

# INSPECTION REPORT

**HITCHIN GIRLS' SCHOOL**

HITCHIN

LEA area: HERTFORDSHIRE

Unique reference number: 117503

Headteacher: MRS R C EDWARDS

Reporting inspector: Dr Barbara Hilton  
3228

Dates of inspection: 16 – 19 May 2000

Inspection number: 185524

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

© Crown copyright 2000

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

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

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18 years
Gender of pupils:	Girls
School address:	Hitchin Girls' School Highbury Road HITCHIN Hertfordshire
Postcode:	SG4 9RS
Telephone number:	01462 621300
Fax number:	01462 621301
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Reid
Date of previous inspection:	2 October 1995

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
Barbara Hilton	Registered inspector
Husain Akhtar	Lay inspector
Alan Brewerton	Team inspector
John Richards	Team inspector
Joyce Sanderson	Team inspector
Philip Winch	Team inspector

The inspection contractor was:

Cambridge Education Associates Limited  
Demeter House  
Station Road  
CAMBRIDGE  
CB1 2RS

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

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

## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>6 - 10</b>
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Students' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL</b>	<b>11 - 18</b>
Students achieve highly in most subjects.	
Teaching is a strength of the school.	
Students have very good attitudes: enthusiasm for learning is shared by teachers and their students.	
Students are known well individually and helped to do their best; they are proud of their school.	
The curriculum is rich and varied.	
Leadership by the headteacher is strong and the school is well managed.	
<b>WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED</b>	<b>18</b>
While a start has been made, not enough use is made of information and communications technology.	
The extent of religious education in the sixth form and opportunities for collective worship are not enough to meet requirements.	
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>THE SIXTH FORM</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	<b>20 - 24</b>

## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Hitchin Girls' School is an 11-18 comprehensive community school for girls in Hitchin, Hertfordshire. The school is about average in size, with a total of 1002 students, including 201 in the sixth form. The great majority of students are white, enriched by a significant minority (138 or 13.8 per cent) from other ethnic backgrounds, mostly from the Indian sub-continent (93 or 9.3 per cent), and of these about two thirds are Indian and the rest Pakistani or Bangladeshi. Most of the other ethnic minority students are black (of Caribbean, African or other backgrounds). Included within the number of white students is a small proportion of white Europeans. The proportion of ethnic minority students is above average for shire counties. While 38 (or 3.8 per cent) of students speak English as an additional language, which is higher than in most schools, only one is at an early stage of language acquisition. The school receives Government funding to support 44 students in learning English. The number of students available for free school meals, at 32 (3.2 per cent), is well below average. The attainment of students entering the school in Year 7 is mostly above average, although students are admitted from across the full ability range. The number on the register of special educational needs (191 or 19.1 per cent) is about average but there are fewer students with Statements (only 5, or 0.5 per cent) than is nationally the case. The students with the highest level of need mostly have moderate learning difficulties or are dyslexic. The school is popular, oversubscribed, and admits students from about 30 local primary schools, in Hitchin and nearby villages. At sixth form level the school works closely with other local schools, as well as a further education college, to extend its range of courses.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

Hitchin Girls' School is a very good school, which has made good improvement since the last inspection. The school is well managed and leadership by the headteacher is strong. The ethos is strongly positive. Students achieve highly because teaching, which is a strength, builds on their very good attitudes and generates enthusiasm for learning. The school provides good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Students achieve highly in most subjects.
- Teaching is a strength of the school.
- Students have very good attitudes: enthusiasm for learning is shared by teachers and students.
- Students are known well individually and helped to do their best; they are proud of their school.
- The curriculum is rich and varied.
- Leadership by the headteacher is strong and the school is well managed.

#### **What could be improved**

- While a start has been made, not enough use is made of information and communications technology.
- The extent of religious education in the sixth form and opportunities for collective worship are not enough to meet requirements.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

Improvement has been good since the last inspection in October 1995. GCSE results have improved at a faster rate than the national average. Teaching is much improved: at the last inspection it was at least sound and often very good and now it is a strength. High standards have been maintained in many areas and results are better now in English, science, religious education, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. Weaknesses reported in the last inspection in the curriculum in art, English, mathematics, music and design and technology have been tackled but provision in information and communications technology is still not enough to meet statutory requirements. While some religious education is included in the sixth form programme, it is still less than necessary to meet the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Assemblies, which students attend several times each week, provide opportunity for collective worship but opportunity

for reflection or worship is seldom provided on other days. Student grouping is now good and staff are well deployed. These overall good improvements have been achieved because of better strategic planning and clearer accountability of staff with responsibilities. Strong leadership and governors' high expectations and keen interest in school development equip the school well to improve 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*	A*
A-levels/AS-levels	C	A	B	

Key	
very high	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Students aged 14 and 16 achieve highly. At the end of Year 9, in the National Curriculum tests in the three core subjects (English, mathematics and science), students' results are well above the national average and very high, relative to similar schools. Over the last few years GCSE results overall have improved faster than nationally. They are very high, compared with all schools nationally and with similar schools. Results at the end of Key Stage 3 and at GCSE represent good added-value over Years 7 to 11. Results in science at the end of Years 9 and 11 are a little better than in mathematics and English. Students do well in most other subjects at GCSE and particularly well in religious studies, food technology, French, German, Latin, music and physical education. Their performance in art is not as good as in their other subjects, and lower than at the time of the last inspection. In 1999, A-level results were above the national average and, in the preceding year, well above average. While the number of students studying for vocational qualifications is small, they do well and in recent years have all gained certificates, most with merit or distinction. Results at A level are broadly similar to those at the last inspection and are in line with expectations based on GCSE results.

