

INSPECTION REPORT

BIRCHWOOD COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

Birchwood, Warrington

LEA area: Warrington

Unique reference number: 111444

Headteacher: Sheila Yates

Reporting inspector: Judy Jones
12460

Dates of inspection: 2nd – 5th May 2000

Inspection number: 185629

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 16

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Brock Road
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Cheshire

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr. Barry Sanson

Date of previous inspection: 16th – 20th October 1995

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school is about the same size as other secondary schools nationally, with 935 pupils aged between 11 and 16 years. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national average and there are very few pupils from ethnic minorities. There are 48 pupils with statements of special educational need; this is higher than average. Pupils come from a large number of primary schools and a significant proportion come from outside the catchment area. Pupils' attainment when they start at the school in Year 7 is below average overall, although there is a full range of ability in each year group.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Birchwood Community High School is a very good school, which is continually striving for improvement. Teaching is good and enables pupils to learn well and achieve success in relation to their prior knowledge in a wide range of subjects.

What the school does well

- Leadership by the headteacher and senior staff is exceptional and inspires a continual search for improvement among middle managers and other staff.
- The school has very good systems for evaluating its work.
- Teachers enjoy teaching and pass their enthusiasm on to pupils, so that learning is good and standards, particularly in Years 10 and 11 are high.
- Relationships at all levels are very good and are the foundation of the very good ethos that is evident in all the work of the school.
- Support for pupils with special educational needs is very good and enables them to achieve success in a wide range of subjects.
- Links with the community are very good. The school benefits considerably from sharing sports and library facilities with the community. This is reflected in excellent extra curricular physical education opportunities.

What could be improved

- Boys' achievement, although above the national average, is lower than that of girls, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- The programme to extend the curriculum is not as well structured in Years 8 and 9 as in other years, and some sessions lack the sense of purpose seen in most other lessons.
- Although teaching in science is generally good, in a few lessons the teachers do not adapt the work sufficiently for pupils who find learning difficult.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in October 1995 and found to have many strengths. Since then the school has maintained the high standard of teaching and improved further in other ways. Standards in GCSE have risen from average to above average. The accommodation has been extended and is of a generally high standard. The facilities for sports are now outstanding.

The school has improved the way it evaluates its work and there are now good systems at all levels for assessing its effectiveness. This extends to pupils who also set themselves targets and review them regularly.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	C	B	B	A

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

Results in national tests at the age of 14 have improved over the last 3 years at about the same rate as the national trend. Results in mathematics and science have followed the national pattern quite closely but English has generally been below average. There is little difference between the attainment of boys and girls in mathematics and science, but in English, boys' results over the last three years have been lower than those of girls.

GCSE results have improved significantly since 1994 when the overall results were close to the national average. Results now are above average and well above the average for schools where pupils come from a similar social background. Over the last three years boys and girls have achieved results that are above average; in 1999, girls' results were well above average. While standards of both groups are rising, the gap between girls and boys is wider than average because the girls have done particularly well.

Since 1994 there has been a big increase in the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C. The proportion of pupils achieving one or more GCSE has remained consistently above average and the proportion achieving five or more grades A* to G has risen. These figures reflect the very good progress made by pupils with statements of special educational need; the school has a higher than average number of pupils in this category, and many reach standards well above what could be expected. The school exceeded its ambitious targets for GCSE results in 1999.

Pupils' work seen during the inspection matches these results. Pupils achieve higher standards than could be expected from their levels of attainment when they start in Year 7 and there is a steady improvement over the five years in school. Standards in literacy are average in Years 7 to 9 and improve to above average in the last two years in school. All pupils communicate well in writing and by the end of Year 11 most can spell and punctuate accurately. Pupils' numeracy is satisfactory.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils are proud of their school and have positive attitudes towards all its aspects.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in lessons is usually good. Pupils are polite, confident and cooperative. Around the school pupils are orderly and sensible. They take good care of the very pleasant surroundings.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils grow into mature and sensible young people. They form stable relationships with each other and with teachers, based on mutual respect and liking.
Attendance	Attendance is satisfactory. There are fewer than average cases of pupils playing truant.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

During the inspection, teaching in 16 per cent of lessons seen was satisfactory, 57 per cent was good, and in over 20 per cent it was very good. A small amount of excellent teaching was seen. Good teaching leads to good learning by pupils in all years in the school.

