

INSPECTION REPORT

PLYMSTOCK SCHOOL

PLYMSTOCK

LEA area: PLYMOUTH

Unique reference number: 113537

Headteacher: Mr Andrew Parsons

Reporting inspector: Dr Barbara Hilton
3228

Dates of inspection: 28 – 31 March 2000

Inspection number: 184321

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 to 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Plymstock School Church Road PLYMSTOCK PLYMOUTH Devon
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Larry Speare
Date of previous inspection:	13 February 1995

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Plymstock School is an 11-18 comprehensive community school in Plymouth, much bigger than most, with a total of 1518 students, including 260 in the sixth form. Boys exceed girls in number by about 17 per cent, and the difference is most marked in Years 9 and 11. Nearly all of the students are white, which reflects the local communities; very few students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals, at about six per cent, is below the national average. The attainment of students entering the school has improved over the last few years. The attainment of students in Year 7 is a little above average, whereas the attainment of students now in Year 11 was slightly below average, overall, when they entered the school. The school is popular and oversubscribed. Since the time of the last inspection the roll has risen by ten per cent. Increasingly, more students live in Plymstock and fewer travel from across Plymouth. The proportions of students with special educational needs and with statements, at 7.7 per cent and 1.3 per cent, are both below average. The school is an enhanced specialist centre within Plymouth for students with communication disorders.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Plymstock School is a very good school and much improved since the last inspection. Leadership and management are outstanding. Students achieve well because teaching is very good. The school makes excellent use of assessment to focus support and to help each student to succeed. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The school raises students' achievements: they do well in lessons and examinations.
- Very good provision helps students to respond keenly: they are proud of their school.
- Skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology are developed very well and help students to learn in all their subjects.
- Teaching is very effectively focused on helping students to do their best.
- Monitoring and planning for improvement are very effective.
- Leadership and management are very strong and effectively promote high standards.

What could be improved

- Opportunities for reflection and collective worship by all students, and sixth formers' entitlement to religious education.

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 good improvement since it was last inspected in February 1995. GCSE results have improved at a faster rate than the national average. Teaching is much improved: at the last inspection it was sound with good features and now it is generally very good. Standards in English, science, information and communications technology, design and technology and modern foreign languages are higher. Generally good standards in other areas have been maintained. Religious education provision is improved at Key Stage 4. While aspects of religious education are included in sixth form general studies, not enough is included to meet statutory requirements. Opportunities for reflection and spiritual development are included in assemblies and some lesson topics but collective worship is not provided daily for all students. Outstandingly good leadership, and governors' high expectations and rigorous approach, equip the school well to improve further.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests, GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	B	A	A	C
A-levels/AS-levels	C	D	B	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

At the end of Key Stage 3, in National Curriculum tests in the three core subjects English, mathematics and science, students achieve well above both the national average and the average for similar schools, and better than at the last inspection. GCSE results, both overall and for five subjects at the higher grades, are well above the national average; they are improving at a faster rate than nationally. In 1999, GCSE results in science were very high relative to performance in Year 9, English results were good, but mathematics results dipped. They were not as good as in the previous year, because of newly introduced examination requirements (a timed task). GCSE results are well above the national average in English, double award science, information systems, design and technology, geography, French and physical education. Results in most other subjects are average or above, but in 1999 students did not do as well in English literature as in previous years. In 1999, A level results were above the national average. Students do well on GNVQ courses: they nearly all gain merits and distinctions. Results at A level are a little better than at the time of the last inspection. Results at the end of Year 9, at GCSE and at A level represent good added-value across each key stage.

In lessons throughout Key Stages 3 and 4, standards generally match or exceed national expectations, and are a little higher than at the last inspection. Students with special educational needs achieve well for their capabilities and keep up in their classes. In recent years, they have all left school with GCSE certificates. Students' literacy skills develop strongly. Work is very well presented and students write extensively in most subjects. Numeracy is well developed in mathematics and applied effectively across the curriculum. Students are very competent users of information and communications technology and use word processing, the Internet and graphical and other applications to assist their work in all subjects. Students' creative skills are well developed in art, drama, music and design and technology. Finished work in art and design and technology is often of a very high standard. Students communicate very well in modern foreign languages and their analytical skills are well developed in humanities subjects. Students achieve well in sixth form lessons.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students are highly motivated and participate well in all activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good.
Personal development and relationships	Students develop mature attitudes and respect for others. Relationships are very good.
Attendance	Well above average with little unauthorised absence.

