

INSPECTION REPORT

Newminster Middle School

Morpeth

LEA area: Northumberland

Unique reference number: 122346

Headteacher: Mr P Lawrence

Reporting inspector: Mr J W Ashton
4492

Dates of inspection: 26 – 28 June 2000

Inspection number: 185886

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Middle deemed secondary

School category: County

Age range of pupils: 9 to 13

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Mitford Road
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 1RH

Telephone number: 01670 513 621

Fax number: 01670 513 548

Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr T Hulbert

Date of previous inspection: October 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
Mr J W Ashton	<i>Registered inspector</i>
Mr D Heath	<i>Lay inspector</i>
Mr F Evans	<i>Team inspector</i>
Mr M Merchant	<i>Team inspector</i>

The inspection contractor was:

*Westminster Education Consultants
Old Garden House
The Lanterns
Bridge Lane
London
SW11 3AD*

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The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Newminster Middle School is a mixed comprehensive school for pupils aged 9 to 13. Still oversubscribed, as at the time of the previous inspection in 1995, it has 499 pupils, which makes it larger than the average middle school. Pupils come mainly from two first schools in the locality and from a mixture of owner occupied and council owned property. There are almost equal numbers of boys and girls in each of its four year-groups. Forty two pupils (8.4 per cent of the total) are eligible for free school meals, which is half the national average. An above average proportion of pupils come from relatively advantaged homes. A very low proportion of pupils is from a minority ethnic background and there are no pupils at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils (18.6 per cent) on the register for special educational needs is below the national average for middle schools. The percentage with statements of such need (1.4 per cent) is broadly in line with the national average. Five pupils have emotional and behavioural needs, whilst four others are dyspraxic, and five pupils have either hearing, visual or speech communication difficulties. The school takes in a larger than average proportion of pupils with reading ages above the national expectation.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Newminster Middle School is a very effective school. Its many strengths far outweigh its few weaknesses. Very good leadership and very good teaching, sustain good progress and high standards throughout the school. The school provides very good value for the money it receives.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Standards of attainment in the core subjects are high, compared to all schools nationally and also compared to schools with similar intakes.
- Very well focused teaching is producing enthusiastic and well motivated pupils and very effective learning, at a very productive rate, especially in English, mathematics and science.
- The school is very well led and managed, and effectively governed, ensuring very good quality teaching and learning, and high standards.
- Relationships are very good, attitudes very positive, and provision for pupils spiritual, social, moral and cultural education is good.
- Pupils are very well cared for.

What could be improved

- Homework arrangements.
- The school does not always convey its many achievements and good systems to best effect.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

There has been substantial improvement since the last inspection, in 1995, in every one of the areas listed as key issues for improvement in the report. The school is still at least as successful academically but is also a more 'child friendly' school.

The revamped school timetable has eliminated problems caused by the previous eight-period days. Improved lunchtime arrangements ensure that lunch no longer extends into first lesson of the afternoon and there is more time now for art in Year 5. Medium-term strategic planning is much improved. The skills of information technology are practised in more curriculum areas, and parents now receive an annual report on their children's progress in information technology. More opportunities are provided for pupils to become aware of the multi-cultural nature of our society. The anti-bullying programme has been maintained as a high profile strategy. Pupils, teachers and parents expect bullying to be sorted quickly on the very few occasions when it does occur. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is much improved since the time of the last inspection. The kiln is now operated more safely and is not fired at all when the teacher responsible is not in school. All pupils now take part in an act of collective worship on every day of the week.

Daily sessions of ERIC (everyone reading in class) have consolidated and strengthened standards of reading and the love of reading throughout the school.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 11 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
English	A	A	A	A
Mathematics	B	A	B	B
Science	A	A	B	B

Key	
<i>well above average</i>	A
<i>above average</i>	B
<i>average</i>	C
<i>below average</i>	D
<i>well below average</i>	E

By the end of Year 6, in 1999, the proportions of pupils attaining the expected Levels 4 and 5 in the national tests were well above the national average in English, and above average in both mathematics and science. In 1998, the proportions were well above average at the end of Year 6 in all three subjects.

