

INSPECTION REPORT

HUISH EPISCOPI SCHOOL

Langport

LEA area: Somerset

Unique reference number: 123868

Headteacher: Mr G Roff

Reporting inspector: Mr D P Cosway
2734

Dates of inspection: 30 April – 2 May 2001

Inspection number: 186092

Short 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 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Huish Episcopi School
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Huish Episcopi
Langport
Somerset

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr P Monaghan

Date of previous inspection: October 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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2734	Paul Cosway	<i>Registered inspector</i>	What sort of school is it? The school's results and achievements. How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed?
9181	Geza Hanniker	<i>Lay inspector</i>	How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents? Community links.
20243	David Benstock	<i>Team inspector</i>	Principles of best value; Finance
1085	John Laver	<i>Team inspector</i>	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development. Assessment
25744	Trevor Osgerby	<i>Team inspector</i>	The curriculum Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school is larger than average, having 1241 students: 599 boys and 642 girls, aged between 11 and 16. The school serves an area of almost 200 square miles, including the settlements of Somerton, Langport, Huish Episcopi itself and a large number of outlying small villages and hamlets. Some children spend almost two hours a day travelling to and from school. The social and economic circumstances of the area differ significantly from the national average. Over half the pupils come from relatively isolated rural communities, including isolated farms that have suffered from the rural recession. However, levels of unemployment are relatively low and so the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (4.7 per cent) is below average.

Almost all pupils are white and there is a lower proportion than nationally (0.1 per cent) of pupils for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of students with statements of special educational needs is broadly average. There are 198 pupils on the register of special educational need. Of the 113 on stages 3 - 5 of the assessment for special needs, just under a quarter have specific learning difficulties. A third have moderate learning difficulties. Just under a fifth have emotional or behavioural problems and there are small numbers with speech or communication problems or physical disability. The attainment of students on entry is about average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school in many aspects of its work. Students achieve very well. From average attainment on entry, attainment in the Year 9 national tests has been well above the national average for three of the last four years. In GCSE examinations, attainment has been well above average every year over the same period and above that in similar schools. The quality of teaching is good, overall, and, as a result of this and the very good ethos in the school, students learn very well, developing good learning skills, learning to work independently and co-operatively. The leadership and management of the school are good, providing clear direction and monitoring the work of the school effectively. The school has good links with parents. The school gives very good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Pupils achieve very well and attain standards well above average, overall, in GCSE examinations.
- Pupils' attitudes to school are very good. They:
 - * respond well to their teachers
 - * work hard, realising the importance of study
 - * behave well.These are significant factors in the academic progress they make.
- Teaching is good overall, with much that is very good, and this leads to pupils developing good learning skills.
- The leadership, particularly of the headteacher, supported by the senior team, focuses successfully on the raising of attainment. This has led to good improvement and very good capacity for future improvement.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Attainment overall in GCSE examinations is high, but some departments are more consistently successful than others. There is a need to raise the effectiveness of teaching and learning so that they are equally good in all subject areas.

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 November, 1995. Since that time, the school has sustained well above average performance in the national tests for 14 year olds and in GCSE examinations. Effective monitoring of the work of the school, along with well-planned staff development, has succeeded in raising the quality of teaching even higher than it was in 1995 and pupils' attitudes and learning skills have also improved further. There is improvement in the understanding and use of assessment information to help pupils to make progress. The work of the school is being monitored with increasing effectiveness.

The key issues from the last report have been addressed. Work in information technology now meets statutory requirements, although levels of funding have not been high enough for the school to meet average levels of computer provision. School policies have been reviewed and are now clear and sufficiently detailed. Development planning is much improved and all departments are fully involved. Literacy, including the teaching of spelling, is now a major focus. The teaching of religious education has improved, despite the difficulties in recruitment that the school encountered. There are still some weaknesses in the provision for Year 11, which the school plans to fully remedy by the next academic year. The school is welcoming to parents and the formation of a 'friends of the school' group has improved the participation of parents in the life of the school.

Overall, there has been good improvement since the last inspection and the promise of further improvements to come.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A

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

At the end of Year 9, attainment in the national tests has been well above the national average overall for the last four years and average compared with similar schools.

At the end of Year 11, the proportion of students who attained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* - C in the Year 2000 was well above the national average and well above average compared with similar schools. The proportions who attained five or more passes at A* - G and who attained at least one GCSE pass at A* - G were above the national average. The overall performance at GCSE, measured by the students' average points score, was well above the average nationally, as it has been for the past four years, and well above that in similar schools.

