

INSPECTION REPORT

NEWPORT FREE GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Newport, Saffron Walden

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115352

Headteacher: Mr. R. J. Priestley

Reporting inspector: Mr. R. A. Palmer
31198

Dates of inspection: 7th - 9th February, 2000

Inspection number: 184409
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:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Newport Saffron Walden Essex
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. S. Cooke
Date of previous inspection:	6 th – 10 th February 1995

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school is a foundation, comprehensive school of average size, with 863 boys and girls aged 11 –18 years on roll in January 2000, compared with 677 at the time of the previous inspection in 1995. There are 148 students in the sixth form. The school admitted its first fully co-educational intake into Year 7 in 1993, after 400 years as a boys school; these pupils are now of Year 13 age. The school is popular and well oversubscribed and draws its pupils from a wide area. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. The numbers of pupils on the school's register of special educational needs and of those with statements of special educational needs are below the national average. The school's intake contains pupils of all levels of ability though the overall attainment of pupils when they enter the school in Year 7 is above the national average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Newport Free Grammar School is a good school. Results in external examinations are well above national averages in most subjects. Teaching is good overall. Good leadership is effective in helping to raise standards further. The school's many strengths considerably outweigh its weaknesses. It provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards are high in many subjects and continue to rise because pupils are generally well taught and have good attitudes to their work.
- Good leadership provides a clear direction for the school to raise its standards further. Long term planning is effective.
- A level results have greatly improved since the previous inspection.
- Extra-curricular activities of high quality help to improve standards in many areas of the school and considerably enhance pupils' social and cultural education.
- The school has made good improvements since the last inspection.
- Pupils make good progress at all key stages because the school analyses and uses its very good assessment data well.

What could be improved

- Although science results at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 are above national averages pupils could achieve even higher standards.
- GCSE results in French, design and technology and drama are not as high as in other subjects.
- The use of information and communication technology is insufficient in many subjects to enhance pupils' work.

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 progress since its previous inspection in 1995. Results at grades A*-C in GCSE examinations are higher and results at A level have risen significantly. The quality of teaching is better. Attendance figures, which were good, are now better. Progress in meeting the eight issues identified for improvement has been mostly good, but the school still does not meet statutory requirements in respect of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating its performance have improved and are good. Planning for improvement is good overall and the school is in a good position to raise pupils' standards of attainment further.

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	B
A-levels/AS-levels	E	A	B	

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

Results in the national tests for 14 year olds are usually well above the national average in English, mathematics and science. In 1999 boys and girls achieved broadly similar results overall in mathematics and science, but girls achieved higher results than boys in English, in line with the national trend. Compared with similar schools, the results in 1999 were well above average in English, average in mathematics and well below average in science.

GCSE results have shown a steady increase since 1994, although at a slower rate than the national average, because the school was already achieving results well above average. In 1999, the overall GCSE results for both boys and girls were again well above the national average and in comparison with similar schools they were above average. Based on pupils' prior attainment in the national tests taken two years earlier, their achievements in GCSE examinations in 1999 were well above average in English and mathematics, and above average in science. In comparison with similar schools, the percentages of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C and grades A*-G are below average and indicate that pupils generally do not achieve as well in their other subjects as they do in the three core subjects.

Results at A level have improved greatly since the previous inspection, when they were below average, and are now in line with national averages for all maintained schools and above the national average for comprehensive schools. Students achieve good results in their vocational business courses.

The school sets suitably challenging targets for performance in external examinations. Pupils' progress is good throughout the school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils are eager to learn and respond positively in lessons
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Most pupils behave very well; a small number misbehave in a few classes and around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils work well together in group and class activities. Relationships between pupils and with their teachers are good.
Attendance	Attendance is above the national average for secondary schools. Unauthorised absence is broadly average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