Over the last four years, pupils, by the end of Year 6, have been on average 1.7 terms ahead of pupils nationally. Pupils achieve well throughout Years 5 and 6, due to effective class teaching. They achieve even better in Years 7 and 8, especially in English, mathematics and science, due mainly to the increased amount of very good specialist teaching in these years.

Reading and writing and speaking and listening standards are all well above average by the time the pupils leave the school. Pupils know their mathematical tables well. Even pupils in the lower ability sets achieve at least average standards in number work, in their work on shape and space, in data handling and in their use and application of mathematics. Pupils in set one are well above average in all of these areas by the end of Year 8. A large proportion of pupils demonstrated their understanding of work at Levels 5 and 6 in previous National Curriculum tests. Standards in science education are high throughout the school. Pupils' information technology skills are above the national expectation, the result of a combination of discrete information technology lessons plus the increased use of information technology in other lessons. The school achieved its National Curriculum targets for 1999 and expects to meet those set for 2000.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very positive. Pupils have a strong work ethic plus an eagerness to do well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. The school remains, as at the time of the last inspection, a happy and orderly school. Pupils, with few exceptions, behave very well.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. A large proportion of pupils are very mature and responsible and their relationships with others are very good.
Attendance	Attendance is above the national average for middle schools. Authorised absence is below average, with unauthorised absence around half the national average for middle schools.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 9-11 years	aged 11-13 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Very good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

All the teaching seen, in every year group, was at least satisfactory. Four fifths was at least good; almost half was very good and one lesson in nine (three lessons) was excellent. The very good or excellent lessons were in English, mathematics, science, French, history, drama, geography and physical education. Inspectors found no areas of weak teaching in the school.

Teachers at Newminster have secure command of their subjects and prepare their lessons very well. A constant feature of the teaching is the sharing of lesson objectives with pupils at the start of every lesson, followed at the end of the lesson by an effective review of the work covered. Notable also is the truly excellent use of lesson time. Not a minute is wasted.

The teachers know their pupils well and their expectations of them are consistently very high. Teachers expect and receive their pupils' full attention. Instances of inattention are rare, and are quickly sorted, with minimum fuss. Consistent classroom routines are a strong point in the school. These, plus lots of praise, and very interesting teaching, ensure that pupils remain focused on the work in hand, striving to achieve success. Teachers take good account of the individual learning targets of children with special educational needs in their classes. Higher attaining pupils are well stretched. Literacy and numeracy are well taught across the curriculum. The good use of information technology in lessons continues to improve.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The school provides a wide range of learning experiences, supplemented by a good range of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN)	Very good. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported with individual education plans of very good quality, containing both subject-specific and general targets. Sensitivity and thoughtfulness on the part of the staff help to build pupils' confidence.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. There is a daily act of collective worship. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well. The quality of pastoral care is very good, a clear strength of the school, and effective arrangements are in place for handling issues of child protection. Staff are caring and committed and know their pupils well.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good leadership from the headteacher. A very effective senior management team. Conscientious pastoral leadership. Very effective co-ordination of English, mathematics and science, and of special educational needs.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors hold the school to account well by acting as useful and effective critical friends. The annual governors' report to parents needs attention.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Much better than average. The school is further on than most in the identification of its own strengths and weaknesses, and in the involvement of governors in this process.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Resources are well deployed in accordance with the school's priorities in the school development plan. The principles of best value are well applied.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children are expected to work hard;• The teaching is good;• Children like the school;• Children make good progress;• Behaviour is good;• Leadership and management are good;• The children are becoming more mature and responsible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Homework;• Information about children's progress;• The range of activities outside lessons;• The school could work more closely with parents.

The inspection team agree with all the parents' positive comments. They also agree that homework arrangements and information about pupils' progress in Years 5 and 6 could be improved. The school needs to work more closely with parents to improve, for example, their knowledge of the range of extra-curricular activities on offer.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

A. Standards of attainment in the core subjects are high, compared to all schools nationally and also compared to schools with similar intakes.