Girls attain better than boys at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE and the difference is slightly greater than the difference nationally. However, both boys and girls attain better at this school than they do on average nationally.

The proportion of pupils who attained five or more GCSE passes at high grades, A* - C, was high, at 64 per cent. The most successful subjects at GCSE in 2000 were history, geography, combined science and art. The finding of the inspection is that attainment is on line to be at least as high as the 2000 figures at the end of both Year 9 and Year 11 in the current year and that the subjects that performed less well than others in the GCSE examinations in 2000 have improved. These subjects are information technology, for which the 2000 results were not typical, a new humanities course and design and technology.

The school set itself targets of 62 per cent of pupils passing five or more GCSE examinations with grades of between A* and C in 2000 and 2001. It exceeded this target last year and is on course to do so again, even though the current Year 11 had lower levels of attainment on entry.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good; almost all pupils have very positive attitudes to the school. They work hard and respect their teachers. The pupils value what the school provides for them and take pride in belonging to it.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good; few instances of poor behaviour were seen in lessons. The good behaviour helps to maintain a very good learning ethos. The school is a very orderly and friendly community.
Personal development and relationships	Very good; pupils relate very well to teachers and to one another. They develop independence and learn to work well and co-operatively with others. Almost all are respectful and considerate.
Attendance	Above average. Attendance levels are above the national average and this contributes to high attainment because pupils miss few lessons.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 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 teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The teaching of literacy and numeracy is generally good across the school, but there is still a minority of boys, as the school has recognised, whose literacy skills are low and this affects their progress in some subjects. Thirty per cent of teaching in the school is very good and this is mainly with Years 10 and 11. Teaching is satisfactory or better in 100 per cent of lessons and good in 47.5 per cent. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subjects. High expectations and very good relationships with their pupils are key strengths. These, combined with the very good attitudes and good behaviour that the school encourages, explain the success the school enjoys.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory; the curriculum is broad and reasonably well balanced. There is good provision for extra-curricular clubs and activities. There is satisfactory provision for personal and social education.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory; the school offers an inclusive education that meets these pupils' needs.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	There are no pupils at an early stage of English acquisition.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good; the provision for moral and social education is very good. The provision for cultural education is good, with an increasing awareness of the need to prepare pupils for life in a multi-cultural society. The provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. There is not an act of collective worship for all every day, but the ones that take place are of high quality.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good: this is a caring school, supporting pupils' personal development well.

The school works well in partnership with parents to help them to support their children's learning. The quality of information about the progress that pupils are making and the sharing of targets with parents are increasing strengths. Statutory requirements for the curriculum are met, except that some groups of Year 11 pupils are not being taught religious education for sufficient time. It is planned that this will not be the case in the next academic year.

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, supported by his senior managers, is setting a clear direction for the future development of the school and has resulted in good levels of improvement since the last inspection. Middle managers are providing effective leadership, but there is inconsistency in the way they adapt to new whole-school initiatives.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors fulfil their role satisfactorily. Although many are new, they are ably supported by a small group of long established governors, guided well by the experienced chairman.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Systems are now in place to provide a good range of data to allow the school to set targets for pupils' attainment and evaluate its effectiveness. Many members of staff use this information well to guide their planning and to raise attainment, but not all recognise its value yet.
The strategic use of resources	Good; the teachers are deployed well and the school makes good use of the accommodation. Resources are used effectively.

The adequacy of staffing, accommodation and learning resources is good overall, with good match of teachers to the needs of the timetable. The ratio of computers to pupils is below average, but a new learning resources centre is about to open that will address this to a large extent. The management of the school is consultative and reflective. Forward planning is detailed, involves all members of staff and prioritises the correct areas for development. The school seeks best value in its use of all of its funding and resources.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 90 per cent of parents who responded agree that expectations are high, teaching is good and children make good progress; • Over 90 per cent feel comfortable approaching the school with suggestions and complaints; • 83 per cent of parents agree that they kept well informed about how their children are getting on; • 87 per cent agree that the school helps their children to become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 per cent of the small number of parents who responded believe that the school does not give students the right amount of work to do at home; • 26 per cent of those who responded think that the school does not work closely enough with them.

