had to computers until recent months. With rising pupil numbers, and therefore income, the school has been able to embark on a substantial programme of upgrading and extending facilities. This is still going on, but the basic infrastructure is now in place to make far more use of computers as a natural learning tool.

19. The standards of work seen at all levels are below those that would be expected given the school's entry profile. Some younger pupils comment that the work that they are doing at the school is still below the level that they experienced in primary schools. In contrast, others have had little experience of working with computers before joining the school. The present arrangements do not provide adequately for this range of prior attainments, since there is no clear assessment of the pupils' competence in information technology when they join the school.

20. Whilst the school's broad principle is that all subjects should be delivering information technology, there are as yet no detailed plans for how this should be achieved. For example, there is no clear picture of how pupils should make progress in using computers over time. As a result, the work of pupils in Key Stage 4 is not markedly different to that seen at Key Stage 3, particularly in terms of presenting information and modelling. The school has yet to develop plans for how key skills, including information and communications technology, will be delivered in the new sixth form curriculum from September 2000. The proposed new timetable structure from September 2000 should provide more appropriate opportunities for assessing the competence of pupils in Years 7 and 12.

21. The school is now starting to undertake an appropriate programme of staff training to ensure that teachers have the confidence and competence to use computers more effectively. It is also fortunate to have the services of an experienced computer technician, who is becoming more involved in supporting the pupils' learning. With more reliable equipment now being installed, the school is sensibly seeking to build up this role.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

22. As part of its planning to ensure that the already high standards continue to improve, the school should:

- (1) ensure that teaching in all lessons focuses more closely on learning through:
 - ensuring that middle as well as senior managers observe colleagues in the classroom in order to identify what works well, together with what is weaker, so that they share best practice across the school;
 - using data more rigorously to analyse strengths and weaknesses in teaching and to set clear and appropriate targets for pupils of all abilities; and
 - improving the quality of lesson planning and delivery so that the focus is on what pupils of different abilities are expected to know, understand and be able to do.
- (2) raise standards in science still further, particularly at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form, through more careful planning of courses and lessons, and improved teaching methods, reflecting the best work already evident in the department.
- (3) use the opportunities being created by the new National Curriculum and sixth form curriculum in order to promote higher standards in information technology across all subjects through:
 - identifying the attainments of pupils in the subject when they enter the school;
 - identifying opportunities within all subjects of the curriculum for the use of information technology;
 - ensuring that, over time, these opportunities provide a steady challenge to pupils and increase the pupils' competence in both depth and breadth; and
 - continuing to provide appropriate support to all teachers to enable them to be confident users of computers in their work.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	41
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	22

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3	18	45	21	13	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	598	163
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	35	n/a

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

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	9

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	45
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	27

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	6.4
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.0
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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	-	119	119

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	-	-	-
	Girls	116	117	110
	Total	116	117	110
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	97	98	92
	National	63	62	55
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	80	92	39
	National	28	38	23

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	-	-	-
	Girls	116	119	119
	Total	116	119	119
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	98	98	92
	National	64	64	60
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	80	92	39
	National	31	37	28

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	-	104	104

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	-	-	-
	Girls	100	102	102
	Total	100	102	102
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	96	98	98
	National	46	91	96

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	60
	National	38

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

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	-	54	54

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	-	22.5	22.5	-	6	6
National	17.7	18.1	17.9	2.7	2.8	2.8

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	6
White	753
Any other minority ethnic group	

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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)	41.0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 - Y13

Total number of education support staff	7
Total aggregate hours worked per week	234

Deployment of teachers: Y7 - Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.8
---	------

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	29.3
Key Stage 4	22.5

Financial information

Financial year	1998-1999
----------------	-----------

	£
Total income	1512427
Total expenditure	1482032
Expenditure per pupil	2139
Balance brought forward from previous year	0
Balance carried forward to next year	30395

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	761
Number of questionnaires returned	183

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	56	40	3	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	55	42	1	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	52	43	0	0	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	34	55	9	1	1
The teaching is good.	51	45	2	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	52	15	4	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	54	41	3	0	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	78	21	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	27	60	8	2	4
The school is well led and managed.	51	43	0	0	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	57	38	1	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	38	43	10	1	8

Other issues raised by parents

Where parents made additional written comments, most were supportive of the school. The comments provided further information on choices made in the above questionnaire; a small number of responses commented on the occasionally variable quality of teaching. This is borne out by observations during the inspection.