1. The school takes into its Year 5 classes each year a larger than average proportion of pupils of higher attainment than is found in most schools. This is apparent from the scrutiny of pupils' written work in English, mathematics and science, and from such teacher assessment evidence as the school collects from its two feeder first schools. By the end of Year 6, in 1999, the proportions of pupils attaining the expected Levels 4 and 5 in the national tests were well above the national averages in English, and above average in both mathematics and science. In 1998, the proportions were well above average at the end of Year 6 in all three subjects.

2. Over the last four years, the trend in average National Curriculum points scores at the end of Year 6 was broadly in line with the rising national trend, but Newminster pupils are on average around 1.7 terms ahead of pupils nationally. Inspection evidence from classroom observations, from examination of the standards of work in exercise books and from national test results at the end of the key stage, indicates that pupils achieve well throughout Years 5 and 6, due to effective class teaching. Evidence from the examination of pupils' work, from lesson observations, the results of standardised National Foundation for Educational Research tests, and from the school's own assessments, indicates that pupils achieve even better in Years 7 and 8, especially in English, mathematics and science. This is mainly due to the increased amount of very good specialist teaching of these year groups.

3. Reading standards are well above average by the time the pupils leave the school. The love of reading is helped by the very regular system of Everyone Reading in Class (ERIC) for ten to 15 minutes at the start of afternoon school every day. This was seen to be working well. The silence and concentration were palpable. All were immersed in their books. Pupils spoke warmly of the sessions and had covered a large number of books since the beginning of the year. Teachers report that it took a while, at first, to get some pupils into the habit of regular reading, but that now there is no stopping them. Writing standards are also well above average by the end of pupils' time in the school. This includes the good use of vocabulary and of drafting as a very useful stage in the production of a finished piece of work. Standards of writing are helped enormously by the excellent marking and individual target-setting in English, which provide opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own work. Speaking and listening standards are much higher than average, especially by the time the pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8. For example, pupils in a Year 8 drama lesson showed well above average skill in being able to empathise with old people and to improvise in role, as they explored the advantages and disadvantages of being old.

4. Pupils know their mathematical tables well. By the time they leave the school, even pupils in the lower ability sets achieve at least average standards in number work, in their work on shape and space, their data handling and their use and application of mathematics. Pupils in ability set one are well above average in all these areas by the end of Year 8. A

large proportion demonstrated their understanding of work at Levels 5 and 6 in previous National Curriculum tests. Teachers' use of information technology to enhance the learning of mathematics has improved since the last inspection. For example, good use of a spreadsheet program to manipulate data was seen in a Year 6 lesson.

5. Standards in science education are high throughout the school, due to at least good (and mostly specialist) teaching throughout the school. Pupils achieve well in both physical and biological science and in the skills of scientific enquiry, as they progress through the school. By the time they leave at the end of Year 8, a well above average proportion of pupils are already operating at Levels 5 and 6. These National Curriculum levels are the ones expected of pupils by the end of Year 9.

6. Pupils' information technology skills are above the national expectation, the result of a combination of discrete information technology lessons plus increased use of information technology in other lessons. Good examples of this use in other subject areas were seen in mathematics, English, history and French. These included word processing to a good level and the use of spreadsheets to sort a collection of data into a more useful form. Despite the increasing age of the machines in the small computer room, and of others around the school, pupils are making good progress in this area of the curriculum. The machines are kept in good order by the school's one tenth share of a technician (one day a fortnight).

B. Very well focused teaching is producing enthusiastic and well-motivated pupils, and very effective learning, at a very productive rate, especially in English, mathematics and science.

7. Twenty eight lessons were seen during the two days of the inspection. Lessons were observed in all four year groups in each of English, mathematics and science, along with a smaller selection of lessons in every other subject, at least one lesson for each subject. All teachers in school during the week of the inspection were observed at least once, sometimes twice. All the teaching seen, in every year group, was at least satisfactory. Four fifths was at least good; almost half was very good and one lesson in nine (three lessons) was excellent. The very good or excellent lessons were in English, mathematics, science, French, history, drama, geography and physical education. Inspectors found no areas of weak teaching in the school.