In lessons throughout Key Stages 3 and 4, standards generally match or exceed national expectations. Students achieve well for their capabilities: those who learn quickly achieve high standards and those with learning difficulties keep up in their classes. Virtually all leave school with GCSE certificates. Students' literacy skills develop exceedingly well. Students write extensively and cogently in most subjects. They discuss topics constructively in lessons, deepening their understanding. Numeracy is well developed in mathematics and used imaginatively in several subjects, for example in geography and science; standards are high. Students' information and communications technology skills are not evenly developed. While they make good use of computers in some subjects, for example in modern foreign languages, geography and religious studies, in some classes, including design and technology, they are insufficiently used. Students achieve very well in religious education, Latin, classical studies, music and physical education. Standards in art are satisfactory. In design and technology achievement is satisfactory overall, being high in food technology and textiles but not so good in resistant materials and graphical products. Achievement in modern foreign languages, humanities and drama is good. In the sixth form, attainment in lessons is mostly above course expectations.

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good: students enjoy learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent: students are friendly, courteous and considerate towards each other and adults.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Students develop mature attitudes and respect for others.
Attendance	Well above average with little unauthorised absence.

Students are enthusiastic about learning. In lessons they concentrate well and effectively apply existing knowledge and skills to new work. Their thinking and study skills are developed through special attention given to learning skills in Year 7 and the emphasis placed by subject teachers on thinking and learning, as, for example, in history. Introduction to the library in Year 7 fosters good reading habits. Sixth formers show responsibility towards younger students and are good role models. Students readily take the 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	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 proportion of lessons in which teaching is very good or excellent, at 49 per cent, is high and of these it is excellent in 10 per cent. Teaching is satisfactory or better in 99 per cent and good or better in 83 per cent of lessons. It is less than satisfactory in only one per cent of lessons. Learning follows a similar pattern. Teaching and learning in English, mathematics and science are as good as in the school overall. Particular strengths are: teachers' use of subject knowledge to question students effectively and provide appropriate emphasis; their very high expectations, which help students to achieve well; and their very good management of students founded on good relationships. Enthusiasm for learning is shared by teachers and their students, as, for example, in science, Latin and classical studies. While there are examples of the use of information and communications technology in subjects, it is generally under used as a tool for learning. Expectations are high for students of all abilities - standards often exceed national expectations in lessons. Numeracy is well taught in mathematics and students apply their skills effectively in geography and science. Teachers give very good attention in all subjects to the use of written and spoken language, which helps students to learn and progress well. Students with special educational needs are supported and achieve well. Lesson planning is effective, particularly so in food technology. History and geography provide many opportunities for considering factors influencing events and religious studies for considering abstract ideas and deepening spiritual awareness. Teachers make very good use of the full lesson time and students maintain a good pace in their learning. In the sixth form, teaching, while almost always good and very good in over one third of the lessons, lacks a little of the impact found lower down the school. In the best lessons teaching has verve and students participate well, as in English, psychology and business studies. In other lessons there tends to be a very even tenor and the main learning points in lessons could receive greater emphasis. Homework is well used and regularly checked, throughout. Comments are particularly helpful on sixth form work.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Rich and varied. Extra-curricular activities and community links are strong.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. Teachers know students well and provide good support.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Good. Students benefit from very good attention to the use of language in all subjects and from well-focused specialist teaching.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Students' personal development is cultivated well through a wide range of opportunities.
How well the school cares for its students	Students are known well individually and helped to do their best. The school is vigilant about health and safety.

In the main school the curriculum is enhanced by classical studies and Latin alongside National Curriculum subjects including good provision in the core subjects (English, mathematics and science), religious education and modern foreign languages. The many visits, competitions and events include extra activities in music, sports, awards for public speaking, drama, mathematics and science, which all help to raise attainment. 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 information and communications technology for students aged 11 to 16 years, of religious education for all sixth formers and of daily collective worship throughout. Sixth formers contribute very well to the life of the school. Mentoring opportunities assist their development and the progress of younger students.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The ethos is strongly positive. Leadership by the headteacher is strong and the school is well managed. Planning for improvement is systematic and incorporates departmental plans and discussion with all staff.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have high expectations and are supportive. Responsibilities are met, except for the provision of the National Curriculum in information and communications technology, religious education in the sixth form and collective worship.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Planning takes account of monitoring of results and evaluation, which is systematic and thoughtful. Targets are set to further raise achievement.
The strategic use of resources	Very good overall. The school budgets carefully to benefit students.

Governors have a good sense of best value. Staffing levels are good. Teaching and non-teaching staff contribute well to the ethos of the school. Teachers new to the school are helpfully supported. Library provision is good and, in subjects, there are enough books for all students to have their own. The number of computers is a little below average for the size of the school. The school makes

efficient use of accommodation. which is heavily used. Increase in the school's roll has put pressure on space and more is needed.