Teaching is good in most lessons, and during the inspection teaching was very good or excellent in a quarter of all lessons. There is very little unsatisfactory teaching. Teaching is good in most English and mathematics lessons at both key stages. In science most lessons are well taught and pupils learn well. Occasionally however, science teachers do not manage the lessons so that the work is suitable for all pupils, and those who have difficulty learning do not get enough help to understand the purpose of the lesson.

The good relationships between teachers and pupils are an important feature of almost all lessons and help pupils to enjoy learning and feel able to ask questions. Literacy is very well taught. It has been introduced into the programme of extension studies this year and is already improving pupils' ability to read critically and recognise and use different aspects of written and spoken language. Numeracy is taught satisfactorily through mathematics; pupils use numbers competently when needed in subjects such as science and technology. The school has effective strategies for meeting the needs of all pupils. Pupils identified as having particular strengths are given the opportunity to take GCSE examinations early. Pupils with learning difficulties are identified quickly and given regular support that is reviewed frequently and changed as necessary.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum covers the subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education fully. It is wide-ranging and has a particularly effective strategy for improving pupils' literacy in Year7.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision is very good, both for pupils with learning difficulties, and for pupils with particular gifts and talents. There is very good planning to support these pupils and enable them to achieve standards well above expectation.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	There are very few pupils for whom English is an additional language. All are bilingual and do not need additional help.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	There are many opportunities for pupils to develop a sense of responsibility and learn to live happily and tolerantly in a community. Pupils develop social skills by following the very good examples set by staff, through lessons and many other activities. Spiritual development is strengthened through the school's strong links with local churches, whose clergy conduct many assemblies and provide support for pupils in times of crisis.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pupils are well cared for. Teachers know pupils well and there are good systems for enabling pupils to make progress in lessons and for supporting those who need help with lessons or with personal difficulties.

There are good opportunities for pupils to learn more about the world of work through the personal and social education course, and there is an effective programme for a small number of pupils who benefit from a practical work-based approach to some of their studies. Pupils with particular gifts and talents are able to take appropriate GCSE subjects one or two years early.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school is very well led by the head teacher and a team of senior managers, who welcome initiatives and are continually trying to improve the education the school provides.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors know the school well and are deeply committed to maintaining its high reputation in the area and improving still further. Governors are well informed and play a full part in steering the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has very good systems for reviewing and evaluating its work, and senior managers use this information well to identify strengths and areas where improvement is needed.
The strategic use of resources	The school uses its resources very well. Senior managers and governors look closely at the way money is spent and ensure that the school buys wisely and carefully. Senior managers have a good grasp of how the school's spending compares with others' and seek to get the best value from all financial decisions.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents are proud of the school and many send children from outside the catchment area.• The school is well led and managed• Pupils are well cared for and bullying is very well dealt with.• The school has high expectations and pupils make good progress.• Pupils behave well in school and outside.	Nothing.

The inspection team agreed with parents' views and with the strengths parents identified.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Leadership by the headteacher and senior staff is exceptional and inspires a continual search for improvement among middle managers and other staff

1. The headteacher has a very clear vision, not only of what sort of school this is, but also of how it should develop. She works closely with her senior management team and governors to see that the school maintains its existing strengths, and brings in new initiatives such as target-setting and improving literacy. She is committed to keeping the school as a central part of the community and developing this aspect further. She is able to carry staff with her because she and her colleagues on the senior management team value the work of all staff and treat them with consideration.

2. The school development plan has been changed in structure since the previous inspection in response to the criticism that it had too many headings, and now outlines the school's main priorities clearly. This clarity is at the heart of the way the school is managed – middle managers know what has to be done and understand how their contribution to planning fits into the whole school plan. Paperwork is straightforward and not excessive, and helps teachers with responsibility for planning to make and evaluate decisions.