Teachers know their subject well; many communicate their enthusiasm to pupils and most have high expectations for all their pupils. The teaching of literacy, oracy and numeracy is good in many subjects. Teachers in many subjects provide few opportunities for pupils to use their generally good skills in information and communication technology to enhance their work. Teaching was satisfactory or better in 97 per cent of lessons seen. It was good or better in 77 per cent including 23 per cent that was very good. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was seen in science.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is suitably broad, balanced and relevant to the needs of pupils. The provision of extra-curricular activities is excellent.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Pupils with special educational needs receive appropriate teaching. The quality and use of individual education plans are satisfactory.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good provision is made for pupils' social, moral and cultural development. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. Although there are limited opportunities for other pupils, sixth formers readily accept positions of responsibility.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pastoral care is good; many pupils and parents say that teachers are very supportive. Pupils' work and progress are carefully monitored. Suitable procedures for health and safety and for child protection are in place.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher and other senior managers provide good leadership. They effectively plan and successfully manage improvements, particularly in respect of teaching and learning.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors carry out their duties in a responsible and supportive manner. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and suitably high expectations for future achievements.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has good procedures for evaluating all aspects of its performance. Senior managers have a good grasp of what is successful and what needs to improve, but in a few subjects, the monitoring of performance is not yet fully effective.
The strategic use of resources	The school's financial planning and administration are good and it uses its resources well.

In recent years there have been well-planned improvements and additions to the buildings, which have helped pupils improve their standards, for example in design and technology, drama, music and business studies. Investment in new computer equipment is leading to a gradual extension of the use of information technology in several subjects. Plans to improve the indoor sports facilities are in place. The school continues to improve. It benefits from good leadership, provides good care for its pupils and has an exciting, extensive and valuable programme of extra-curricular activities of high quality which help pupils achieve good standards. The school provides good value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards are high. • Pupils make good progress • The school is well led. • Teaching is mostly good. • Behaviour is good. • Expectations are high. • Pupils are happy at the school. • Pastoral care is good. • Provision of extra curricular activities is a strength of the school. • Music is very good, especially the choir and band. • The school helps pupils become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency of homework provision • Closer partnership between home and school. • Better recognition of girls' achievements in sport. • A small amount of unsatisfactory teaching. • More use of computers in school. • A more effective anti-smoking policy.

Parents are mostly very pleased with the school and the education it provides. Inspectors' findings agree with all the positive comments made by parents. Parents hold different views on homework; a small number say there is too much, but more feel that it is not always set nor of a suitable standard.

Inspectors support parents' views that the frequency and quality of homework do vary across and within subjects, particularly in Key Stage 3. Inspectors disagree with the views of 20 per cent of parental questionnaire returns that say the school's partnership with parents is not close. The school has many good systems in place to involve parents

including homework diaries that are well used, consultation evenings that are well attended and an effective parent and teachers' association. The unreliability of pupil-post and the large distance some parents live from the school are possible explanations for some parents not feeling closely involved, because many other parents say that their links with the school are very good and that they are bombarded with information about the school's activities. Parents are justified in their view that the quality of teaching is variable, but it is mostly good. The school works hard to recognise good achievements by both boys and girls. There is less staff support for girls' sport than for boys' games. Inspectors did not see pupils smoking, but pupils report that smoking, particularly by a few girls, does occur. Provision for teaching computing skills is better than that found in many schools. Although pupils do make good use of information and communication technology in a few subjects, they rarely use computers in many subjects.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards are high in many subjects and continue to rise because pupils are generally well taught and have good attitudes to their work.

1. Throughout the school, standards achieved by pupils are high. Results in the national tests for 14 year olds and in GCSE examinations were well above the national average in all of the last three years. Results in A level examinations have risen sharply in the last two years and were well above average in 1998 and average in 1999.

2. In the national tests for 14 year olds, results in English, mathematics and science have been well above national averages for all of the last three years, apart from in English in 1998 when results were average. Both boys and girls have achieved well above average results overall, in these three core subjects, over the four-year period 1996-1999. Boys did slightly better than girls in mathematics and science in 1999, and girls did better than boys in English. The school's overall results in these tests in 1999 matched those achieved by similar schools, but whereas performance in English was well above that of similar schools and mathematics was average, in science the achievement was well below average. This was mainly due to the lower proportion of pupils in science gaining the higher levels of six and above.