## **PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

<b>What pleases parents most</b>	<b>What parents would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school's high expectations.</li> <li>• Support for students' personal development.</li> <li>• The progress their children make.</li> <li>• Leadership, which is good.</li> <li>• Behaviour, which is good.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homework, which some parents feel is too much.</li> <li>• The information they receive on their child's progress.</li> <li>• The ways in which the school works with parents.</li> <li>• The use of computers.</li> </ul>

Parents have high expectations. Inspectors confirm their positive views of the school, reflected in their questionnaire responses and by those (53) who attended the parents' meeting. Homework is generally well used. Students did not mention excessive homework to inspectors, nor was any observed during the inspection, although pressures are great when coursework is being completed and deadlines for its completion could be better planned to spread the load. The information parents receive on their child's progress is in line with requirements. Parents say that the school is open and honest but occasionally they have to push for the information they would like and that end-of-year reports are issued too late. The ways in which the school works with parents are in line with most secondary schools and include consultation meetings on their children's progress and events, for example in music, sports and fund-raising. Several parents assist in the library and in listening to children read. Parents are not invited to comment on students' organisers and few opportunities are taken to discuss the curriculum with parents. Parents express concern about the limited use of computers but do not wish greater use of technology to detract from the school's ethos.

## PART B: COMMENTARY

### WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

#### Students achieve highly in most subjects

1. Students achieve highly at Hitchin Girls' School, both in lessons and in their results, particularly those aged 14 and 16 years. At the end of Year 9, the overall results in National Curriculum tests for the three core subjects (English, mathematics and science) are well above the national average and very high, relative to similar schools. Attainment in science is a little better than in English and mathematics. Bearing in mind students' level of attainment on entry in Year 7, which is generally above average, their results at the end of Year 9 represent good added-value.
2. Results for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) are very high overall, both when compared with results nationally and results for similar schools. In many subjects the proportion of the very high grades (A\*/A) obtained is notably good. For example, in 1999, in English language, English literature, mathematics, science, religious education, Latin, German, French, food technology, music and physical education the proportion of A\*/A grades was twice (or even more) than the national average. In 1999, the proportion of students gaining 5 grades A\*-C, at 84.9 per cent, was well above the national average and the proportion gaining five grades A\*-G, at 99.4 per cent, was very high. The great majority of grades (94 per cent) are achieved across A\*-D. Students virtually always leave school with GCSE certificates. Overall, the results represent good added-value from Years 9 to 11 and very good progress by students with learning difficulties.
3. Students' GCSE results in each of the core subjects (English, mathematics and science) are very good, results in science being just a little better than in English and mathematics. GCSE results in art are in line with the national average for girls but not as good as in their other subjects. The majority of course-work in art for GCSE shows a good range of subject matter and media, including papier-mâché, backed up with research and the development of ideas. Drawing and the development of decorative patterns are good and in the best work selective colours are used very well to create mood or expression. While the styles and techniques of artists are the basis of much good work, there is scope for improving their use by weaker candidates. GCSE results vary across design and technology aspects. In food technology they are amongst the best in the school but in resistant materials there are relatively few of the highest grades, though results are still well above the national average. The standards attained in information and communications technology by those who enter GCSE are high; results are well above the national average. However, the general standard of work by younger students is disappointing: much work was unfinished in files of students' work seen and their skill levels were generally low. Individual subject teachers make effective use of computers, for example, in religious education, design and technology, Latin, geography and French.
4. Younger students do well in lessons. In English, their standards of listening, speaking, reading and writing are very good and they make good use of their skills to assist their learning in all subjects. By the time they are aged 14 years, their writing is accurate and expressive. Students enjoy learning new words and exploring their use, as observed in a Year 9 lesson, where students of middle ability were achieving well, checking the spelling of words such as *agoraphobic*, to give precise expression in their literary criticism. In a different Year 9 class, high attaining students who had recently added to their vocabulary words such as *vociferous*, *discerning*, *derogatory* and *orifice* made very good progress in appreciating the poet's intentions in the poem *Windy boy in a windswept tree* through drawing on their awareness of rhythm, alliteration and the use of verbs. Students' understanding of key words and concepts assists their work throughout, as observed, for example, in a Year 7 religious studies lesson where a student defined the term *religious icon* and helped the class learn well from a video they had seen.