Students are keen to do well. They concentrate hard in lessons and show strong commitment in projects and longer pieces of work. The library is well used and busy at break and lunchtimes with students enjoying studying. Behaviour is very good: students are friendly, courteous and considerate towards each other and adults. Sixth formers and older students show responsibility towards younger ones and are good role models. Students readily take initiative and contribute well to the life of the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

The quality of teaching is very good overall, promoting very good learning. In lessons, teaching is never unsatisfactory. In 93 per cent of lessons it is good or very good, in 47 per cent it is very good or excellent, and it is excellent in eight per cent. Learning follows a similar pattern. Teaching and learning in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are as good as in the school overall. Teachers are well qualified and use their knowledge very well to provide clear explanations and help students to understand. In modern foreign languages, teachers' own proficiency is well used to develop understanding and good oral skills among students of all abilities. In art, teachers' knowledge is promoting very high standards in students' work, evident in striking examples around the school. The key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology are very well taught in lessons in English, mathematics and computing and used by teachers to an unusual extent across the curriculum, so that students make frequent and effective use of their skills including, for example, computer applications in religious education and in Latin. Lesson planning is very good, so that students' interest and a good pace of learning are maintained. Expectations are high, for students of all abilities. Students with special educational needs are supported well. Humanities subjects, sociology and psychology (in the sixth form), give much opportunity for discussion and students contribute very well to their own learning. A good range of methods is used, with very effective use of learning resources. Students are very well managed and teachers make excellent use of assessment to plan activities and challenge students so that they do well. Homework is well used, on the whole, although there are a few lessons in which it is not set. Work is regularly checked, often with helpful comments to help students to improve.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. Subjects are well planned to foster effective and purposeful learning.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. Teachers know students well and provide good support.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Good, with strengths in moral and social development. Students' cultural awareness is fostered well. Spiritual development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its students	The school is very vigilant in health and safety matters. Assessment is excellently used to help students do well.

Schemes of work are very well planned and take account of the levels at which students are working. In English and the humanities, many opportunities for extended writing are provided. In mathematics, aspects of shape and algebra are developed at an early stage and provide a good foundation for more advanced work. In science, skills of investigation are developed well, alongside knowledge and understanding of different aspects of science. Design is a successful feature of design and technology in older years and, among younger students, presentation and making skills are effectively emphasised. Support for students with special educational needs is well planned by the learning support department. The range of courses in the sixth form is good and vocational opportunities are extended by local consortium arrangements.

Statutory requirements are met, except for the provision of daily collective worship throughout and of religious education for all sixth form students. Parents recognise that the curricular offer is very good. The school works in effective partnership with parents, who regularly sign their children's planners and some assist in the school, for example in the library and in the learning support department. The range of extra-curricular opportunities provided is very good. As well as sports, music and recreational activities, students have many opportunities to extend their subject knowledge and some sit extra GCSEs as a result of activities, for example, in statistics and modern foreign languages.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Outstandingly good. Raising achievement is at the heart of everything the school does. Strong teamwork ensures consistent approaches within a supportive and friendly environment.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very effectively; governors have high expectations and work closely with the school. Responsibilities are met, except for the provision of religious education (for sixth formers) and collective worship.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent. Monitoring of teaching, the curriculum and the progress of students is very effective.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. Governors have a keen sense of best value in decisions they take.

Excellent school planning and use of resources provide a very good climate for learning. Staff are deployed very well. Accommodation is adequate and, for the most part, of good quality but huts, used for mathematics, modern foreign languages and English, are deteriorating. Learning resources are well provided and very well used - computers, particularly. Review and evaluation are very well used in improving teaching, attendance and the curriculum.

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 progress their children make. • The behaviour, which is good. • Teaching, which is good. • They feel comfortable about approaching the school. • Leadership and management, which are strong. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework, which is set in variable amounts. • The timing of parents' consultation meetings.

Inspectors confirm the very positive views of parents, reflected in their questionnaire responses and by those (58) who attended their pre-inspection meeting with the registered inspector. Homework generally is set appropriately in all years. The school monitors homework carefully to develop a consistent approach; nonetheless, among some older groups of students there are days when little is set, although students are expected to do coursework. The school has a schedule of parents' meetings and in Year 8 the meeting is timed for late in the year so that there is discussion with parents before Year 9. However, some parents feel they have missed an opportunity to influence their children's progress before the start of the next school year.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The school raises students' achievements; they do well in lessons and examinations.