3. GCSE examination results remain well above the national average and show a steady increase since the previous inspection. The trend in the school's average total GCSE points score per pupil has risen slower than the national trend, even though the change from an all boys' entry to a mixed comprehensive intake might have been expected to lead to a slightly faster rising trend. The school's performance is nevertheless good, because the school started from a much higher position than most schools, some girls of high attainment attend an all girls' school instead, and good progress is made relative to pupils' prior attainments. Indeed, taking note of pupils' average total points score in national tests for 14 year olds in 1997 and their subsequent GCSE average points score in 1999, pupils' achievements were well above average. Girls achieved better GCSE results than boys in most subjects. During the last two years, pupils have performed less well in double award science, French, design and technology and drama than in their other subjects, but still, apart from in drama, achieved results above the national average. Pupils achieved better results in English (including literature), mathematics and geography than in their other subjects. When compared with similar schools, the average total GCSE points score per pupil in 1999 was above average, but the percentages of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-C or A*-G were below average. In its attempts to improve GCSE results further, the school is currently examining why girls and boys achieve broadly similar results at grades A*-C, but girls do much better in gaining grades A* and A.

4. Results at A level were well above the national average for comprehensive schools in 1998, above average in 1999, and represent a significant improvement since the previous inspection, when results were well below average.

5. The standards of work were high in two thirds of lessons seen during the inspection. Pupils' achievements were at least satisfactory in 94 per cent of classes observed. Their standards are generally high because they have positive attitudes to their work. Many pupils benefit from active participation in an excellent range of extra curricular activities, including revision and additional classes for pupils of all abilities in many subjects.

6. Pupils' standards of speaking, listening, reading and writing are good. In many lessons, pupils answer questions eagerly and can discuss their work sensibly and articulately. Teachers often encourage pupils to learn the meaning and spelling of key words. In a Year 11 English class, pupils commented intelligently on poems in oral discussion. In a Year 7 history lesson, pupils developed their good reading skills in an exercise involving retrieval of information, and their written work was generally accurate. In a Year 10 Latin lesson, pupils were improving their grammatical skills by revision of such work as verb conjugations and tenses, noun declensions and use of past participles.

7. Standards in numeracy are good. Pupils often use these skills to good effect in many subject areas. In a science middle set in Year 10, pupils competently converted square centimetres into square metres; in their work on reflection and refraction they showed a good understanding of angle properties and could use formulae correctly. In a lesson on electronics in Year 7, pupils applied their skills in measuring and their knowledge of shapes to draw nets and construct solids.

8. Standards in information and communication technology are improving, but there are limited opportunities in many subjects for pupils to practise and develop these skills. However, in the sixth form, students make good use of the Internet to assist their work, as seen in a lesson on marketing products in business studies. Pupils in Year 9 could demonstrate how to convert the computer's text to French, run spelling and grammar checks and include accents.

9. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject and many transmit their own enthusiasm for the subject to the pupils. Teachers are well aware of the examination syllabus requirements and pupils receive regular and frequent testing, particularly in mathematics. In many lessons, pupils receive good advice on how to handle examination questions.

10. Homework of appropriate quality and relevance is set regularly for most classes and is generally well marked. However, pupils say that a few teachers do not follow up instances when pupils do not complete their homework nor insist that pupils complete unfinished work. In one science class in Year 11, a few pupils of low attainment could not remember when homework was last set. Most pupils say that homework is good and helps them improve their work, and that teachers' marking helps them understand their strengths and weaknesses and how to improve.

11. Pupils improve their work through voluntary attendance at extra curricular classes of good quality in most subjects. These classes help pupils to improve their examination performances as well as promoting their social and cultural development. A group of 25 pupils in Years 10 and 11, who attended an after school workshop on expressive arts for two and a half hours, were seen making very good progress. A parent, who has considerable expertise in dance, took the session. She conveyed her enthusiasm to the pupils, who all showed a keen interest in the work and responded positively to the good pace and challenge of the varied activities. Pupils follow up this work by preparing a project for their GCSE portfolio.

12. In most lessons pupils learn effectively because the lesson is well-structured, teachers have high expectations and the pace of the lesson is suitably brisk. Usually, teachers explain the aims of the lesson and these are well understood by the pupils. Quick, but thorough revision of previous work then follows, aided by probing questions and relevant discussion. In lessons where teaching was less than good, the teacher tends to dominate the lesson and pupils rarely participate actively. In one lesson, the teacher's class

management was ineffective, pupils found the work boring and lost concentration.