5. In most subjects, standards match or exceed national expectations in lessons. In mathematics, more able students in Year 10 attain highly; they are in line to do very well at GCSE. Working on algebra, they generated number sequences which they expressed accurately as symbols on paper and in words. They enjoyed their work and several devised extraordinary sequences, illuminating for the whole class the possibilities for squaring, for example. Even students who are less able mathematically, relative to others in Year 10, achieve in line with national expectations for their age. For example, they change the subject of a formula, including examples with negative numbers. Mental arithmetic is regularly included in mathematics lessons. By the end of Year 9, students in all classes can recall accurately their tables up to x9 and x10. Higher attaining students in Year 8 accurately calculate in their heads problems with percentages and formulae, for example. Students apply their number skills effectively in other subjects, including science and geography, but they are less confident solving problems involving scale in design and technology. They make good progress in geography and often very good progress in history lessons, where the written work of Year 11 students shows relevant answers with good supporting detail. In both history and geography they acquire good analytical skills and learn to use evidence effectively.
6. Standards in physical education lessons are good. Students make good progress in overall performance by understanding the factors affecting strength, health and safety and the improvement of individual skills. For example, in a very good lesson on trampolining, Year 10 students learned how body tension and movements improve technique by practising, observing and assessing single movements and whole jumps. Similarly, in drama, students learn how to improve through evaluation of their work. In a Year 10 lesson, students made very good progress in performing dramas they had devised as part of GCSE coursework. They showed good analytical skills and dialogue among themselves was very constructive. Students make very good progress in music lessons. For example, within a 60 minute lesson, Year 9 students learned about *raga* in Indian music, improvised rhythms, composed a *tal*, then improvised a rhythm over this, to create polyrhythmic effects.
7. Overall results in the General Certificate of Education at Advanced level (A level) at the end of the sixth form are above the national average. Few students study vocational qualifications but those who do so are successful in achieving the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in business at advanced level, a high proportion with merit or distinction. Results are generally high in A-level Latin, modern foreign languages, music and psychology. In other subjects results fluctuate a little but are usually average or better. Standards in sixth form lessons are good. In a chemistry lesson, for example, Year 12 students significantly increased their knowledge of chromatography and made very good gains in understanding the significance of hydrolysis in analysing protein structure. Biology projects, presented by Year 12 students, are similarly of a high standard, covering topics such as the genetic modification of crops, biology of fermentation and ripening of tomatoes. In a Year 12 physics lesson students demonstrated above average understanding of mechanics and electricity in good answers to A-level questions. Overall, A-level results are in line with expectations, bearing in mind the very good results students achieve at GCSE.

### **Teaching is a strength of the school**

8. The proportion of lessons in which teaching is very good or excellent, at 49 per cent across the school, is high and of these it is excellent in 10 per cent. Overall, teaching is satisfactory or better in 99 per cent and good or better in 83 per cent of lessons. It is less than satisfactory in only one per cent of lessons. The quality of learning follows a similar pattern. Outstanding features include teachers' excellent use of their subject knowledge to challenge and interest students, their very high expectations, to which students respond by doing very well, and their excellent management of students, based on very good relationships. Enthusiasm for learning is shared with students throughout the school. Careful planning, to make each lesson a special event, with a range of different activities, features more strongly lower down the school than in the sixth form. In the sixth form, teaching is good overall, being very good or excellent in 36 per cent of lessons, good in a further 50 per cent and satisfactory in the rest. In the satisfactory and most of the good lessons the pace of teaching tends to be even and lacks the impact seen lower down the school. However, outstandingly good examples of teaching were seen in the sixth form, as, for example, in English, where students were revising Thomas Hardy books for their A-level examination, and work in pairs was excellently used to deepen

their understanding of the questions and to develop their critical skills. In psychology, the teacher's clear and high expectations, together with effective use of timed targets, provided focus and assisted learning in a revision lesson. Students participated well in small group discussions. The teacher orchestrated whole-class discussion very effectively so that all students were prompted to consider issues which individuals raised, such as ethnocentrism and the problems of generalising, resulting in very good learning overall.

9. Throughout the school, teachers use their subject knowledge well. They ask well-focused questions to emphasise the main learning points, as observed in a Year 9 geography lesson on population changes, where very pertinent questions enabled students to understand specific terminology and appreciate the link between population and the quality of life in several countries. Similarly, Year 7 students, in a history lesson, made good progress in understanding factors affecting the living conditions of medieval peasants through the teacher's very well focused questions. In religious education, teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to interest and challenge students in all years: Year 9 students studying Guru Gobind Singh acquired a very good understanding of the Khalso and associated virtues and the lesson was enriched by the teacher skilfully drawing on the experience of a student who has recently visited India. Similarly, in the sixth form, students studying Buddhist text made very good progress in understanding vocabulary and concepts because of the teacher's excellent use of questions and awareness of examination requirements.
10. Teachers of modern foreign languages have very good linguistic ability. In the best lessons, the modern foreign language is used most of the time, helping to improve students' listening and pronunciation skills, as observed in a Year 8 French lesson on shopping vocabulary and numbers and in a Year 9 German lesson on *freizeit*. In a Year 10 French lesson a challenging and very French atmosphere was created in a lesson on 'one's own interests', enabling students to make very good progress in using the past and future tenses.
11. Teachers' knowledge and use of information and communications technology is patchy, so that students' use of this depends too much on the class they are in. Its incorporation into key skills and frequent use in business studies enhance the skills of sixth formers. Numeracy is very well taught in mathematics and students apply their skills effectively, for example, in geography and science. Teachers give very good attention in all subjects to the use of written and spoken language, which helps students to understand, express themselves fluently and progress well. Students who are learning to speak English benefit both from this general approach and also from specialist help, which focuses carefully on aspects which students find difficult, for example, spelling and sentence order. The specialist help is very supportive, which builds students' confidence; they respond very well and keep up in their classes.
12. Teachers manage their students excellently. Their relationships with students are very good so students are confident and participate and behave excellently: their attitudes to learning are very good. Within this very good climate for learning, teachers have very high expectations. So, for example, in Latin lessons with younger students, teachers frequently use the spoken language and significant learning occurs, both in terms of students' knowledge of grammar and of Roman life and culture. Good progress was made in a Year 9 Latin class, learning about past tenses. In a parallel Year 9 classical studies lesson, the teacher's high expectations, very good management of students and effective use of subject knowledge were enabling students to make very good progress in learning about Roman Britain. A recent topic, on Roman curses, had captured the interest of the students, who had constructed foil tablets to illustrate their work. Where, occasionally, expectations slip then students' learning is affected, as observed in a graphical products lesson. High expectations and good relationships are features of sixth form lessons. They enable sixth formers to build on their earlier learning and make good progress, as in business studies and psychology lessons.