1. Students' results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 are well above average, relative both to all schools nationally and to similar schools. Overall, boys and girls achieve equally well at the end of this key stage; in 1999, boys gained slightly better results than girls in mathematics and science, although girls did better in English. Teacher assessments show above average attainment in other subjects and high standards in information and communications technology. The results of tests in the core subjects are better than at the last inspection and represent good added-value from students' attainment on entry in Year 7.
2. Overall, results in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) are well above the national average. In recent years, students have achieved well in five or more subjects at the higher grades (A*-C), with results which were well above the national average in 1998 and 1999. While, in 1998, results were also well above average for five subjects and for one subject across the full range of grades, in 1999 they were a little less strong; compared with all other schools nationally they were above average and in line with the average, respectively. Students achieve particularly well in science: in 1999, results were very high, relative both to all schools nationally and to similar schools. Results in English language were well above the national average, but they dipped in English literature in 1999. Results in mathematics were broadly in line with the average, but lower than in recent years because of newly introduced examination requirements (a timed task). Students achieve very well at GCSE in design and technology, French, geography, information and communications technology and physical education. Results are above average in most other subjects. Results were a little disappointing in 1999 in expressive arts and in religious studies, although in each case relatively few students were entered (compared with other subjects). In recent years, all students on the school's register of special educational needs have achieved well and successfully gained GCSE certificates. The school makes very effective use of challenging targets for improvement in GCSE results which, overall, are improving at a faster rate than is nationally the case. GCSE results represent good added-value from students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3.
3. Results in the sixth form were above the national average in 1999, both for the General Certificate of Education at Advanced level (A level) and for General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), in which most students gained awards with merits or distinctions. Students entered for other certificates (for example in text-processing) achieved a high level of success. Results in individual A level subjects fluctuate, almost always being average or above. Results in English, design and technology and science subjects are generally high. In 1999, boys achieved better than girls overall though, in other recent years, girls have done better than boys. Sixth form results represent good added-value from students' achievements at GCSE.
4. Standards in lessons throughout the school are generally a little higher than reported at the last inspection and are in line with or above national expectations. Students with special educational needs keep up with progress in their classes. In English, students achieve well from Year 7 in their writing, which is extensive, with good accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar. By the time they are in Year 11, students write well on books they have read and make effective comparisons, for example, between the film and the novel, *Of Mice and Men*. In literature work, students in faster sets use quotations very effectively. Among middle and slower sets, while students describe at length the books and poems they have read, they are less skilled in making comparisons and in criticism. At sixth form level, students sustain very long pieces of coursework and have impressive ability to analyse the use of language as, for example, Alex's use of language which reflects his ultra-violence in the *Clockwork Orange*. In mathematics, teachers plan the work so that students achieve well in algebra and trigonometry from an early stage. By the time they reach Year 11, students in slower sets competently calculate the surface area of a cylinder and, in faster sets, they work out algebraic problems

mentally. In science, students are proficient in practical work and their knowledge and understanding of different aspects of science develop well. By the end of Year 11, they explain results of their experiments in theoretical terms and evaluate their findings effectively. For example, students in a faster working group understood the effects of concentration on the acid/thiosulphate reaction and suggested how their experiment could be improved. In sixth form lessons in mathematics and science students handle abstract ideas competently.

5. Students achieve highly in information and communications technology. By the end of Key Stage 3, most are autonomous users of the school's high quality software, are capable of advanced spread-sheet work and create models to calculate and track market and monetary variables. In the sixth form, A level computing projects show a high standard of design and analysis of commercial computing applications. Through their work in religious education, as well as in their humanities subjects, students develop good analytical skills. Their depth of knowledge is in line with expectations and they use it well. For example, a group of Year 11 students working on prejudice and discrimination could draw on their knowledge of religious writings and link what religions say to contemporary examples.
6. In all subjects, well-planned schemes of work provide a rigorous and broad base for developing students' understanding. In design and technology at Key Stage 3, students document their work well, standards of presentation are high, making and design skills are good. Coursework at Key Stage 4 is extremely well thought out, with extensive use of information and communications technology. Finished products show the ability to research realistic and specific needs and to design acceptable solutions: achievement is well above average. Design work in the sixth form shows greater depth of research and understanding. Finished products, such as full-size furniture prototypes, show original thinking and efficient problem-solving to meet stringent specifications: standards are high. In art, students build systematically on their knowledge, understanding and skills, through exposure to high quality exemplar material. Standards in art lessons are higher than at the last inspection. By the end of Key Stage 4, finished work in both two- and three-dimensions is of exceptional diversity and scale. Sixth formers' personal studies are of exceptionally high standard. Students benefit from communication and visits with artists to discuss their work. In modern foreign languages, standards are better than at the time of the last inspection: students develop good oral skills and their written work is generally good. In music, students have good listening skills and above-average understanding of theory. Students' attainment in physical education is broadly average overall, although examination groups and individuals achieve highly. Teachers help students to relate their learning of sports science to their practical work, which helps to improve their performance, for example, in rounders and in soccer.