A few parents are concerned about the amount of homework set, some thinking there is too much, some too little. The inspection team found that the level of homework given is generally appropriate and that it supports pupils in their learning. The school works effectively with parents, despite the large distances that some parents have to travel to reach it. A few parents are concerned about standards of behaviour in the school. Behaviour is generally good, but there is a small proportion of pupils who can be inattentive if the teaching does not motivate and interest them.

Most parents are pleased with their school. The inspection team agreed with the positive comments from parents. Pupils make good progress at the school and teachers have high expectations of them. The quality of teaching is good overall and parents are well informed about the progress their children are making against the targets the school has set.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Pupils achieve very well and attain standards well above average, overall, in GCSE examinations.

1. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is close to average overall. Analysis of the results of the end of Year 6 National Curriculum tests for primary school pupils who have entered the school over the last four years shows an improving picture and the present Year 7 intake was above average based on these test results. Previous primary school test results have been in line with the national average or below, however. The Year 9 pupils who took the national tests in 2000, for example, attained average levels overall in English in the national tests for 11 year olds in 1997, when they were in Year 6. Their overall results in mathematics were below the national average and their performance in the science tests was well below the national average. Their average points score for the three core subjects was also below the average nationally.

Performance in the national tests at the end of Year 9.

2. Pupils make very good progress. Results in English were slightly above the national average in 2000, having been above for the previous three years. They were in line with those in similar schools. Attainment has been well above average in mathematics over the last four years. It was in line with that in similar schools in 2000. Attainment at the end of Year 9 in the National Curriculum tests in science was also well above average and above the average in similar schools. It has been above or well above the national average for the last four years.

3. Attainment at the end of Year 9 in the national tests has been well above average overall for the last four years and has risen broadly in line with the national trend. Attainment was close to that in that in similar schools in 2000.

Attainment in GCSE examinations.

4. Attainment in GCSE examinations has been rising in the school in recent years and this upward trend has above the rate of improvement nationally. 1996 was a particularly good year, when 70 per cent of the Year 11 pupils passed five or more GCSE examinations with grades between A* and C. In 1997, the proportion was 57.5 per cent and since then it has risen to 66.8 per cent in 1999 and 64 per cent in 2000. This increase compares with a rise of just over four per cent nationally in the same period.

5. The average point score at GCSE has also increased over the same period. In 1997 it was above the national average by 5.8 points, at 41.3. In 2000, it was more than nine points above the national average at 47.8. The average point score is the measure of the school's overall success in GCSE examinations and in 2000 the score of 47.8 points was well above the average point score for schools' nationally and well above that in similar schools.

6. In 2000 in GCSE examinations, the proportions of pupils who attained five or more grades A* to G and one or more passes at these grades were above the national average.

7. In many subjects, in geography, history, English, English literature, mathematics and art and design, and especially in physics, biology and chemistry, pupils' attainment was well above the national average in the 2000 GCSE examinations. In biology and chemistry, for example, almost all of the 47 candidates attained a grade in the range A* to C, with over 40 per cent gaining an A* or A grade. In physics, 95 per cent gained an A* to C grade, with just over 40 per cent gaining one of the two highest grades. Pupils achieved particularly well, when their grades across subjects are compared, in geography and history. Many pupils obtained their highest grades in these two subjects. Some subjects performed significantly less well. In some cases, this was because the course was only intended for low attaining pupils. For example, in single award science GCSE, no candidate attained a grade in the A* to C range, although all obtained a pass mark. Nevertheless, compared with the achievements of the same candidates in their other examinations, they succeeded better in single science than elsewhere. However, in some other subjects, notably German, information technology and physical education, pupils tended to perform poorly compared with their attainment levels in other GCSE examinations. This was mainly because of low attainment by boys. In physical education, boys' attainment in the theory papers was affected adversely by the literacy problems that some low attaining boys suffered. In courses that were new, such as humanities, where teachers were coming to grips for the first time with the requirements of the syllabus, or German, where there were staffing problems, boys' motivation proved to be less than girls and they performed poorly as a result.

8. The findings of the inspection are that current levels of attainment reflect the results of the national tests and GCSE examinations in 2000. Attainment is well above average overall, despite the fact that the present Year 11 cohort has a higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs than in the previous year. The proportion of pupils who attain five or more GCSE passes at grades A* - C is likely to be similar to that in 2000. Pupils are continuing to make good progress and achieving very well. High standards were seen in a number of subjects. For example, pupils in a middle ability set in Year 8 were observed learning about hormones in science. They showed an understanding of the complexity of hormone production and the actions of hormones that was above average for their age. The Year 11 music class showed an

above average understanding of the differences between western and eastern musical styles and could relate some of these differences well to the use of different musical scales. The pupils in the top mathematics set in Year 9 were seen to be attaining standards well above average for pupils of their age in a lesson on probability. They showed an intelligent interest in the subject and a good intellectual grasp of the concepts involved.