13. In the very good lessons, pupils often make their own decisions about how to tackle the work; they learn new skills and improve their understanding because they receive interesting and challenging tasks. In a Year 7 music lesson, for example, pupils learned how to complete their own ostinato and dance compositions and enjoyed performing these. They showed a good recall of previous work on time signatures and scales and gave clear explanations of their work. They listened attentively to the teacher's introduction, his reiteration of the main learning points and to his effective drawing together of conclusions at the end. During the rest of the lesson, pupils worked well together in pairs and small groups discussing their work eagerly, experimenting with and practising their keyboard and other instrumental skills, both inside the classroom and in the adjoining corridors. The teacher provided good opportunities for pupils to develop their oral skills through group and class discussions and their work on literacy skills, through a homework that expected pupils to learn the meanings and practise the spellings of the key words used in the lesson.

Good leadership provides a clear direction for the school and long term planning is effective in raising its standards further.

14. The effective leadership of the headteacher, who is well supported by the governors and senior managers, sets out a clear educational direction for the school and is a major factor in the school's continued success and improvements. The school meets its aim of adding value at all key stages, whilst retaining a broad curriculum and a wide range of enrichment activities. The school has a positive and friendly ethos within which staff and pupils display a strong commitment to achieve high standards of work and behaviour, and most pupils express pride in their school. The school provides a good quality of education that enables the large majority of pupils to achieve their potential, within a secure and caring learning environment. Many parents, justifiably, commented positively on the very enthusiastic commitment of the large majority of teachers, the good team spirit within the school and the benefits their children gained from the outstanding provision of extra curricular opportunities.

15. In their discussions with inspectors, many of the girls felt that the school gave them equal opportunities with boys and that the school had successfully managed its change from being an all boys' school a few years ago. However, a few girls feel that they do not get the same recognition for sporting achievement or provision for sport as the boys; this is probably due to the situation in which more male than female teachers are involved in extra-curricular games and sport.

16. Good progress has occurred since the previous inspection in respect of the school's main priorities of raising pupils' standards of attainment and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

17. The school's procedures for evaluating its own performance and planning for improvement are good and the outcomes of these procedures are mostly good. The headteacher, governors and senior managers regularly monitor data relating to the school's performance and have a realistic appraisal of the school's current strengths and areas for improvement. Suitably challenging targets for pupils' and all departments' performances at external examinations are determined by the governors' curriculum committee, following a close and rigorous study of pupils' prior attainment and of other sophisticated assessment data. In 1999, the school met its targets for performance in the national tests for 14 year olds, and was close to meeting its targets in GCSE and A level examinations. Targets set for the next two years are demanding but realistic.

18. Links between the senior management team and subject staff are largely effective in promoting improvements in work. The monitoring of pupils' learning and the quality of teaching is an established feature. However, the sharing of good practice does not happen in all departments and in part accounts for the reluctance of a few teachers to try different methods of teaching or to engage pupils more actively in their own learning.

19. The school's long term planning has brought about improvements in teaching and learning as well as providing much improved accommodation in areas such as design and technology, business studies and music. The schemes of work in subjects are now based on a common format that helps to ensure a consistent approach across the school and assist line managers and curricular co-ordinators to monitor departments' work more systematically.

20. The school is continually searching for ways to consolidate and improve its performance and does not suffer from complacency. It has the capacity to build on its current good achievements.

A level results have greatly improved since the previous inspection.

21. Results in A level examinations have improved significantly since the previous inspection. The average points score for students taking two or more A levels has increased from the well below average score of 9.6 in 1995, to 17.2 in 1999, which was above the national average for comprehensive schools.

22. The percentage of A level results at grade A has risen from seven in 1994 to twenty-two in 1999; the proportion of passes in the range A-C has risen from 32 per cent to 60 per cent, and the overall pass rate at grades A-E from 69 per cent to 93 per cent.

23. In its bid to improve results at A level further, the school is trying to ensure that all of those students who have high attainments at GCSE achieve as highly at A level as students do nationally. Also it is rightly considering why there are differences among subjects in the value added between GCSE and A level examinations.

Extra-curricular activities of high quality help to improve standards in many areas of the school and considerably enhance pupils' social and cultural education.

24. Many pupils greatly enhance their learning through participation in one or more of the numerous extra-curricular activities provided by the school. The impressive range of well-supported extra curricular activities includes many sporting activities, a very good programme of cultural visits and field trips, both locally and abroad, and a programme of after school classes in most subjects.