Very good provision helps students to respond keenly: they are proud of their school.

7. Students have very good attitudes to their work throughout the school, reflecting very good planning by teachers, which takes account of the levels at which students are working, and their interests. Good links with local primary schools assist them in settling into Year 7, and help teachers to build on what students already know.
8. At the time of the last inspection, students were generally well motivated. Their keenness and enthusiasm are more evident now as observed, for example, in Year 11 lessons when students were working on poems for GCSE English literature; in their enjoyment of mental arithmetic exercises at the start of a lesson on probability in mathematics; their rapt attention when learning about sedimentary rocks and fossils in science and the good team spirit and atmosphere of fair play in physical education. Students with special educational needs respond well in small groups and to the individual help they are given. They trust the learning support staff and this gives them confidence. Students throughout the school co-operate very well with each other and their teachers. Relationships are very good. Students are encouraged to give answers to the class and they become confident in explaining their views, leading to good discussion as, for example, in a Year 9 geography lesson about the value of the National Parks. Group work is a strong feature and assists their learning and social development very effectively in many lessons. In a Year 11 drama lesson, discussion in groups assisted students in improving their characterisations for GCSE practicals. In the sixth form, students are helped to develop an historical approach by presenting information and argument to the class, as in explaining issues about the Third Reich. In modern foreign

languages in the sixth form, dialogue among pairs of students helps them to develop clear and fluent expression.

9. The curriculum has good breadth and balance across Key Stages 3 and 4. Students readily apply their skills and understanding in all their subjects. For example, their ability to write at length, fostered in English, is reflected in their work in humanities subjects. Most striking, is the readiness with which they use information technology skills throughout the curriculum: they respond excellently to the school's good facilities and opportunities which teachers provide. They organise material and research effectively, for example, in history, geography and religious education. Students make very good use of facilities for private study. At lunchtimes, the library is full of students working on their own and using reference materials. Many students come into school early to use computers. Some give up their own time to attend a statistics club (and successfully enter for GCSE), or stay after school to study an extra modern foreign language. Extra-curricular activities provide opportunities for extra learning in most subjects, improving skills in sports (including sailing) and performance in music.
10. Behaviour is very good, generally, and often impeccable in lessons. Students with special educational needs behave very sensibly when using commercial software programs to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, and in group work. Students are courteous and respect the views of others. In practical subjects, they work safely and carefully. They develop very good patterns of working in ceramics. Attendance is well above average, and unauthorised absence is below average. The number of students excluded for a fixed period is broadly average for the size of the school, but no student has been excluded permanently in recent years: the school does its best to provide for all its students. Discipline is very good: students respond very well to the school rules and code of conduct. At the time of the last inspection, the school was described as orderly, and it remains so now. Bullying was not a problem then, and this is still the case. Ethical issues are explored in many subjects. Teachers are excellent role models. Overall, moral development is very good.
11. Students develop mature attitudes as they progress up the school. They have many opportunities to take responsibility and develop initiative – for example, on reception duty, through work experience, performing in concerts and drama productions, in longer pieces of coursework and projects, participating in house activities, the school council, the Ten Tors expedition and, for sixth formers, their *Senate*. A good programme of visits to support students' learning in modern foreign languages also helps to broaden their horizons and cultural understanding. The programme is strengthened by links with schools in Germany, France and Canada. Parents, at their meeting, praised the range of extra-curricular activities. The good range of literature studied in English, topics in humanities subjects, together with very good contextual work in design and technology, and in art, help to cultivate students' awareness of the richness of other cultures. Through work in English, the humanities and in creative subjects, students have opportunities to reflect on deeper meanings and universal issues. For example, Year 8 students reading Shelley's poem, *Ozymandias*, concentrated hard on the words and reflected well on its message. Approaches in religious education provide many opportunities to reflect on the meanings of religious writings in contemporary life. At whole-school level, awareness of students' spiritual development is good: for example, students have opportunities to sponsor the education of young people in other countries and assemblies, which each student attends twice each week, take account of the Christian calendar and provide opportunity for reflection. Opportunities are frequently missed in early morning form times to cultivate spiritual development although, overall, students' spiritual development is satisfactory.
12. The general atmosphere in the school is friendly, harmonious and purposeful. Students like the school and respect its high expectations. Through their very good attitudes they contribute well to the very good climate for learning. Students are proud of their school.

Skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology are developed very well and help students to learn in all their subjects.

13. Literacy is very well promoted. The generally good standards reported at the last inspection have been maintained and students' written work is improved. In English, students develop a good vocabulary, and learn to write accurately and extensively; these skills are reflected in their work across the curriculum. Effective emphasis by teachers on key words and on the use of language helps students in all their subjects. Year 7 students, in a slower class in geography, were helped to develop their map-reading skills by the teacher's continual emphasis on vocabulary. Precise use of words by teachers in mathematics helps students to work accurately as, for example, in work on shape and dimensions by Year 11 students. Good standards in literacy assist students' achievement in humanities subjects, so they make apt comments and realise that words do not always mean what they say. Students with learning difficulties make very good progress in reading and spelling through regular use of a commercial software program. Regular reading practice for small groups of students on the school's register of special educational needs helps them to improve the fluency of reading, their expression and understanding of text.
14. Numeracy is well promoted in mathematics, as at the time of the last inspection. Regular revision of basic arithmetic with younger students helps them to remember the rules. Effective use is made of computer programs to reinforce understanding: younger students enjoy the repetition and constant feedback they provide. Students have opportunities to enter *Maths Challenges* in which many do well. Numbers and graphs are regularly and effectively used in other subjects. For example, in religious education, Year 8 students coped well with simple statistics, when learning about the charity, *Christian Aid*. In science, numbers and graphs are frequently used, as in a Year 11 class studying radioactive decay. Students have practice in using numbers in geography, and in accurate measurement and using graphical skills in design and technology.
15. The development of students' information and communications technology skills is outstandingly good, especially through timetabled lessons in Key Stage 3, good opportunities across the curriculum and very good access to high quality software. Use of computers across the curriculum has improved greatly over the last few years as the school has improved facilities. Students rapidly become autonomous users. They successfully use their skills in presenting their work, including in English (such as an account of the animals' rebellion in *Animal Farm*, in a classroom newspaper, *The Daily Manor*), in science (to represent results and plot graphs), and in their design and technology coursework projects (including an outstanding example of a design and make project for a decorative jewellery cabinet for GCSE). They are encouraged to use a variety of applications, including spreadsheet work and the Internet for research. Students use e-mail in many subjects. Memorable examples include its use to communicate their Latin homework and to learn about other faiths in religious education.

Teaching is very effectively focused on helping students to do their best.

16. Overall, the quality of teaching at Plymstock is very good. In the lessons observed, all teaching was satisfactory or better. In 93 per cent of lessons teaching was good or better, in 47 per cent of lessons it was very good or better and it was excellent in eight per cent. The very good teaching is reflected in the very good quality of learning. Teaching and learning are both much improved since the time of the last inspection, when they were judged to be sound with good features. Several outstandingly good teachers have been recognised nationally, for example, as regional finalists in *Teacher of the Year* and as a national finalist for *Contribution to School Leadership*. Overall, teachers manage their classes well. Relationships are very good. The climate for learning is purposeful, well-ordered and friendly.
17. Teachers make very good use of their knowledge to give clear explanations, so students understand concepts (for example, in mathematics), develop critical skills (for example, in studying literature in English), research skills (as in the humanities) and good speaking and listening skills (as in modern foreign languages). Art teachers' excellent skills and understanding of two- and three-dimensional art, including ceramics, promote high standards among students: art work around the school is strikingly good and examples have been displayed at the Tate, St Ives. Planning, and the range of methods used, effectively promote very good learning. Lessons are very purposeful. Very effective use is made of time and the

variety of activities provided successfully maintains students' interest. Students participate actively. For example, they frequently explain their reasoning and explain solutions to problems on the board in mathematics. Teachers make excellent use of learning resources, including video (as in a geography lesson with Year 9 students, learning about the impact of tourism in Kenya), overhead projectors (as in the display of graphical calculator functions, in a Year 11 lesson in mathematics), and the work of local artists, as well as visits to their studios (in art).