13. Lesson planning is generally good. Teachers make effective use of the full length of lesson time and of appropriate resources. In a Year 7 food technology lesson, for example, the teacher captured students' interest in the composition and preparation of rice meals, referring to the amount of water absorbed in cooking and to the types of rice used in different countries of the world. Homework was well planned to build on learning in the lesson (the design of a pot rice meal). The teaching of how to design is well organised in food technology so students document their plans well. The preparation of design briefs, including the quality and variety of drawings, is weak in two aspects of technology: graphical products and resistant materials; this affects students' achievements in these areas. Planning for English and science lessons is generally very good, so students learn systematically. In mathematics, the activities used, though guided by departmental documentation, depend to a large extent on the individual teachers because outline planning is in the style of a syllabus, rather than a scheme of work. Homework, throughout the school, is used well. Amounts are reasonable and topics follow on from work in lessons. Students with whom inspectors discussed homework did not feel homework was excessive, although at times of coursework deadlines more could be done to spread the load.
14. In most subjects, teachers mark students' work conscientiously with constructive comments, especially in examination groups and for sixth formers. Variation occurs in the quality of marking in science where work is acknowledged and a grade given but there are relatively few comments on how to improve. Teachers do not tell students at what National Curriculum level or GCSE grade they are working until near the end of Year 9 or the GCSE course. However, students know what work has to be covered and how they are doing, relative to the school's expectations, which are high. In art, teachers comment on students' attainment in lessons but little systematic use is made of assessment to raise attainment. In information and communications technology there is no whole-school approach to assessing students' competence, so the contribution of work done in subjects is piece-meal. Very good use is made of assessment on the sixth form GNVQ course, where it is used to inform students of how they are doing and helps them plan to improve further.

**Students have very good attitudes: enthusiasm for learning is shared by teachers and their students**

15. The school is successful in reflecting its aims of maintaining traditional values in work and behaviour in its daily life. Students have very good attitudes towards their work and their behaviour is excellent. In lessons they are keen to do well. They concentrate throughout the full length of the lesson time and participate happily in lessons and extra-curricular activities.
16. Students' very positive attitudes assist their learning. For example, the enthusiasm of a Year 10 class working on a media topic in English and their very good oral skills assisted them in presenting their analysis on the effectiveness of advertisements; they made their presentations to each other with panache, emphasising key points very well. Teachers continually stress collaboration. In the best lessons teachers emphasise the need for good memory and vocabulary. The development of literacy skills and oracy assists students in all their learning. Specific teaching in Year 7 of thinking and study skills helps students to learn well in all their subjects. Students appreciate this opportunity. Timetabled library lessons in Year 7 help students to develop good reading habits.
17. Students develop very good learning skills. They waste no time, settle quickly in lessons and learn very effectively. Teachers expect students, and make a point of telling them, to recall their earlier work, as, for example, in science lessons in Year 7 on static electricity and in Year 8, when learning about circuit electricity. Similarly, teachers expect students to apply their existing knowledge and skills, as in a Year 9 geography lesson about measuring development and a Year 10 music lesson involving sight-reading on instruments or voice. Students respond to these opportunities by learning effectively. They develop good revision techniques by frequent practice in extracting information and developing memory skills, as observed in a Year 7 history lesson. With older groups, sixth formers particularly, teachers make appropriate reference to examination expectations and provide model answers. Students make very effective use of facilities available but, because there is not enough provision of information and communications technology, their use of this is limited.

18. Students learn very well through longer projects. Sixth formers have produced excellent work in the three science subjects. In physics, for example in a project on investigating the ability of sports shoes to absorb impact, a range of techniques for investigating the problem was explored, useful results were collected, the findings were discussed critically and the overall presentation was of an exceptionally high standard. Younger students (Year 9) in Latin are building up project folders on the life of Quintus. Their projects are imaginatively presented, show good understanding of life in Pompeii and empathy with Quintus, in his flight after the volcano eruption. They achieve high standards and are justifiably proud of their work.