3. Middle managers plan well and share responsibilities with colleagues, for example for planning courses, to give all staff an opportunity to develop professionally. They guide and support colleagues with the same vision that characterises senior management. This leads to a united staff, committed to reflecting on what they do and improving further.

The school has very good systems for evaluating its work

4. A particularly distinctive and effective aspect of the way the school is managed is the emphasis on self-evaluation. This is a strong feature of the school's planning cycle and influences all areas of the school. There are effective systems for teachers with responsibility for subject areas to evaluate the work of colleagues and for teachers to observe each other as critical friends, to enable them to share good ideas and support each other, both within their subject areas and beyond.

5. Self-evaluation now extends to pupils who are used to setting targets for themselves in all subjects and reflecting on how well they are doing. This is a recent development that is being monitored and refined. For example, senior managers are now considering ways to make target-setting for pupils still more effective, by reducing the number of targets and reviewing them more frequently.

6. Governors are an important and effective arm of the school's management. They know the school well. They are proud of its achievements and keen to see the school improve still further. They take full part in making the policy of the school, and setting priorities for development. For example, they recently disagreed with a school plan to focus on improving attendance and asked that homework should be given greater prominence instead.

Teachers enjoy teaching and pass their enthusiasm on to pupils, so that learning is good and standards, particularly in Years 10 and 11 are high

7. Teachers know their subjects well. They also know how children learn and what to do to help them learn better. In a Year 8 religious education lesson with the theme 'Is there life after death?' the teacher planned the lesson with great care. She recognised that the class does not yet have the skills for full debate so she set out rules for discussion on the board and listed the aims of the lesson. Following a short review of what they had studied in the previous lesson she encouraged a series of short debates that allowed pupils to make points and follow arguments without the discussion becoming too diffuse. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs, made sensitive contributions, which were praised and valued. The well-planned structure enabled the teacher to succeed in her aim to develop pupils' ability to talk openly and confidently about personal and potentially embarrassing matters.

8. Lessons are planned so that pupils are challenged to think hard and deepen their knowledge. Teachers have high expectations that pupils will try hard and want to succeed; consequently most pupils have high expectations of themselves. In a Year 10 French lesson a lower set, who are working on a Certificate of Achievement rather than GCSE, were able to learn how to buy stamps and services from a post office in French through a role-play activity in which they could 'cheat' and look at a prompt, or try to remember the words and phrases they had learned. They showed pleasure in trying to meet the challenge of using what they had learned, and pride in their achievement as they became less reliant on the prompts.

9. Most lessons are short - only 45 minutes - but teachers use the time well, taking pupils briskly through a variety of planned activities. In a Year 11 revision lesson in business studies the teacher helped pupils to revise the use of computer spreadsheets and market research by providing a 'consumer testing' activity in which pupils had to taste five kinds of potato crisp, mark it for various qualities, enter the results in a spreadsheet and collect and analyse results from other pupils. By the end of the lesson most pupils had completed the spreadsheet and effectively reminded themselves about both market research and functions of spreadsheets. In a Year 8 music lesson the teacher managed a variety of activities including listening to a piece of music and performing in groups successfully because he was very clear in his instructions and made sure all pupils knew what to do next by asking a series of quick questions to check. He emphasised the important points of the lesson by referring to the key words on the wall round the room, and saved time by having overhead transparencies ready prepared to show pupils how to record what they would be hearing.

10. Teachers use lively teaching materials that make lessons interesting and relevant. The literacy course that all Year 7 follow for two lessons a week is very well planned to explore literacy through a number of subjects. In some lessons pupils look at the way literacy is used to present and explain mathematical problems, and teachers have prepared a series of lively overhead projector transparencies of a humorous mathematics book. Pupils are interested and amused and discuss keenly the ways ideas can be presented. They identify stereotypes, such as 'the mad mathematician' and can see that the mathematical term 'round up' is actually a metaphor.