25. The educational visits and exchanges with schools in France, Germany and Italy help pupils improve their language skills. Many pupils develop their cultural awareness because the school actively promotes an international dimension in its work and through well-organised visits to many European and other countries.

26. Through active participation in a very good programme of after school work, the high proportion of pupils involved in music making, drama and expressive arts considerably enhance their musical and theatrical skills as well as increasing and broadening their knowledge and understanding of their normal class work. Many parents praised the high standards achieved by the school's choir and band.

27. Pupils readily accept, and benefit from, the many opportunities to become involved in international activities. For example, the school together with others in Italy and Germany takes part in an arts programme funded by the European Community's Comenius project. The music department has valuable exchange visits with Holland and France. Students develop their social and cultural awareness through participation in rural environmental projects, during the school's annual expedition to Delhi and Rajasthan in India. Individual students enhance their knowledge and understanding of world affairs through their attendance and participation in conferences. Every year, a few sixth formers take part in a model United Nations Assembly at the United Nations headquarters in Geneva; last year the pupils acted as the delegation for Ghana, but their proposal for the developed countries to write off the international debts of the Third World Nations was unsuccessful. The school is the world-wide co-ordinator of IDEAS, an International Day of Environmental Action and Service, a day when students, staff, parents and governors work together on improving the school and village environment. Some 40,000 others around the world now follow the school's lead and do the same in their schools, villages or towns on the appointed day.

28. Many pupils develop their physical and social skills through participation in the school's well-organised Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and by playing in school teams in many sports. In particular, pupils improve their standards in hockey because they receive good support from the local community's hockey clubs, who share the school's facilities.

The school has made good improvements since the last inspection.

29. The school has made good progress in many important aspects of its work since the previous inspection. Results in national tests for 14 year olds and In GCSE examinations continue to be high and are rising. Results at A level examinations have greatly improved from being well below the national averages to a position that is close to the average for all schools (including selective and non selective schools), and above the average for comprehensive schools.

30. Attendance remains above the national average and has risen from 92.7 per cent in 1995 to 93.4 per cent last year.

31. The school has successfully managed the change from a former all boys' school to a successful co-educational comprehensive school. Girls feel comfortable and well cared for and they achieve well in their external examinations.

32. Many good improvements have been made in the accommodation and these not only enhance the general environment but also act as a spur to pupils' learning, particularly in the areas of music, drama, design and technology and business studies. More improvements are planned, including the much needed new sports building.

33. In respect of the eight key issues for improvement identified in the previous report the school has made mainly good progress. A level results have improved. Standards in art and physical education and religious education are better. GCSE results in art and physical education were above the national average in 1999. The provision of religious education at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form has also improved and the school meets the

requirements of the Essex agreed syllabus for religious education. Many, but not all, teachers now use a good range of teaching and learning styles to cater for the different needs of pupils and to develop pupils' skills as independent learners. The school makes effective use of its very good assessment data on pupils' achievements to help set realistic and challenging targets. Many teachers make suitable adjustments to their teaching programme as a result of studying the assessment data, but this good practice is not yet widespread. The use of assessment to set individual targets for pupils to recognise their progress over time and how to improve their work is not fully effective. The school now has effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and the implementation of school policies. Clear links now exist between the school's educational priorities and its financial planning. The quality of assemblies is good and provision for collective worship has increased, but the school does not meet statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship. The road crossing arrangements in Bury Water Lane have significantly improved and pupils were seen to cross between the school's buildings sensibly and safely, even in inclement weather conditions. The school successfully addressed the other issues relating to health and safety shortly after the previous inspection.

34. The school is popular and heavily over subscribed. The number on roll has increased from 677 in 1995 to 863 in January 2000.

Pupils make good progress at all key stages because the school analyses and uses its very good assessment data well.

35. The overall attainment profile of pupils on entry to the school is above average. Pupils with differing levels of prior attainment, after arriving from many different primary schools, make good progress from the time they join and throughout their time in school. In many subjects they achieve well above national average standards by the end of Key Stage 4. This good progress is due to good teaching, to the high expectations of the school and parents, to the positive attitudes of pupils and increasingly to the way the school analyses and uses its assessment data. The school makes good provision for pupils with special educational needs. Pupils, including the higher attaining ones, benefit from, and are stretched by, the additional tuition offered after normal school hours to help them prepare for examinations.