18. Expectations are high throughout the school. This was a feature noted at the last inspection, and remains a strength now. In science in Year 9, for example, students in every set are challenged to think. In a slower class observed, students made good progress learning about the properties of metals through the teacher's clear instructions and well-focused questions which made them think about the results of their experiment. In a middle ability class, after an experiment on the diffusion of gases, students were challenged to think in terms of particles and made very good gains in learning about the kinetic theory. A faster working group in the same year responded very well to a complex project about the energy needs of a small island. Students confidently presented their findings to the rest of the class: excellent learning resulted from the teacher's excellent use of subject knowledge to challenge the class to research, apply their scientific knowledge, analyse and discuss their findings. In design and technology, expectations of design and finish are very high, and students respond very well, developing good practical skills and producing excellent products, including dressing-table mirrors and storage units, by the time they are in the sixth form. In art, the teachers' high expectations and very good planning assist students in incorporating a wide range of reference materials into their personal studies. Students learn well and there are examples of high standards in all years. Art coursework in the sixth form, based on first hand observation at the Plymouth National Marine Aquarium, was exceptionally good, and extremely well presented and illustrated.
19. Teachers use assessment information very well, in planning work and helping students to learn. The grouping of students according to the pace of their learning works well. Teachers plan work appropriately and have extra activities available in lessons to match individual needs. Teachers focus very well on assessment criteria, so students know how to improve their results. In English in a Year 9 lesson, for example, the teacher's explanation of assessment criteria helped students to consolidate their learning about how to analyse a writer's use of language. In a Year 13 performing arts class rehearsing their A level practical, the teacher's excellent focus on examination criteria was assisting students to develop complex ideas into a coherent structure: they learned to use space well, come in on cue, plan the lighting arrangement and justify what they were doing. Work is appropriately planned by the learning support department for students with special educational needs. Learning support staff help students with communication disorders to organise their work and break this down into small steps so that they cope calmly and keep up in their classes. Subject teachers are informed about their needs and contribute written reports on their progress in time for the reviews of students' individual education plans. Systematic planning and target-setting by subject teachers to help students with special educational needs is not consistent across the school. As a result of a curriculum review within the school, this has been identified as an area for development.
20. Marking is good, on the whole. Students' work is regularly checked. Teachers often add helpful comments to help students to improve. Homework is regularly set for most classes, although among older year groups, when students are preparing coursework, it is sometimes missed. Homework is built into the scheme used for mathematics and the regular short practice after lessons helps students to improve. A small minority of parents, replying to the parents' questionnaire, recognise that sometimes too little – or too much – homework is set. The school monitors homework to improve consistency.

Monitoring and planning for improvement are very effective.

21. Monitoring and planning for improvement are strengths of the school and contribute very effectively to the consistently high standards of teaching, curriculum planning and the progress of students. A regular programme of lesson observations provides feedback to individual teachers on their performance. Senior staff, heads of departments and heads of year are all involved in observing lessons. Improvements which have resulted include better lesson

planning and use of time, and awareness of strategies to raise boys' achievement. In-service training activities are focused on areas of greatest need. An overall staff development plan complements the school development plan. The school values its staff and their development and has devised training programmes with accreditation at Masters' level, for staff with management responsibilities. One teacher is recognised as an Advanced Skills Teacher. Continued training for all staff in the use of information and communications technology helps to maintain very high standards in this area. Appraisal is in place and the school development plan includes the setting of performance targets for senior and middle managers.

22. The curriculum is regularly reviewed. Each department works with a member of the school management team to review a key stage each year. The reviews are thorough and include lesson observations and analysis of students' work. Most recently, the sixth form has been reviewed to inform changes which are necessary because of the introduction nationally of new courses. Review of the learning support department is strengthening planning for students by subject teachers. The English department has responded well to the dip in GCSE literature results in 1999: more time is spent on literature, a mock examination has been introduced and choice of texts carefully monitored. In GCSE mathematics in 1999, students took the timed task and were disadvantaged by the marking system which affected the overall results. After vigorous appeals no concession was made, so this year students are following a coursework option and their predicted grades are better.
23. The monitoring of students' attainment, with review of progress and setting targets for improvement, is outstandingly good. Form tutors and heads of year have a very effective overview and discuss with subject colleagues the progress of individuals in their classes. Targets are set for students' achievement, by class and individually, using predictions based on the results of earlier tests and knowledge of students' progress. Analysis shows that overall, across each key stage, the school achieves good added-value. The school is very open in its use of information and shares with students their assessment levels and probable grades. They respond well to this and generally try to do even better. Plans are in hand to strengthen the use of targets for each subject by every student.

Leadership and management are very strong and effectively promote high standards.