**Students are known well individually and helped to do their best; they are proud of their school**

19. The pastoral system is well organised and strong. Relationships in form groups are very good. Form tutors make effective use of early morning form times. They take opportunities to encourage positive thinking and build students' self-esteem as well as dealing with practical matters, such as organisation of books for lessons. Students are known well, individually. Form tutors monitor overall progress and help students to set targets for improvement. Subject teachers are caring and the school has a system for following up concerns if it is felt that a student is in need of support. Students know they can find the pupil development co-ordinator (a trained counsellor) if there is any matter they would like to discuss and a second trained counsellor is available at lunchtimes. Students appreciate the efforts made by their teachers and are proud of their school.
20. The curriculum to support students' personal development is very well organised and taught. Topics cover a wide range of issues. During the inspection these included health and safety (smoking) with Year 7, improving study skills (Year 8), attitudes to age and women (Year 9), money-management (Year 10) and university entrance (Year 12). Health and sex education and drugs' awareness are appropriately covered in personal, social and health education lessons, supplemented by work in science and physical education. Careers education is well planned with the support of careers officers at appropriate stages. A high proportion of students stay on in education after GCSE and nearly all of the sixth formers progress into higher education where they study on a very wide range of courses. In 1999, for example, they successfully entered training in subjects as diverse as marketing, medicine and jazz and contemporary music.
21. Many opportunities are provided for students' social development. Students gain confidence in lessons through paired and group work. They discuss and present ideas well. Individuals' contributions in assemblies, both spoken and musical instrument playing, are good. Students are taught to respect each other. Staff are good role models. There is a strong sense of right and wrong and consideration for others. Behaviour is excellent. Many opportunities are taken to enrich students' cultural experiences. The visits programme is unusually wide. Religious education is strongly multi-cultural. Many examples drawn from other cultures are used in food technology, art and music. Work in modern foreign languages, Latin and classical studies further enrich students' understanding of other cultures. Students are encouraged to take responsibility, show initiative and be good citizens. Form and school councils are active. During the inspection students observed a "pink day" in aid of research into breast cancer. Reflection is encouraged in many areas, including humanities subjects, in English, science, modern foreign languages and the arts. Assemblies, which students attend on several mornings each week, include religious references and opportunity for prayer and worship. On other mornings there is no planned opportunity for reflection. The statutory requirement for collective worship is not met. In other respects, opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very good.
22. Students receive good guidance on their work, which is mostly very promptly marked. Comments on the work of sixth formers are detailed and helpful. The school keeps systematic records of students' progress. Since the last inspection the analysis of information has improved significantly. The school makes effective use of monitoring information to plan, to guide students and help them to improve. Students know how they are getting on but not always in terms of National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades, except at appropriate stages.

Information is correctly reported to parents.

23. The pupil development co-ordinator manages the support of students with special educational needs very effectively: they progress very well. Detailed records are maintained. Individual Educational Plans are used effectively by pupil development staff to help students to improve and to monitor their progress. Subject staff plan well for the work of teaching groups, which are mostly organised on the basis of students' ability, but they do little planning and review for students with particular needs and this is an area for development. Outside specialists work well with the school to support the needs of individual students. Support for students who are learning to speak English is good.

### **The curriculum is rich and varied**

24. This section mainly covers provision up to Year 11; a section on the sixth form is included later in the report. The curriculum is rich and varied. Strengths include good modern foreign languages provision. Students of all abilities have opportunity to learn Latin or classical studies. They enjoy these lessons and familiarity with Latin assists them in their understanding of the English language and its accurate use. The school values additional languages spoken by students; Punjabi is taught and students are entered for GCSE in this and other home languages. Good provision in the core subjects, English, mathematics and science, enables students to progress systematically and well. In English a wide range of literature and writing opportunities is provided, reflected in high standards of written work and presentation across the curriculum. Students' creativity is developed through work in drama, art, physical education and music. Parents at their meeting commented on an emphasis in music on the classical repertoire. While this is mostly true, the curriculum covers a wide range of world music, such as Thai, Indian and American music, including jazz and blues. Opportunities, through access to practice facilities, are provided for students to make their own music and these could be known more widely.
25. The curriculum meets the requirements of the National Curriculum up to Year 11, except for the provision of information and communications technology, where planning does not ensure consistent coverage of the curriculum at the expected depth. All students have information and communications technology lessons in Year 7; none is taught in Year 8 and little in Year 9. Across Years 10 and 11 only the GCSE groups have regular systematic provision although even these students do not do enough on control. Individual subjects include information and communications technology in lessons but there is no co-ordinated approach to covering the curriculum and assessing students' skills. Inadequate coverage of control, measuring and modelling is a short-coming affecting design and technology, where this aspect is generally taught by reference to industrial practice because only limited facilities are available.
26. Extra-curricular provision is very good, and benefits students' experience greatly. The range of visits abroad is extensive. For example, a recent visit to Thailand vividly brought to life students' classroom learning in religious studies and inspired impressive art work, displayed at the entrance of the school. A link with a French school assists students' progress in French and helps them appreciate the outlooks of people from different backgrounds. Students are well challenged and successful in numerous outside competitions and events, including public speaking, scientific poetry, Royal Institution lectures and mathematics challenges. They perform in frequent music concerts at school and public venues and successfully enter sports events and competitions at regional and national levels. The school has recently gained the Sportsmark award for the second time. While the annual drama production has lapsed, parents are regularly invited to workshop performances. Parents are also invited into school to view art work displayed for examination assessments.

27. The school is out-going and students benefit from many links beyond the school. Work experience placements enhance understanding of the world of work by Year 11 and sixth form students. Links with businesses, both major world-class companies as well as smaller firms, extend the expertise and facilities available in many practical ways. These opportunities reflect well on the support given by the education business co-ordinator, the work of the sponsorship group and the efforts of individual teachers.