9. Overall, attainment in literacy and numeracy is above average. GCSE examination results in 2000 support this. In English, all pupils gained a pass mark and the proportion passing at the higher grades, A* to C, was almost 20 per cent above the national figure. In mathematics, 99.5 per cent of pupils entered passed the examination and 12 per cent more than nationally gained a grade in the A* to C range. However, there is a difference in performance between boys and girls. In both subjects, girls attained better than boys and the difference was greater than that nationally. There is still a need to develop further the teaching of these two important skill areas, especially to raise further boys' attainment.

Pupils' attitudes to school are very good. They respond well to their teachers, work hard, realising the importance of study and behave well. These are significant factors in the academic progress they make.

10. Attitudes throughout the school are generally very good. Apart from small groups of low attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11, who sometimes respond in an unsatisfactory way if the teaching is not strong and discipline firm, pupils are keen to learn and want to do their best in lessons. The ethos is an important part of the school's success. It is one that encourages pupils, valuing success, and enables pupils to succeed because lessons are orderly and it is clear to everyone that school is a place one comes to in order to learn. Almost all pupils enjoy coming to school and value what it can give to them. Significant numbers, more than half the school population, live in relatively small and isolated rural communities. The facilities the school provides for them are therefore particularly valued. Almost all pupils are proud of the school and relate well to their teachers. Similarly, relationships between pupils are generally good. Year 7 tutor groups each have a 'friend', a Year 10 pupil, who visits their registration sessions and gets to know them. This is an example of the ways in which the school encourages pupils to care for and feel concern for one another.

11. Attendance is above the national average. The vast majority of pupils arrive at school punctually, despite the large distances that many have to travel. This allows the school day and lessons to begin on time. Pupils' learning benefits because they miss few lessons in a calm atmosphere that prepares pupils well for the busy day ahead.

12. Behaviour is very good in most lessons. Behaviour is good overall and this helps to generate the purposeful ethos in classrooms that helps learning. Around the school, pupils are generally sensible, well mannered and well behaved. Two Year 9 art classes were observed working in the school corridors producing perspective drawings of different parts of the school. Although not closely supervised, they worked quietly and conscientiously.

They showed considerable concern for the classes working nearby, ensuring, even though the classroom windows overlooked them, that they caused no disturbance to other pupils. When pupils are on work experience or school visits, the people they meet appreciate their good behaviour and courtesy. There have not been any permanent exclusions in the last year. The behaviour of pupils with special educational needs is good, including that of those who have behavioural difficulties when admitted to the school. Their attendance is good. Pupils with special educational needs are completely integrated into the activities enjoyed by the rest of the school and they have good opportunities for taking responsibility. However, there is a small proportion of pupils, mainly but not exclusively boys, who can behave inappropriately. The effect is to disrupt their learning, although the quality of teaching is usually strong enough to ensure that others can get on with their work. It happens when the teaching, though satisfactory for the large majority of the class, is not succeeding in interesting and motivating these reluctant learners. Although behaviour is good overall, this is still a problem the school needs to remain aware of and continue to address.

13. Relationships between teachers and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are very good overall. This results in an atmosphere of mutual trust and security in which pupils feel confident and comfortable. A class of Year 9 girls, in a physical education lesson outdoors, were asked by their teacher to run in an ungainly way in order to stretch their leg muscles. Although they were aware that they might have looked foolish to observers from the main school building, they overcame their self-consciousness and followed the teacher's instructions. Their eventual attainment in the final sprinting exercise benefited as a result.

14. Pupils respect one another's feelings and are supportive of each other in lessons. There was good evidence of this in an English lesson on *An Inspector Calls*. A Year 10 class was working for the first time on the text. They were divided into small groups in order to discuss aspects of social responsibility. The pupils enjoyed the activity and spoke and listened very well, supporting and building on the contributions made by others. As a result, although the final examination was still a year ahead, their attainment was already judged to be above the average expected in Year 11.