36. By the end of Key Stage 3, the performance of both boys and girls in the National Curriculum tests is well above the national average in English, mathematics and science. There is some variation, however, in the relative amount of progress made by pupils in the different subjects. In the most recent tests, in 1999, the percentage of pupils reaching Level 6 was well above the national average in English and mathematics and above the national average in science. In comparison with schools that have a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, the pupils achieve results well above the national average in English, in line with the average in mathematics, but well below the average in science. The indications from the school's internal assessments of pupils' performance at the age of fourteen are that they make good progress in all the subjects taught. Progress is better overall by the age of fourteen than it was at the time of the last inspection, particularly in subjects such as art and physical education where learning and teaching have improved.

37. Pupils continue to make good progress throughout Key Stage 4. Results overall in GCSE examinations are well above the national average for all schools and are above the average for similar schools. Comparing pupils' average total points score in national tests for 14 year olds in 1997, and their subsequent GCSE average points score in 1999, pupils'

achievements were well above average. Achievements for those gaining five or more grades at A*-C in GCSE examinations and for A*-C grades in English and mathematics were also well above expectations based on their earlier attainments.

38. The school's participation in a recent national pilot study, designed to measure pupils' performance in school from the age of fourteen to sixteen, shows clearly that, in 1998, pupils made progress which was above the average in most schools.

39. Results at A level have improved greatly in recent years and most students make good progress. Students on the GNVQ business studies intermediate and advanced courses also make good progress and, last year, all students following these courses passed.

40. Pupils' progress is enhanced because the school carefully analyses all examination results at all levels, to see how they can be improved. At the beginning of every school year, all subject departments produce a statistical breakdown of their results and identify the strengths and weaknesses in their performance, as well as a list of strategies for improvement. Each head of department then meets with the headteacher and the appropriate line manager to discuss the main issues arising from this analysis, and how to secure the desired improvements. Governors then receive an analysis and commentary on the school's performance in external examinations, which is looked at in fine detail by the curriculum committee as part of the governors' monitoring programme.

41. Work continues on analysing the relative performances of boys and girls. The school has asked itself the question as to why girls gain much better results than boys at grades A* and A in GCSE examinations, while boys and girls achieve broadly similar results for passes at grades A*-C.

42. The school's analyses of its assessment data have raised some interesting points for the school to consider. They have prompted the science department to address the issue of achievement at level 6 and above in the Key Stage 3 tests. In the non-core subjects at Key Stage 3, the school is considering whether the teacher assessments in a few subjects are too harsh in comparison with national standards. In the sixth form the question is raised of why high achievers in terms of GCSE results do not always appear to achieve so highly at A level compared with national figures. The school is currently investigating the reasons for the differences in the value added between subjects both at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

Although science results at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 are above national averages, pupils could achieve even higher standards.

43. Although pupils achieve well above average results in science in the national tests for 14 year olds, and above average results in the GCSE examinations, their grades in science are lower than their average grade in their other subjects.

44. In the 1999 national tests for 14 year olds, pupils' results in science were well above the national average but well below the average for similar schools. This was largely because an insufficient proportion, (31 per cent), of pupils gained level 6 or above. Even though this proportion was above the national average for all schools it was much lower

than the 47 per cent of the school's pupils who achieved level 6 or above in English and the 56 per cent who did so in mathematics.

45. At Key Stage 4 nearly 20 per cent of pupils sit GCSE examinations in the separate sciences of biology, chemistry and physics compared to less than five per cent nationally. During the last three years results in GCSE examinations for these subjects have been generally well above average and represent an excellent achievement. Results obtained by the other pupils in dual award science GCSE examinations are also high, but during the last two years, pupils following double award science have achieved lower grades in science than their average grade in other subjects. Overall progress in science, as measured by performances at GCSE examinations in 1999 compared with expectations from prior attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1997, is above average overall in the science subjects, but in both English and mathematics progress is well above average.

46. The relative underachievement in science is partly due to a curriculum planning issue and partly because some teaching does not do enough to promote high levels of performance and enthusiasm in the subject. The time allocation in Year 8 is lower than that found nationally. The National Curriculum for science is being covered but there is a restricted range of opportunities for higher achievers to extend their work.