### **Leadership by the headteacher is strong and the school is well managed**

28. The school is strongly led by the headteacher. Very high standards are effectively promoted, in a climate of very good relationships and enjoyment of learning and achievement. The ethos is strongly positive and the school is successfully working towards its aim of developing students' talents to the full, in preparation for the demands of the outside world. Parents are very pleased with results and the attitudes and values promoted by the school. At their meeting they commented that the school is friendly and honest and arrangements are very systematic: the school is well managed. Responsibilities are clear. Senior managers are linked to subject areas and are themselves good role models: they lead by example.
29. Good progress has been made in many areas of the school's work since the last inspection. GCSE results have improved at a faster rate than nationally and teaching, which at the last inspection was described as at least sound and often very good, is now a strength. The systematic planning of developments has helped the school to improve and the recently updated Development Plan incorporates further improvements. The school is well aware of the areas where more improvement is needed – in the use of information and communications technology especially, for example – and this is included as a target area in its plan. The school is deeply committed to helping all students to do their best and promotes respect and equality of access through planned initiatives. Departments analyse results and plan further improvements. The monitoring of progress towards their targets is uneven, however, reflected, for example, in the inconsistent use of information and communications technology across the school.
30. Governors have high expectations and are closely involved in the work of the school. They probe information they receive, visit lessons and receive reports and presentations by departments at their meetings. They have a good sense of best value and draw on their professional backgrounds to assist the school, for example, in arrangements for external decoration and in monitoring its finances. They subsidise the funding for special education needs allocated by the local authority, because of their commitment to pupil development. Likewise, they assist students learning to play musical instruments. Governors are acutely aware of the need for extra space and are vigorously seeking help from the local education authority for the provision of extra accommodation for design and technology (textiles). The need remains for more general classrooms, space for information and communications technology and, indoors, for physical education. Increase in the school's roll has put great pressure on accommodation. While the school has increased the number of computers available over the last few years, the number of machines is still a little below average for the size of the school. Recent purchases have been possible because of support from a local education trust, with whom governors have good links. Students benefit in many practical ways through the support of local organisations, including help towards the cost of educational visits. The parents' association contributes actively towards the life of the school, organising events and raising funds, for example, for the purchase of dictionaries.
31. The school is well staffed. Teachers are well qualified and experienced on the whole; all are involved in planning for improvements. Training in the use of information and communications technology is behind that in many schools. Teachers new to the school are well supported. Non-teaching staff contribute well to the ethos of the school. The library is well run and has good stock, including a good range of fiction, from quick-readers to current novels, to encourage students of all capabilities and inclinations to keep up their reading. In subjects, all students have their own books and they are well used in lessons. A dictionary and thesaurus are kept in every teaching room and they are used effectively by staff and students. Videos are used appropriately. Students' own participation is used effectively in lessons – as observed in business studies, where students gave presentations on case-studies on experience of management training, and music, where a sixth former was able to sight-read

from a Clementi piano sonata to demonstrate passages to the class. Provision of learning resources is good in many ways, except for computers.

32. The school budgets carefully to benefit students and monitoring of resources is thorough. The amount of money coming into the school is average. Funding for students with special educational needs is well spent; they make very good progress. The school allocates appropriately resources for students from ethnic minority backgrounds and they progress broadly in line with others in the school. Most are fluent English speakers and the focus of their support is on raising achievement across the curriculum. The amount of money the school spends on the sixth form matches the allocation. Results at A level are in line with expectations based on students' GCSE results, which represents satisfactory added-value. When account is taken of the overall quality of education provided by the school, which is very good, the standards of students on entry in Year 7 and their subsequent achievements, at GCSE especially, the school provides good value for money.

## **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

### **While a start has been made, not enough use is made of information and communications technology**

33. At the time of the last inspection, the provision of information and communications technology was a key issue for action. While some improvement has been made, it is very limited and this remains an area for improvement. The amount of direct teaching for younger students is limited. There is no consistency in the use and monitoring of students' progress in information technology across the curriculum from Years 7 to 11. In several subjects good use is made of computers – for example in Latin, where the scheme of work includes the use of information technology, and in music, where software is used for musical composition. No recent audit has taken place of the use of computers across the curriculum. Insufficient use is a serious shortcoming in design and technology where there are not enough opportunities for students to learn control, modelling and measuring. Increased use of information and communications technology is a priority also in art, where students have little opportunity to create and manipulate images electronically. Provision for students preparing to take information studies at GCSE and business studies in the sixth form is much better. The sixth form key skills initiative is a useful model for future development. The availability of computers has improved since the last inspection, although the number of machines is still a little below average, for the size of the school. However, the limited use across the curriculum is not due to insufficient machines. Since the last inspection, progress in planning and monitoring improvement has been slow. A strong thrust is needed to train staff and include worthwhile opportunities in every subject.

### **The extent of religious education in the sixth form and opportunities for collective worship are not enough to meet requirements**

34. The quality of religious studies, taught across Years 7 to 11 and at A level, is good. Elements of religious education are included in the programme for all sixth formers but insufficient to meet the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Assemblies, which students attend several times each week, include opportunity for thoughtful reflection and worship but no similar opportunity is provided on other days. These weaknesses were reported at the time of the last inspection and are no better now.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

35. *To further raise the standards of work and attainment of students, the governors, headteacher, senior management team and staff should continue improving aspects of the school's work included in key issues of the last inspection report by:*
- raising standards in information and communications technology by providing the National Curriculum systematically across all subjects (see paragraphs 25 and 33);
  - increasing the frequency of opportunities for reflection and collective worship and the provision of religious education in the sixth form (see paragraphs 21 and 34).
36. The school has included information and communications technology as an area for improvement in its Development Plan.