8. The teachers at Newminster have secure command of their subjects and prepare their lessons very well. A constant feature of the teaching is the sharing of lesson objectives with pupils at the start of every lesson, followed at the end of the lesson by effective review of the work covered. Teachers tell the pupils what they are going to learn, the lesson follows this agenda, and afterwards teachers remind the pupils of what they have learned. This is an effective system, seen to be working very well. As a result, pupils experience consistency of approach from teacher to teacher, and develop a strong knowledge of their own learning.

9. Notable also is the truly excellent use of lesson time. Not a minute is wasted. Pupils are punctual to lessons. They expect to begin working almost as they come through the door and to finish only seconds from the bell. The teachers know their pupils well and their

expectations of them are consistently very high. Teachers expect and receive their pupils' full attention. Instances of inattention are rare, and are quickly sorted, with minimum fuss, by teachers asking a friendly question which refocuses pupils' interest. The simple behaviour-management strategy of writing a miscreant's initials on the board is usually quite sufficient to deal with any problems.

10. Consistent classroom routines are a strong point in the school. These, plus lots of praise, and very interesting teaching, ensure that pupils remain focused on the work in hand, striving to achieve success. Teachers take good account of the individual learning targets of those children with special educational needs in their classes. Higher attaining pupils are well stretched. Literacy and numeracy are well taught across the curriculum. The good use of information technology in lessons continues to improve.

11. Year 5 pupils practise their mathematical tables regularly, in a way that keeps the task fresh and enjoyable. This, combined with a Year 5 teacher's very good use of real supermarket till receipts, was very helpful in a lesson where the pupils had to create a shopping list of items adding up to exactly ten pounds.

12. Pupils in a Year 7 mathematics class are unlikely to forget how to work out the area of even the most complicated shapes involving rectangles and triangles. In Year 8, pupils learn how to plot sets of data against each other on scatter diagrams and to decide accurately whether or not there is a positive, negative, or indeed no correlation between them.

13. Pupils in Year 6 learn to ask in French for a range of common foods and drinks, with far more confidence and panache than is found with pupils in most schools at this age. This is not just because French is not usually begun in schools until Year 7, but because of the lively and interesting teaching they receive in French lessons.

14. In an excellent English lesson, higher attaining Year 7 pupils read and researched about a Sikh shipowner being threatened by crooks for protection money. The teacher's imaginative use of a whole variety of learning tasks, and her impressive 'feel' for language, brought about a high level of understanding of the impact of words and phrases like, 'staggered' and 'rigid with fear'.

15. Year 8 pupils studying the refraction of light in science had their previous knowledge of the properties of light very effectively consolidated by excellent teaching. The teacher's initial strategy of getting pupils to write down five facts about light was quickly taken further, through probing and challenging questions. Her very high expectations of what the pupils were capable of, and her encouragement of them to apply their knowledge to new situations, was matched by their ability to move up a gear such that, by the end of the lesson, their understanding of the principles of refraction was very secure.

16. In a Year 7 geography lesson about the Barrage in the Bristol Channel, the class teacher's excellent class management, her very secure geographical knowledge and her very effective use of writing frames to summarise the main points, led to excellent progress and to well above average understanding of the principles of renewable energy sources.

17. Year 8 pupils are being taught the skills of quick cricket in such a very organised way, and with such very good enthusiasm and judicious use of humour, that most pupils have good hand-eye co-ordination and can give a good account of themselves in a team game. Those without kit are well used as umpires. The pupils are sensitively grouped to take account of the imbalance of ball skills in each class, so that the teacher can assist one group and extend the others with relative ease.

C. The school is very well led and managed and effectively governed, ensuring very good quality teaching and learning, and high standards.

18. The headteacher, not long in post at the time of the last inspection, has brought about, with strong staff and governor support, substantial improvements in the organisation and general direction of the school. Preserving the best of its traditional 'formality', he is also proud of helping to make the school more 'pupil friendly'. He is well supported in this by a very effective senior management team and a very well informed governing body, many of whose members are leading professionals in their own right.

19. Governors work well as critical friends of the school. They take staff selection and the quality control of existing staff more seriously than do the governing bodies of many schools, with more direct involvement of governors than is often the case elsewhere. About half the teachers are new in post since the last inspection, and the school is benefiting from this infusion of new blood with fresh ideas, alongside the proven experience of its longer-serving staff. Teachers attending for interview are often observed teaching for a short period, as a routine part of the selection process. During the process of appointing the new assistant headteacher earlier this year, the large group of candidates, and some of the interviewers, observed the outgoing deputy head teaching a mathematics lesson. This was to allow candidates, when questioned later at interview, to demonstrate their skills in the observation and evaluation of teaching.