11. Teachers are beginning to emphasise the importance of literacy in all subjects and make good use of key words to help pupils become familiar with technical language. Pupils' writing in all subjects improves steadily from Year 7 to Year 11. Their spelling and punctuation become more accurate and the careful marking in most subjects helps pupils

to take care presenting their work. The work pupils do in Years 10 and 11 in English, learning how set out an argument clearly, helps them to write well in other subjects. For example, some of the project work in design and technology is very well set out, described and evaluated.

12. The high standards in literacy are evident in pupils' good English results at GCSE. Most pupils are entered for both English literature and English language and results are above average. This compares very well with the national picture, because in many schools lower attaining pupils are not entered for the literature examination.

13. Good teaching in mathematics leads to satisfactory standards of numeracy, so that pupils can use number, measurement and graphs where necessary in other subjects such as geography and design and technology. Pupils are still inclined to use calculators rather than mental mathematics if they have a choice. There are well-conceived plans to introduce more basic numeracy into the Year 8 curriculum, building on the work done in primary schools through the National Numeracy Strategy.

14. Teachers manage pupils very well; they show that they expect pupils to be polite and well mannered, and set high standards through their own examples. In a Year 7 science lesson a teacher who was meeting a group for the first time quickly established her rules with a number of lively and restless boys, and quietly but firmly asserted herself each time they forgot and started to call out, so that by the end of the lesson everyone understood and accepted the expected behaviour, and relationships remained cordial.

15. Pupils learn well because teachers are clear about the purpose of the lesson and explain this. They enable pupils to achieve their best by helping them to develop skills and build on them through well-chosen activities. This is particularly evident in art, where pupils can explain what they are doing, and what effect they wish to create. This awareness of how they are learning is very motivating. In a Year 9 art lesson the pupils' behaviour was exemplary as they constructed collages based on their study of modern art and artists. Their thoughtful and mature assessment of their work and the degree of commitment were a reflection of the commitment and care taken by the teacher in planning the course.

16. Teachers use information and communication technology well to support learning in other subjects. In science, for example, a lower set of Year 10 pupils used computers to calculate the cost of running different electrical appliances. Pupils learned about the difference in running costs and about the way a computer spreadsheet can speed up the way results are analysed, and reduce tedious tasks. The lesson worked because the teacher introduced the topic with lively and relevant anecdotes and prepared the pupils well for using the computers. By the time they went to the computer suite in the second part of the lesson pupils knew the purpose of the spreadsheet, and what to enter. They enjoyed the satisfaction of seeing the spreadsheet produce their results after they had set it up correctly by entering a simple formula.

17. Since the previous inspection, standards, particularly at the end of Year 11, have risen. Pupils' achievement is good and can be seen in the way standards rise, from being below average when pupils enter the school, to average by the end of Year 9, and above average at the end of Year 11.

18. Standards at the age of 16 have risen right across the ability range. The proportion of pupils getting five or more GCSE A* to C grades has risen from below average to above average since 1994. In addition, the average point score for pupils has increased at a faster rate than the national trend, showing that the grades of all pupils have improved, not

just those identified as borderline between the C and D grades. This is in keeping with the school's philosophy of doing the best for all pupils.

19. Attainment in art is a strength of the school. The very good results at GCSE, where over 85 per cent of pupils reached levels A* to C are founded on very good teaching and learning from Year 7. Expectations are high and pupils use sketch books for weekly extended homework that demands concentration and care and often takes a significant part of their homework time in the early years. By the time they reach Year 10 over a third of pupils elect to take art at GCSE level and in 1999 about a quarter got grades A* or A. This is well above national figures.

20. Last year pupils were less successful in music than in their other subjects. The school has suffered from changes of teachers in the subject and has only just been able to reorganise the department and make a new appointment. Teaching and learning in music are now good and the standards seen in lessons during the inspection show that the subject is poised to improve. Teachers are working hard to help pupils in Year 11 recover lost ground. For example, teachers have provided pupils with useful checklists to use when revising, carefully structured to help pupils remind themselves of the syllabus and identify areas where they are weak or have not covered the work fully. In a Year 11 lesson on revising musical forms the teacher checked to see what pupils already knew and ensured that as well as revising previous work she could fill the gaps in knowledge caused by staffing difficulties last year. After the pupils had listened to a piece once and been shown how to identify changes in qualities such as pitch and rhythm they repeated the task to consolidate what they had learned, and by the end of the lesson all pupils were clearly more confident and competent and could reach at least average standard.