24. The headteacher is an outstandingly good leader; his strong leadership was recognised at the time of the last inspection. With the very strong support of senior and middle managers he has established management systems which very purposefully promote high standards, within a supportive and friendly environment. Arrangements for monitoring and planning for improvement promote good consistency in all areas. Raising achievement is at the heart of everything the school does. Questionnaires of students' and parents' views show that students understand the school's high expectations: 71 per cent of parents replying to their questionnaire strongly agree that the school expects their child to work hard and achieve his or her best (and nearly all other parents tend to agree with this statement). Parents also feel that their children like school, and that the teaching is good. During the inspection, students were keen on learning, friendly and courteous. They are happy and proud of their school.
25. Governors have high expectations. They have fully supported the school in its drive for improvement, through recognition at national level as an *Investor in People*, *Investor in Careers* and its award of the *Curriculum Award*, *Charter Mark for Excellence* and *Sportsmark*. Governors' good working relationships with the school were reported at the last inspection. They know the school well and have a good sense of its strengths and weaknesses. They monitor the work of the school systematically, receive curricular reviews, presentations by departments, are involved in school development planning and have development priorities of their own. Through particular responsibilities they take a keen interest in the work of departments, in the progress of students with special educational needs, in accommodation, personnel and the budget. They have a keen sense of best value. In the last year, governors agreed to match the funding spent by any subject department on the purchase of textbooks. Through this decision they augmented the book stock significantly and reduced photocopying costs. Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities, except those regarding collective worship, because this is not provided daily, and religious education, which is not provided in the sixth form. In all other respects the governors are very effective and strongly supportive of the school.

26. The school uses its resources very well. Teachers work hard – the number of hours they are in front of classes is higher than in most schools – but they are well supported by faculty assistants and learning resources staff. Classroom assistants are very effective in supporting students with special educational needs, both in the learning support department and subject classrooms. The resources for students with special educational needs are fully and effectively used: students make good progress. Office staff and library assistants are unfailingly helpful to students and staff. Parents assist in several areas. The school has planned expenditure on learning resources very carefully and students benefit from excellent computer facilities, a very good library, and good availability of textbooks. Annually, the governors save a little of the income of the school and they accumulate a small amount of capital to put towards substantial projects.
27. At the time of the last inspection, a building programme was in hand and the school now benefits from refurbished and new accommodation for science, humanities, technology subjects and art. Five years ago the huts, which are used for mathematics, modern languages and some English lessons, were described as poor quality, and they are no better now. Internally they are pleasant and warm but the external fabric is deteriorating and, being some distance from the main buildings, time is lost between lessons and students and staff are exposed to the vagaries of the weather. Recently, a further small building programme has been planned, which will help to improve the accommodation.
28. The amount of money coming into the school is just a little lower, relative to each student, than nationally the case for schools with sixth forms. The proportion spent on sixth formers matches the allocation made by the local authority. Bearing in mind their results, which represent good progress over the key stage, this is money well spent. Over the school as a whole, when account is taken of the attainment of students on entry, which is average, the quality of education provided which is very good, and the results at GCSE which are well above average, the school provides very good value for money, as at the time of the last inspection.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Opportunities for reflection and collective worship by all students, and sixth formers' entitlement to religious education.

29. The two key issues of the last report addressed the need to ensure that collective worship fully met statutory requirements, and to provide sufficient time for the teaching of religious education at all stages throughout the school. Students now attend assemblies twice each week, rather than once, and assemblies provide opportunity for reflection and thoughtful prayer. On other mornings, in form times, opportunity is seldom provided for students to reflect on their experiences to deepen their understanding and awareness of universal values. The requirement for collective worship is still not met.
30. At the time of the last inspection, insufficient time was provided for religious education at any stage. Provision is much improved at Key Stages 3 and 4, where the curriculum meets the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus and lessons are well taught. Ethical issues and values are discussed in the sixth form general studies programme but the religious education content is too slight to meet the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Provision of religious education falls short of statutory requirements in the sixth form: more needs to be done.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

31. To raise further the standards of work and attainment of students, the governors, headteacher, senior management team and staff should continue improving aspects of its work included in key issues of the last inspection report:
- increase the frequency of opportunities for reflection and collective worship, and the provision of religious education in the sixth form (see paragraphs 29 and 30)