20. Newly qualified teachers have very good support, which includes a good measure of first hand observation followed by appropriate advice, from the headteacher and his senior management team. Governors are well involved in this procedure too. Earlier this year, a small group of governors observed the monitoring of one of these new teachers (a volunteer) to ensure that governors themselves had accurate first-hand knowledge of the system.

21. Subject areas are effectively co-ordinated. Worthy of special note is the co-ordination of the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science and of special educational needs.

22. Examples of the school's use of the principles of best value include: the school's awareness of how well it is performing against similar schools, the four tenders for the playground benching, and the recent improvements in catering arrangements since the school took over the management of its own school meals provision. Faster service, increased staffing, and a significant profit which can be invested elsewhere in the school, are just some of the advantages arising from this latter change in lunchtime provision.

D. Relationships are very good, attitudes very positive, and provision for pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural education is good.

23. A very strong work ethic, a striving to do well, a determination to make the best use of the time available, permeate the whole school. Pupils are very well behaved; listen carefully; work hard on their tasks, and take care with their work. The civilised behaviour around the school, in the dining area and in classrooms, is very noticeable. Pupils are very generous and complimentary when evaluating each other's work. The secure and friendly atmosphere in classes promotes very good speaking and listening skills. The positive reward system is working well. Pupils are nominated, either by subject or form teachers, for improved work or good citizenship, and their positive achievements are celebrated in achievement assemblies.

24. Bullying is not an issue in the school, due to the vigilance of all concerned and their determination not to allow it. Preventative strategies include: a clear statement of the school's anti-bullying code in homework diaries; the good work on this issue in personal and social education lessons; encouragement of pupils to report any problems, and the involvement of parents in the follow up to any incidents.

25. The provision for pupils' spiritual development is good overall. Instances of awe and wonder arise within lessons in religious education, but also in music, history, science, and even in physical education - with the profusion of wildlife seen at times on the grassed playing areas at the rear of the school - deer are regular visitors. The statutory regulation for a daily act of collective worship, 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character', is now met on every day of the week. Pupils attend whole school assemblies in the hall on four days every week. On Fridays, there is collective worship for each year group in turn. The other three year groups remain with their form tutors and receive a thought for the day or prayer (conducted sometimes by the pupils themselves).

26. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good, not just in the celebration of the children's own culture but also in the opportunities the school gives for the study of a range of other cultures and traditions, for example, Islam and the Aztecs. Notable, in this respect, is the work of the Amnesty Human Rights group of Year 8 pupils, who are very active in writing to try to help people in difficulties in various parts of the world.

27. Provision for pupils' moral and social development is another strength of the school. This is illustrated well by fair play in physical education, and by a very strong sense of right and wrong in their day-to-day work elsewhere. The pupils' School Council, introduced since the last inspection, claims some useful successes, including: persuading staff and parents to support girls being allowed to wear smart trousers if they wish, the purchase of lockers for older pupils, and improved seating provision in the playground. The prefect system gives a good number of older pupils the opportunity to experience the pleasures and pitfalls of pupil supervision on a limited and well-monitored scale. Pupils are trusted to decide themselves when they may visit the lavatory during class time. They sign themselves out, noting also the time. They are accompanied by a friend for safety reasons when they move around the school, and quickly return to sign themselves in again.

E. Pupils are very well cared for.

28. The quality of pastoral care is very good, a clear strength of the school, and effective arrangements are in place for handling issues of child protection. Staff are caring and committed and know their pupils well. Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported and higher attaining pupils are well stretched, especially in Years 7 and 8.

29. Pupils are well catered for at lunchtimes. Much improved dining arrangements mean that pupils are no longer late to afternoon lessons, a key issue at the time of the last inspection. A fair rota system ensures that year groups have equal turns at eating in first sitting. Some parents express concern that there are insufficient lunchtime supervisors. The school has seven such supervisors, which is the number recommended by the county for the numbers of pupils in the school. Three are based indoors, often supported by the headteacher himself, and four others supervise the outside areas.