Relationships at all levels are very good and are the foundation of the very good ethos that is evident in all the work of the school

21. The school is a friendly place where everyone is valued. To a large extent this is because the senior managers work closely together, share common aims and are good at communicating their enthusiasm and enjoyment of the job. Good relationships are also the result of careful planning so that people know what they have to do and, though demands are great, they are made with consideration and are not excessive. For example, the headteacher planned to employ extra staff to invigilate during examinations in the week following the inspection, to ease the load on teachers.

22. Good relationships with pupils stem largely from the good example set by teachers, but are also due to effective planning. Pupils stay with the same form tutor for the full five years and the form tutor knows the pupils well. The importance of the role of the form tutor is underlined by having members of the senior management team, with the exception of the headteacher, act as form tutors.

23. Good relationships with teachers are one reason why pupils do well in the school. They respect teachers and value their advice and help. Even pupils who do not have a great interest in the lesson are prepared to listen and are often won over by teachers' enthusiasm and good humour. This was seen during the inspection in some Year 11 lessons when pupils were continually leaving for or returning from physical education practical examinations. In spite of the pressures on them and the distraction of having to think about the examinations, pupils were cooperative and tried hard to become involved.

24. The school provides many opportunities for pupils to develop constructive relationships outside lessons and grow into mature and responsible young people. One example is the School Council, formed of representatives from all years. Two older pupils have agreed to chair the council jointly, and do this with great assurance. They encourage younger pupils to express themselves and deal with issues that are important to pupils and the school generally. For example, they were concerned that a local shop has been refusing to allow groups of pupils access and sent a letter, putting their case very clearly, but politely. The shop manager replied sympathetically to the council's well-argued letter. The council is guided by a senior teacher who advises, but does not patronise or intrude.

Support for pupils with special educational needs is very good and enables them to achieve success in a wide range of subjects

25. The school has a higher than usual proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need. This is partly because the special needs department has built up a reputation in the community for working well with such pupils and helping them to achieve success in GCSE and other examinations. The special educational needs coordinator manages the department well, ensuring that pupils are supported according to their needs, and that teachers and classroom assistants are given up-to-date guidance.

26. The strength of the system lies in the regular and accurate assessment of pupils, particularly in Year 7. An unusual but effective feature of the planning is the attachment of 'support tutors' to forms in Year 7. These teachers, who do not have forms of their own, support the group in a few lessons and give help to individuals who need it. Their other role is to help the special needs coordinator to estimate the degree of support needed and to see when pupils need more help. This allows the school to help pupils with minor learning difficulties, usually related to reading and spelling, to make sufficient progress to be taken off the special needs register quickly, or else moved on to a stage where more support is provided. The school's resources are therefore focused on pupils who are in most need of help.

27. Pupils remaining on the register have good individual education plans that help teachers to provide activities and help in lessons to match their needs. Pupils with statements are well supported in lessons by classroom assistants, and in the learning resource base where special facilities such as computer learning programmes are used. Teachers know the needs of these pupils well and are sensitive to the particular problems of pupils with, for example, Asperger's syndrome.

28. In Years 10 and 11 pupils with special educational needs take fewer subjects in order to have extra time to work in the support base. This is very effective and allows them to keep up with the rest of the class through the help of special needs teachers and classroom assistants. A Year 11 pupil with a statement is taking GCSE in a number of subjects, including design and technology and has been able, with guidance, to put together a portfolio of work of at least average standard.

29. The school has a valuable programme in Year 11 for a small group of pupils for whom a full course of GCSE examinations would be inappropriate. These pupils spend some of their time outside their ordinary curriculum following a work-related programme run by the careers service and leading to a Youth Award. Pupils in this group are developing confidence and the ability to negotiate and organise through activities such as fund-raising for a local charity. Members of the group have roles such as secretary, and social chair, which they fulfil responsibly, with unobtrusive guidance from the careers officer.