15. Personal development is very good. Pupils respond well to the opportunities they are given to take responsibility for their own learning, especially when they are able to use the information and communication resources for individual research. A class given the opportunity to find about people with special needs used the computers and internet access very competently to find the information they needed to help them with their projects, for example. There are many examples of students working in pairs and small groups to produce useful and interesting work after some good discussions. Pupils use the school library effectively to research work and complete homework tasks. At the time of the inspection, the library was small and inadequate to meet the needs of this large school, but a large new resource base is nearing completion. The year councils are effective, giving students a forum from which they

can make a contribution to the life of the school. The councillors are enthusiastic about their role and seek to reflect the views of the pupils they represent in their discussions. Recent changes brought about as a result of council debates include changes in the school uniform to allow girls to wear trousers and the provision of vegetarian meals in the school canteen.

16. Parents are generally pleased with the attitudes and behaviour that the school promotes. Most all of those who responded to the questionnaire think that their children like coming to school and that the behaviour of pupils is good.

Teaching is good overall, with much that is very good, and this leads to pupils developing good learning skills.

17. The quality of teaching in the school overall is good. Thirty per cent of teaching in the school is very good. Teaching is good in 47.5 per cent of lessons and satisfactory in 22.5 per cent. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. All teachers, across all year groups plan their lessons effectively, using a variety of teaching methods within each lesson. This range prevents pupils becoming bored, as they could be if they were asked to do work in the same way throughout the hour-long lessons.

18. Taking the school as a whole, teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 (Key Stage 4) than in Years 7, 8 and 9 (Key Stage 3). Overall, it is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4.

19. There are many examples of very good teaching. Such lessons feature very good relationships and management of pupils so that no time is wasted and they respond very well to the work the teacher sets. A good example is the Year 10 lesson on *An Inspector Calls* referred to earlier. This very successful lesson featured confident teaching from a teacher very secure in her understanding of both the text being studied and the course requirements. The objectives of the lesson were clear to the pupils so that they understood what they were expected to learn. The teacher's expectations were high and the pupils rose to the challenges she set very well. The lesson planning was excellent. The activities were designed to help the pupils reach the lesson's objectives in a progressive way, each activity building on the last. The pace was very brisk so that much was accomplished and the pupils were both stretched and forced to concentrate and work hard to keep up. The work was designed to involve the pupils in researching aspects of the play in depth in order to increase their understanding of the context and the characters. This was done in an enjoyable way that motivated the pupils. They made very good progress.

20. The teaching in Years 10 and 11 benefits from the increased pace and focus on learning that the build up to the GCSE examinations brings. This is especially true of teaching in history, geography, mathematics, English and science: in these subjects the teachers use their experience and knowledge both of the pupils and the examination requirements very successfully to provide challenging work that prepares them particularly well for external examinations. A very good example occurred when a Year 11 class were revising social and economic history for their forthcoming GCSE examination. They were

considering the work of Edwin Chadwick and his promotion of public health. Again, there were very high expectations of pupils. The teacher's questions, which were very well directed to stimulate learning, challenged the pupils to think for themselves, to explore the topic in depth and to realise for themselves the links between historical topics. He was not simply teaching history, he was teaching them to think as historians. The real keys to the success of the lesson, however, were the experience of the teacher, his knowledge of the pupils and what they need to learn; all linked to a thorough understanding of the requirements of the examination syllabuses. The most successful teachers in the school are very skilled at preparing their pupils for the GCSE questions they are likely to face.

21. Although there is no unsatisfactory teaching, three quarters of lessons are not as effective as those described above. This is sometimes because the task set, although appropriate to the needs of the majority, does not allow all pupils to attain the lesson's objectives. In a lesson on perspective drawing, for example, the view chosen was too complex for the lower attaining pupils and so they became confused. Their understanding of single point perspective was not helped by their need to struggle sketching trees and bushes that concealed some of the outlines of the buildings. In other lessons that were satisfactory rather than very good, a lack of challenge and some inappropriate tasks can lead to a lack of motivation, particularly amongst lower-attaining pupils. In a Year 11 science lesson on the solar system, for example, the teacher had not included sufficient variety in the lesson to keep all the pupils interested for an hour. Some pupils found the work too difficult. The result was the teacher had to work hard to keep the class working and responding appropriately. He succeeded, but progress was only just satisfactory.