30. Pupils with special educational needs are very well looked after and have individual education plans of very good quality, with both subject-specific and general targets. For example, a Year 7 pupil's targets were: to read a decimal scale and to measure accurately in tenths of a centimetre, but also to be encouraged to slow down when completing writing tasks and to take more pride in finished work. The special educational needs co-ordinator's good systems were apparent, even in her absence during the inspection period. Learning agendas are shared with the children and success criteria developed so that they can assess their own progress. The link governor for special educational needs plays a very helpful part in supporting the work of the department, liaising regularly and effectively with the special educational needs co-ordinator, and helping in the department with particular pupils. The very strong emphasis on literacy, in English and in other subjects, helps pupils with special educational needs. Particular help is given with vocabulary and sentence structure to these pupils, and when teachers create opportunities for pupils to speak, they include pupils with special educational needs as often as they can. In English, pupils with special educational needs have work chosen for display, as other pupils do, but they have to agree to let the teacher show it on the wall. This sensitivity and thoughtfulness on the part of the staff help to build up the pupils' confidence.

31. Higher attaining pupils were being well stretched in lessons seen in Years 7 and 8. The setting of pupils into ability groups makes this easier to accomplish, because the work is targeted more carefully towards the narrower range of ability in the set. For example, in Year 8 science, the higher attaining pupils in set one are working at a faster pace than pupils in the other set. They are already through the study of reflection of light and on to the harder topic of refraction, whilst set two pupils are still consolidating their understanding of reflection. In Years 5 and 6, the classes are mixed ability and a range of strategies is used to cope with the wider spread of ability found in each class. In some lessons, slightly different tasks on the same theme are given, with great sensitivity, to different groups of pupils. Sometimes all the pupils are given the same diet and are expected to work at the same speed, but the teachers, knowing their pupils so well, are skilled in directing specific questions to individual pupils. This was seen to work particularly well in an English lesson with Year 6, where very good use was made of the techniques recommended in the National Literacy Strategy.

32. Good links with partner schools, both before entry and in the run up to leaving Newminster, ensure that transfer between the schools in the local partnership, of first schools through to high school, is relatively painless. A recent innovation, said to be working well, is the partnering of some Year 12 boys with particular boys in Year 8, in order to assist the younger boys to gain information that they might otherwise be too shy to ask about the high school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

F. Homework arrangements need improving.

33. The inspection team supports parents' concerns about the quantity, range and frequency of homework. The school's homework timetable is not always followed, according to the pupils. Some pupils, particularly those in Years 5 and 6 have relatively limited amounts of homework, whilst pupils in Years 7 and 8, have too much. Often this is without sufficient time to complete it well, or there are periods of drought and excess; too little followed by too much. There was agreement between pupils and parents that too much is set just before holiday periods when families may well be trying to go away for a short break. Pupils' homework journals are not monitored as effectively as they might be, by either staff or parents. The school needs to re-examine its homework policy, come to a shared understanding of why homework is set and what form it might take, and then ensure that the implementation of this policy is systematically monitored and evaluated by middle and senior managers.

G. The school does not always convey its many achievements and good systems to best effect.

34. Evidence from the parents' meeting with the registered inspector, and from parental questionnaire returns, especially the detailed written comments on the backs of many of the questionnaires, points to a parental body with *very* high expectations of the school. 'Of course it's a good school', said one regular parent helper, 'we wouldn't send our children here if it wasn't. But we want it to be a *perfect* school, so we nit-pick a lot.'

35. Despite the regular parental newsletters, a number of parents feel that they are not kept sufficiently well informed of the range of extra-curricular activities offered by the school. Other parents believe that there are not sufficient lunchtime supervisors. The queuing arrangements in the hall during parents' consultation evenings are thought not to be private enough. Comments on the annual teachers' reports to parents of pupils' progress in Years 5 and 6 are not felt to be specific enough to their children. The governors' annual report to parents is said to need improving, to make it more lively and informative and with less jargon. Only the musically talented are thought to be able to join the choir, which is a shame, parents say. They think it would be good to see a wider range of extra-curricular activities, than just those for sport and music. The belief is that only pupils in the 'top' sets can be prefects. At least one parent wonders why a middle school needs a prefect system.