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

SIXTH FORM

32. Just over half of the students in Year 11 stay on into the sixth form and most of the rest further their education elsewhere, some nearer their homes on the other side of Plymouth. A small minority gains employment. Plymstock sixth form provides a good range of A levels (about 23, including sociology, psychology, economics and business studies) as well as several AS level subjects (including electronics, economics and mathematics). GNVQ courses at Advanced level are provided in business and in leisure and tourism and, in recent years, health and social care has also been provided. Many sixth formers enter for certificates in information technology or text processing. Students' choice is enhanced through collaboration with a local consortium which provides other vocational qualifications. Personal and social education and general studies are provided for all sixth formers. Year 12 students have private study at school when they are not in lessons but Year 13 students are allowed to study at home. Overall, sixth form provision is good.
33. Students learn very effectively on sixth form courses. Those on vocational courses draw effectively on their experience in work placements to help them progress on their assignments. Most sixth formers have good research skills and enjoy analysing complex situations, such as crowd behaviour (in psychology) and life on a Kibbutz (in sociology). They learn well through challenging projects, effectively supervised by teachers and they achieve very high standards. For example, in science, projects have included factors affecting the distribution of algae on the shore; the catalytic decomposition of hydrogen peroxide; and investigations into the laws of electrolysis. Learning is very good because students are purposeful and keen, and teaching is very good. Teachers use their subject knowledge very well to provide good challenge and interest. For example, in English, the teacher's very good knowledge of *The Alchemist* enabled her to select significant speeches and point up the main aspects of Sir Epicure Mammon's personality so that students could come to a clear view of Sir Epicure's greed and lechery. In mathematics, lessons move at a brisk pace and teachers challenge students to think for themselves, for example, in expressing algebraic functions as partial fractions (in Year 12) and in using calculus to find the volume of revolution (in Year 13). Overall, achievement in lessons and in sixth form examinations is good. Results at A level reflect good progress across the key stage and on GNVQ courses most students gain distinctions and merits.
34. Sixth formers develop mature attitudes and are good role models in the school. Some help younger students in lessons. They select their own representatives on the *Senate*, through which they manage the day-to-day running of the sixth form centre, including refreshments at lunchtime. The centre provides good study and common-room facilities. In 1999, a good proportion – almost 70 per cent of the students – progressed on to university, about 10 per cent continued in further education and the rest gained employment. Students benefit from the school's strong links with local universities and colleges of further education. Overall, the sixth form provides a very worthwhile experience and a large measure of independence, as well as being a valued part of the school. Plans are well in hand for a broader curriculum in September 2000. The sixth form is well led, managed and co-ordinated.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	101
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	31

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
8	39	47	7	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 students

Students on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	1258	260
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	77	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	20	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	117	1

English as an additional language	No. of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	8

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	22
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	18

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	5.9
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.4
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 (98)	132 (146)	113 (100)	245 (246)

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	112 (106)	109 (103)	99 (105)
	Girls	103 (94)	84 (67)	81 (74)
	Total	215 (200)	193 (170)	180 (179)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	88 (81)	79 (69)	73 (73)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	56 (58)	52 (45)	36 (43)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	114 (100)	108 (104)	102 (103)
	Girls	102 (88)	85 (76)	82 (68)
	Total	216 (188)	193 (180)	184 (171)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	88 (76)	79 (73)	75 (70)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	62 (45)	55 (45)	41 (41)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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 (98)	130 (124)	117 (128)	247 (252)

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	75 (70)	121 (124)	126 (124)
	Girls	73 (85)	113 (123)	115 (126)
	Total	148 (155)	234 (247)	241 (250)
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	60 (61.5)	95 (98)	98 (99)
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	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 student	School	43 (43)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

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 (98)	43 (42)	52 (42)	95 (84)

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	19.6 (14.2)	18.3 (16.8)	19.0 (15.5)	4.3 (3.9)	4.0 (2.0)	4.2 (3.2)
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	91
	National	73

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	1
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	4
White	1508
Any other minority ethnic group	3

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	24	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	85.8
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	6.4
Total aggregate hours worked per week	143

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.0
Key Stage 4	22.0

Financial information

Financial year	1998-99
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	£
Total income	3,452,914
Total expenditure	3,398,387
Expenditure per student	2,265
Balance brought forward from previous year	67,392
Balance carried forward to next year	121,919

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1518
Number of questionnaires returned	436

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	36	54	8	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	48	48	3	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	44	49	3	0	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	56	16	1	2
The teaching is good.	45	50	2	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	36	50	12	2	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	44	4	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	71	27	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	31	55	9	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	54	43	0	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	45	49	3	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	44	41	7	1	8

Other issues raised by parents

Parents at their meeting with the registered inspector were strongly supportive of the school, including standards in most subjects, the effectiveness of the sixth form and the leadership of the headteacher. Many parents praised the range of extra-curricular activities provided. One parent expressed concern about lack of opportunities for sailing, which have now been improved.