47. Schemes of work provide a satisfactory basis for the teaching of science but lack sufficient emphasis on planning for clear learning outcomes for pupils, and for meeting the different needs of pupils. Teachers are inconsistent in their setting of investigative science tasks and some do not regularly include the teaching of investigative skills as an integral part of the practical work across all attainment targets.

48. Most of the teaching is good and has similar strengths to those seen in most other subjects. However a small amount of the teaching is unsatisfactory and some of the satisfactory teaching also has features that could be improved. In these instances, much of the teaching is very teacher directed and pupils have few opportunities to develop skills of independent learning. Although teachers are conscious of the wider ability range in classes in Years 7 and 8, and do try to provide work of appropriate challenge for each pupil, they do not always succeed in providing work to stretch higher attaining pupils fully. At both Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils' work is marked frequently, but is often ticked with insufficient extended written comment on how they can improve their work.

Results at GCSE examinations in French, design and technology and drama are not as high as in other subjects.

49. Within the school's well above average overall performance in GCSE examinations, there is relative underachievement in French, design and technology and drama in comparison with what pupils achieve in other subjects.

50. Attainment in modern foreign languages is higher than it was at the time of the last inspection but it is not high enough in French compared with other subjects. It has reached a point where higher grade A* - C GCSE passes are now in line with the results achieved in schools nationally but, despite this, pupils' average grades are still below the average grade they achieve in other subjects. The improvement in examination performance is due mainly to the fact that most teachers now teach their first foreign language and conduct lessons largely in that target language. In lessons observed, however, there is not always an insistence by all teachers that pupils should respond in French all the time. The number of higher grade (A*-C) passes shows improvement from 1998 onwards, when girls were entered for the first time. Girls achieve higher grades than boys in French, as they do

nationally. In the last GCSE examination for example, 59 per cent of girls gained A*-C passes compared with 40 per cent of boys. The co-ordinator for languages monitors teachers' planning and marking as part of an initiative to improve teaching and learning in French. The regular monitoring of teaching has been confined to the observation and guidance of newly qualified teachers in recent months. The intention to monitor all teaching to seek further improvement in pupils' attainment is an important step forward.

51. Since the previous inspection there has been a good improvement in the GCSE results in design and technology; results were above the national average in the last two years. However, pupils' average GCSE grades in design and technology were below their average grades in other subjects in both 1998 and 1999. The percentage of pupils gaining A*-C grades has been just above the national levels overall. This figure, however, hides a major difference between the relative attainment of girls and boys. In 1999, for example, 54 per cent of girls gained A*-C passes, slightly below the national average for girls of 58 per cent, whereas 57 per cent of boys achieved A*-C grades which is above the national average for boys of 41 per cent. This means that design and technology was an area of relative underachievement for the forty-eight girls when compared with boys' achievement overall. In the previous year, both girls and boys underachieved equally in comparison with other subjects. The subject department attributes the relative lack of examination success to the lack of time and effort given to the coursework component by pupils and has taken appropriate action to plan the GCSE course more carefully to prevent such problems.

52. Pupils' practical skills in the GCSE drama course develop well, but the newly introduced written theory questions were not answered well in the 1999 examination. The overall pass rate at grades A* - C in last year's examination was below the national average for the first time in recent years. Pupils' average grades in the GCSE drama examination, however, have been below the average grades achieved by the same pupils in other subjects in the last three years. This underachievement does not match the considerable energy, enthusiasm and enjoyment shown by pupils in drama lessons. It indicates that there is an urgent need to look carefully at the course and lesson planning and to ensure that pupils are prepared more thoroughly to meet the examination requirements, particularly for written work.

The use of information and communication technology is insufficient in many subjects to enhance pupils' work.

53. Many pupils have generally good skills in computing when they enter the school and are eager to use them to assist their work across a wide range of activity. They improve these skills and increase their knowledge and understanding through their discrete lessons in information and communication technology, which take place in three well-equipped rooms, all with access to the Internet. These lessons, in all Years 7-11, enable pupils to have individual access to one computer each, for one hour every two weeks. This results in many pupils having the confidence and competence to choose, from a range of suitable options, how best to do the work. Pupils also use the computing facilities after school and at lunchtimes, but their demand for these facilities is much greater than the availability.