36. Inspectors established, from discussions with senior management and some governors, that the school offers a choice of 27 extra-curricular activities. The higher profile ones are undoubtedly sporting and musical. For example, over 350 pupils wanted to join the choirs this year, a clear vote of confidence in the staff who work so hard to conduct them. There would be no room for an audience if the school had a single choir so large. The chosen solution was to have at least two choirs; in fact eight separate occasions when pupils have an opportunity to join one or other of the singing groups. More than two thirds of the school take part in one choir or another. The school has the correct number of lunchtime supervisors, though not as many as parents whose children attended one of the partner first schools will be used to. This is because that particular school has a much higher proportion of special needs pupils, in fact a special needs unit and, in consequence, much larger numbers of support assistants. Parents are correct in their assessment of the Years 5 and 6 reports. These are in the early stages of being modified and improved to provide sufficient choice of statements to enable them to match individual pupils better. The equivalent reports for pupils in Years 7 and 8 have been in development for much longer and are of better quality. Here the hard work of the teachers in developing a wider choice of different statements is apparent. That work is at an earlier stage in Years 5 and 6. There is indeed room for improvement in the governors' annual report to parents. It could be more detailed and clearer about the work of the school. Prefects are elected by the staff. The first 15 boys and first 15 girls in this vote are appointed as prefects. The headteacher accepts the results of this election. He has cause to 'interfere' only where the result would otherwise lead to an imbalance of ability, in other words, to only the most able pupils being voted as prefects. This is said to be a rare occurrence.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

37. The school's staff and governors are in a strong position to remedy the few weaknesses identified in the inspection. They should continue the school's focus on maintaining high standards, and should also:

- Re-examine the homework policy in order to achieve a shared understanding between home and school of:
 - * why homework is set;
 - * what form it might take;
 - * how best to spread the load throughout the year and across each year group;
 - * and of how the implementation of this policy is to be systematically monitored and evaluated by middle and senior managers.

- Take appropriate steps to inform parents more about the work of the school and, in particular, improve the quality and effectiveness of the:
 - * annual governors' report to parents;
 - * subject reports to pupils in Years 5 and 6;
 - * information about the school's extra curricular provision and its rationale.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	28
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
11	35	33	21	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y9 – Y13
Number of pupils on the school's roll	499
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	42

Special educational needs	Y9 – Y13
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	7
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	93

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	12
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	14

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.1
National comparative data	6.0

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	0.4

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 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	64	59	123

National Curriculum Test/Task Results	English	Mathematics	Science	
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 4 and above	Boys	55	51	59
	Girls	52	49	53
	Total	107	100	112
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 4 or above	School	87	81	91
	National	70	69	78

Teachers' Assessments	English	Mathematics	Science	
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 4 and above	Boys	53	48	49
	Girls	51	50	49
	Total	104	98	98
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 4 or above	School	85	80	80
	National	68	69	75

Ethnic background of pupils

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes:

Y9 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	22.0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	22.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff:

Y9 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	4.2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	79

Deployment of teachers:

Y9 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	82.7
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Average teaching group size:

Y9 – Y11

Key Stage 2	26.0
Key Stage 3	26.5

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	4	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	836730.00
Total expenditure	834074.00
Expenditure per pupil	1665.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	15606.00
Balance carried forward to next year	18262.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	499
Number of questionnaires returned	210

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	34	57	5	8	0
My child is making good progress in school.	29	62	6	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	23	67	6	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	9	51	31	8	1
The teaching is good.	24	69	3	1	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	15	47	31	6	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	34	55	9	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	40	54	3	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	14	49	30	4	3
The school is well led and managed.	28	49	9	2	12
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	29	59	6	3	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	19	43	20	7	11

Other issues raised by parents

The need for a clearer, more informative annual governors' report to parents.

The school needs decorating.

The inappropriateness of rewards in the form of vouchers for a well-known burger chain.

The lack of privacy in the hall when queuing to see parents on parent interview evenings.