## THE SIXTH FORM

37. The school provides a good range of sixth form opportunities through subjects taught on the school's own premises and in partner schools of the local consortium. About 24 A-level subjects are provided at the school and also a GNVQ at advanced level in business. Students have a good choice if they wish to continue studying arts, modern foreign languages, the sciences, humanities or classics. Subjects introduced at sixth form level but not taught lower down the school include psychology and business studies. Students who wish to study other vocational courses continue at the local college of further education or at colleges further afield, for example the London College of Fashion. In the school sixth form classes observed during the inspection there were usually several students from partner schools. Relationships were good and students were learning well, in response to the teaching, which was good, overall. Religious studies is provided as an A-level course. Students' attitudes and learning on this are excellent, in response to the teachers' very high expectations and good handling of abstract ideas. Opportunities for other students to consider religious and fundamental issues are provided through special conferences and courses but not in sufficient depth to meet the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. In addition to their main examination subjects, students have personal, social and health education, including careers education, and opportunity to gain awards in sports' leadership and Spanish. Students gain credit for their attainment in key skills, either through a pilot vocational award or the Youth Award Scheme, which also recognises achievement for a wide range of community service and individual interests. Students achieve well on this: the majority gain gold awards. Students are not entered for general studies at A level: arrangements which were in place a number of years ago have lapsed. While social and cultural issues are discussed in many subjects and develop as part of extra-curricular activities, there is no timetabled programme to enrich all students' experience. Students on business courses (leading to A level or vocational qualifications) have opportunity for work experience, which provides valuable case-study material. Sixth formers attend school every morning although they can work at home in the afternoon. Good facilities are provided in the school for sixth formers' private study and as social areas. They are good role models and contribute well to the life of the school; for example, they mentor younger students, run clubs, including drama, have responsibilities and represent the school as prefects and head and deputy head girls.
38. The school monitors sixth form results carefully. Information is shared with students to a much greater extent than lower down the school. Overall, the value added in the sixth form is satisfactory: A-level results are broadly in line with expectations based on GCSE results. In some subjects standards are very high, as reflected, for example, in results in Latin, modern foreign languages, music and psychology. Inspectors observed high quality work in students' science projects. The school is keen to improve provision and achievements further. A key skills pilot is raising standards in the use of information and communications technology. Plans are well advanced for the sixth form from the autumn of this year when curricular changes, in response to national initiatives, are to be implemented.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	99
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	38

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
10	39	34	16	1	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	801	201
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	32	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	5	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	193	13

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	38

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	12

### Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	6.2
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.1
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 students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999 (1998)	0 (0)	159 (158)	159 (158)

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	Girls	148 (152)	142 (125)	141 (136)
	Total	148 (152)	142 (125)	141 (136)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	93 (96)	89 (79)	89 (86)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	59 (64)	71 (64)	72 (66)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	Girls	152 (133)	141 (123)	146 (144)
	Total	152 (133)	141 (123)	146 (144)
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	96 (84)	89 (78)	92 (91)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	77 (64)	70 (56)	75 (71)
	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 (1998)	0 (0)	159 (163)	159 (163)

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	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
	Girls	135 (144)	158 (161)	158 (161)
	Total	135 (144)	158 (161)	158 (161)
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	85 (88)	99 (99)	99 (99)
	National	46.6 (44.6)	90.9 (89.8)	95.8 (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	56 (56)
	National	38.0 (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)	0 (0)	144 (147)	144 (147)

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	0 (0)	17.7 (19.4)	17.7 (19.4)	0 (0)	4.1 (3.8)	4.1 (3.8)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	100
	National	73

### Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	10
Black – African heritage	17
Black – other	8
Indian	63
Pakistani	16
Bangladeshi	14
Chinese	4
White	864
Any other minority ethnic group	6

### 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	3	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)	62.05
Number of students per qualified teacher	16.2:1

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	15
Total aggregate hours worked per week	251

### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72.0
---	------

### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – 11**

Key Stage 3	24.1
Key Stage 4	22.0

## **Financial information**

Financial year	1999-2000
----------------	-----------

	£
Total income	2,585,404
Total expenditure	2,569,109
Expenditure per student	2544
Balance brought forward from previous year	41,043
Balance carried forward to next year	57,338

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1002
Number of questionnaires returned	295

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	42	49	7	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	52	46	2	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	40	55	3	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	29	51	14	2	4
The teaching is good.	37	57	4	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	57	13	1	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	41	48	8	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	64	34	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	25	49	18	1	7
The school is well led and managed.	45	47	4	1	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	44	50	4	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	38	46	10	2	4

### Other issues raised by parents

Parents at their meeting with the registered inspector were supportive of the school, particularly the standards achieved in most subjects and the attitudes and values promoted by the school. An individual parent expressed concern about the cost of school visits, although other parents were very appreciative of the range of opportunities offered. Several expressed concern about limited use of computers although they said they would not wish increased use of technology to affect the ethos of the school, which they much appreciated.