Links with the community are very good. The school benefits considerably from sharing sports and library facilities with the community. This is reflected in excellent extra curricular physical education opportunities

30. Birchwood is a community school in every sense. It was conceived as a community school, and partnership with the local community is one of its strengths. Its location, next to a busy shopping centre, means that pupils are on show whenever they use the outside sports facilities, and are in close contact with the public in the shared areas. The very good relationship between the school and the community is therefore crucial to the school's reputation.

31. The community library is in the centre of the school. It is a pleasant spacious area, used most days by the public as well as by pupils and plays an important role in establishing the school as a civilised and purposeful community. The school benefits from a much larger library than most schools, with trained librarians always on hand to help pupils. Relationships between school staff, librarians, pupils and members of the public are harmonious and contribute to the warm and welcoming atmosphere in the school.

32. The very effective cooperation with the manager of the leisure facilities is based on mutual trust and respect and works to the benefit of both the school and the community. Since the previous inspection this fruitful cooperation has enabled the school to bid successfully for lottery funding to build extensive additional sports facilities. The physical education department capitalises on the excellent facilities and has built up a high reputation for its physical education programme. The school enjoys considerable success in a wide range of sports.

33. Governors and senior managers are deeply committed to the maintaining this partnership with the community, and are emphatic that it is an important aspect of the school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Boys' achievement, although above the national average, is lower than that of girls, particularly in Years 10 and 11

34. Boys' results have improved since the previous inspection and are above the national average. However the gap between boys and girls has widened in the last two years; girls' results have risen faster still and in 1999 were well above average. The gap between boys and girls gaining the highest grades of A* and A is particularly wide.

35. In 1999 the proportions of girls achieving A* or A grades was above average in English literature, mathematics, science, art and design, design and technology, drama, information technology, German and history. Only in geography and German did the boys reach these levels.

36. During the inspection the attainment of boys in lessons was not noticeably different from that of girls, but there were some minor differences in a few lessons. Sometimes boys appeared to have a more relaxed attitude than girls, and needed more encouragement to settle to work. When questioned about why boys did better in examinations, some Year 8 pupils suggested that boys do not like to be seen trying hard. Teachers commented that some boys find extended coursework more demanding than girls do and this prevents them getting higher grades in subjects where coursework is a significant part of the total assessment. This view is supported by boys' success in French and German where they do

better than in most of the other subjects they take, and where extended coursework is not required. In lessons using computers, boys were more likely to take the lead, showing ingenuity and skill and supporting other pupils helpfully.

37. The school has tried a number of ways to raise the attainment of boys. For example, staff have had training courses on managing boys in the classroom, and on looking at different learning styles favoured by boys. Pupils have been taught in single-sex groups where there were enough pupils taking the subject to split the groups evenly. This was tried in geography the year before last and boys' GCSE results improved. The English and information and communication technology departments have statements in their policies about raising the attainment of boys. The art department targeted boys and gave them more teaching time last year; results were good and all the boys achieved at least a grade C at GCSE. The language department is introducing more information and communication technology into its teaching.

38. There is a need to draw on these experiences and identify what works best, so that a coherent plan can be made to raise the examination results of boys across all subjects.

The programme to extend the curriculum is not as well structured in Years 8 and 9 as in other years, and some sessions lack the sense of purpose seen in most other lessons

39. The curriculum includes a 90 minute session of 'extension studies' that allows the flexibility to give extra time where needed to particular pupils or groups of pupils. In Year 7 this time has been very well used to provide pupils with a stimulating course on literacy within a number of subjects. Each module lasts for half a term and pupils study literacy in, for example, science, geography, and mathematics. The course is tightly structured to deal with the differences and similarities in the way a variety of topics are presented, and gives pupils a coherent picture of the importance of literacy in all aspects of life. The course develops pupils' skills and helps to broaden their appreciation of different subjects. For example, in science pupils are studying the way information about microbes is presented. This is backed up by suitable resources, including a set of science dictionaries.

40. The time is well used in Years 10 and 11 to find more time for subjects where pupils need extra help or practice, and for courses such as the work related Youth Award.