54. Pupils and parents commented that the long time lapse between these discrete lessons of information and communication technology slowed progress, particularly for the minority of pupils who do not have computing facilities at home. A few sixth form students said that their work suffered because the computers were unreliable. Pupils say that they do use computers to good effect in a few subjects such as business studies and French, but that generally they rely on their home computers to practise and develop their skills further. A few pupils in Year 11 said that they felt frustrated because they were not able to

use the computing facilities more frequently, especially when they saw pupils in other subjects improving their work because they worked more often with computers. Although all subjects plan for the use of computers in at least one unit per year in their schemes of work, very few subjects, mathematics providing an example, make more than perfunctory use of them. In modern languages, most classes use the computer rooms about once every six weeks and only one teacher has specialist skills in information and communication technology. Because the computer rooms are in heavy demand to meet the timetable needs of the discrete course and the examination course requirements of some A level, GNVQ and GCSE courses, many subject departments are unable to attain ready access for their classes to use the computers. The situation will improve once the business studies area's computers are fully installed in their own room.

55. The school recognises the need for further improvement of its provision for information and communication technology. The fourth network will soon be fully operational in the sixth form and most subject areas have at least one computer. All teachers have received training on a range of information and communication technology topics, but some lack the confidence to use computing work to assist teaching and learning. The school makes generally good use of its available information and communication technology resources, but they are currently insufficient to enable all departments to teach the information and communication technology components of the work in their subject as well as possible.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

56. All three of the following issues are part of the school's current planning priorities. The school should now:

- (1) improve teaching and provision in science to enable pupils to achieve even higher standards at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4;
(Paragraphs: 2, 3, 10, 36, 43 – 48)
- (2) raise pupils' standards at Key Stage 4 in design and technology, French and drama so that pupils achieve as well in these subjects as they do in other subjects, by continuing to monitor the quality of teaching and to plan more thoroughly to meet the GCSE examination requirements in these subjects.
(Paragraphs: 3, 49 – 52)
- (3) as resources permit, increase the provision of information and communication technology and develop its use further in all subjects.
(Paragraphs: 8, 53)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	33
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	38

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6	17	54	20	3	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	715	148
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	31	1

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	7	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	96	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	21
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	19

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	5.9
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.7
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	68	65	133

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	52	57	57
	Girls	55	55	49
	Total	107	112	106
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	81 (69)	84 (81)	80 (75)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	47 (28)	56 (56)	31 (40)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	44	55	42
	Girls	53	52	40
	Total	97	107	82
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	74 (81)	80 (81)	62 (81)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	35 (41)	55 (52)	30 (40)
	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	79	51	130

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	48	76	77
	Girls	35	49	49
	Total	83	125	126
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	64 (68)	96 (95)	97 (96)
	National	46 (45)	91 (90)	96 (95)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	47.9 (46.9)
	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	43	26	69

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	19.2	7	17.2 (18.8)	2.3	3	2.8 (2.0)
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.

The number of candidates entered for two or more A levels represents the last all-boys intake. The number of girls entered was very small.

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	15	100
	National		N/A

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	2
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	852
Any other minority ethnic group	4

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	17	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	48.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	290

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.5
Key Stage 4	22.6

Financial information

Financial year	1998/1999
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	£
Total income	2 334 239
Total expenditure	2 316 061
Expenditure per pupil	2 804
Balance brought forward from previous year	117 924
Balance carried forward to next year	136 102

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	863
Number of questionnaires returned	270

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	48	43	8	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	41	50	6	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	27	62	4	3	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	53	17	3	2
The teaching is good.	29	59	8	2	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	29	51	14	2	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	52	37	7	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	56	37	4	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	27	51	17	3	2
The school is well led and managed.	39	50	6	1	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	40	47	8	2	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	42	45	8	1	4

Other issues raised by parents

Parents are mostly very pleased with the school and the education it provides.

A few feel that girls have fewer opportunities than boys do in extra curricular sport; inspection findings confirm that there is less staff support for girls' sport than for boys' games.

A few would like a stronger anti-smoking policy. Inspectors did not see pupils smoking, but pupils report that smoking, particularly by a few girls, does occur.

Several parents want better computing provision. Inspectors find that, although pupils do make good use of information technology in a few subjects, they rarely use computers in many subjects.