41. However, the courses in Years 8 and 9 are not so well related to the curriculum, and although the sessions, such as the course on making curry, taught by a non-specialist, are interesting and fun, they lack the structure and rigour of the Year 7 programme and do not therefore extend pupils' skills as well as they could.

Although teaching in science is generally good, in a few lessons the teachers do not adapt the work sufficiently for pupils who find learning difficult

42. Pupils work hard in science and GCSE results in 1999 for girls were close to those of English and mathematics. For boys the results were just below those of English and mathematics. In National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9, results have been close to those of mathematics and better than English.

43. However, from lessons seen during the inspection, there are opportunities to raise standards further, particularly for pupils who find learning difficult, by improving the way pupils are managed in some lessons.

44. In most lessons the teaching is planned carefully to help pupils to learn. Teachers are innovative and frequently base their teaching on ideas pupils find interesting. For example, in a Year 11 lesson the teacher gave pupils a practical exercise she has found on a science website that allowed them to extract DNA from wheatgerm.

45. However, there are some lessons where teachers do not plan well enough or provide suitable support for pupils who find aspects of learning difficult. While these weaknesses are sometimes outweighed by other good features of the lesson, such as providing accurate notes and ensuring good discipline and behaviour, a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was seen.

46. In a lesson using microscopes the teacher did not make sure that all pupils knew what to look for before they started, so that many were confused and made inaccurate drawings. Later, when some pupils were unable to use the microscopes correctly, the teacher completed the task for them instead of taking the opportunity to help them to do it for themselves. There are times when the teaching is too heavily based on worksheets that are too difficult for pupils who do not read and write well.

47. The department is well managed and the recently revised scheme of work is comprehensive. It provides a good overview and is helpfully laid out and available electronically so that teachers can make their own amendments. There is now an opportunity to add detail in some lesson plans about how pupils with learning difficulties can be helped to make greater progress through strategies that rely less on worksheets and more on understanding the essential purpose of the lesson.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

48. The school should now:

- (1) draw together the school's ideas and experiences of ways of raising the attainment of boys to form a plan for action for the whole school;
(paragraphs: 34-38)
- (2) develop the extension studies courses in Years 8 and 9 to make it more supportive and closely linked to the rest of the curriculum, while retaining the flexibility that this time allows;
(paragraphs: 39-41)
- (3) improve the consistency of teaching in science so that the needs of all pupils are fully met.
(paragraphs: 42-47)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	55
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	20

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4	22	56	16	2	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
Number of pupils on the school's roll	935
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	127

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	48
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	170

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	23
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	19

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.3
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.8
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	98	102	200

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	32	60	47
	Girls	54	65	55
	Total	86	125	102
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	43 (58)	63 (61)	51 (57)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	15 (19)	36 (38)	21 (23)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	44	74	54
	Girls	66	86	64
	Total	110	160	118
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	56 (67)	80 (69)	60 (60)
	National	64 (61)	64 (64)	60 (61)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	32 (27)	50 (47)	28 (30)
	National	31 (30)	37 (37)	28 (30)

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	106	89	195

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	41	101	104
	Girls	63	84	89
	Total	104	185	193
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	53 (51)	95 (95)	99 (98)
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.7 (94)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	42 (40.9)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	71
	National	N/A

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	6
Indian	6
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	3
White	911
Any other minority ethnic group	7

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	7	2
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 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	52.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	243

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.6
Key Stage 4	23.2

Financial information

Financial year	1998/1999
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	£
Total income	2 082 773
Total expenditure	2 070 301
Expenditure per pupil	2 169
Balance brought forward from previous year	177 696
Balance carried forward to next year	181 168

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	935
Number of questionnaires returned	138

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	49	7	1	3
My child is making good progress in school.	43	54	3	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	34	49	12	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	23	57	17	2	1
The teaching is good.	38	54	5	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	38	51	8	1	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	67	25	6	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	68	28	4	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	38	49	5	4	4
The school is well led and managed.	53	41	3	1	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	45	46	5	2	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	41	48	4	0	7