22. The teaching of numeracy is generally good across the school and as a result it is rare for pupils to have problems with numeracy that affect their ability to achieve well in the subjects they study. Literacy is taught well in English. In many other subjects, teachers show a growing awareness of the need to reinforce and develop literacy skills, including the teaching of subject specific vocabulary. However, pupils' levels of literacy would be enhanced if the good work being done in English and several other subjects to develop pupils' writing skills were reinforced consistently across the rest of the curriculum.

The leadership, particularly of the headteacher, supported by the senior team, focuses successfully on the raising of attainment. This has led to good improvement and very good capacity for future improvement.

23. The leadership and management of the school by the headteacher, ably supported by the deputy head and the senior managers, are very good. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities satisfactorily. The senior managers monitor the school's performance well. As a result of their analysis, very effective action is taken to improve the work of the school. This has led to good progress since the time of the last report and the school is very well placed to improve in future. Resources are deployed well to improve the quality of education for the benefit of pupils and the school succeeds in getting the best value from its use of its funds and resources. Levels of staffing are good. The teaching staff is of good

quality. The learning support assistants are deployed appropriately and support pupils' learning effectively.

24. The headteacher, along with the other senior managers, provides very clear direction for the work of the school. Under his leadership, attainment has risen. Over the last four years, performance in GCSE examinations has improved at a more than the national rate. In both the end of Year 9 national tests and the GCSE examinations in Year 11, the difference between the average point score (the overall measure of candidates' performance) of pupils at the school compared with that of pupils nationally has increased to almost double.

25. The headteacher has guided much recent development. In particular, he realised the deficiencies in the accommodation when he arrived almost five years ago. A number of departments were not suited together, which made it difficult to share resources effectively and to share teaching ideas. There were many 'demountable' classrooms on site, temporary accommodation that was partly the reason for subject departments being split around the school site. Funding was raised for new building projects and these problems were largely solved. Most of the temporary accommodation has been removed, a brand new teaching block has been built, the spacious and well-equipped learning resources centre, a large library and computer suite, was almost complete at the time of the inspection and another new build, just agreed, will bring the science rooms together and to a high standard. The biggest impact has been on the provision and teaching of information technology. There were few computers in the school five years ago. They were out of date and the rooms unsuitable. The teaching of information technology was severely criticised in the last report. Despite considerable difficulties with the school budget, in deficit for the first four years of the new headship, and the need for staffing reductions, the ratio of computers to pupils has risen dramatically. The old machines have been discarded and classrooms converted into effective information technology rooms. The learning resource centre will enhance this provision further. This is now having a positive effect on attainment. The finding of the inspection is that standards are rising rapidly and that attainment is currently above the national average. From next year, information technology will become a core subject taken by all pupils, leading to a GNVQ qualification for the majority.

26. Management is increasingly consultative and all staff, governors and parents are enjoying more say in the way the school is run and in the process of decision-making. Most respond to this well and school policies are generally better understood and implemented as a result. There are some heads of department, however, who have been in post for some time, who still cling to an out-moded autonomy in the running of their departments. The school's assessment policy is not consistently implemented, for example, because there is resistance from some departments who are happy with their own systems and do not see the whole school picture.

27. There was little monitoring of teaching before the new head was appointed. This has changed and the school's performance management policy is now fully in place. His increased focus on the monitoring and the professional development of teachers has paid dividends. The inspection has found that the quality of teaching has

improved since the last inspection. There is a higher proportion of very good teaching than there was previously and no unsatisfactory teaching. The school has applied for Investors in People status, demonstrating its care and support for the personal development of its staff.

28. Current professional development for teachers and teaching assistants includes work on the further development of teaching styles, use of assessment information and the identification and sharing of good and successful practice in order to improve even further the attainment and progress of pupils. There are high expectations of both teachers and pupils. There is a strong focus on the further improvement of the already high examination results. The school's priorities for development are very appropriate and include a focus on raising the attainment of boys.

29. The governing body carries out its responsibilities effectively, although it has recently been restructured and contains many new members. It is well organised and some of its members, highly qualified in their own professions, bring good management experience to their roles as governors. They are well informed, thorough in their monitoring of some aspects of the work of the school, including the budget, and have a good overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are aware that the statutory requirement for an act of collective worship for all every day is not being met. They need, as they have recognised, to be more organised in their monitoring of other aspects of the school's work, especially the curriculum. There is good communication between them and the senior managers on the staff and this means that they get regular reports on the work of the school and a full analysis of examination results. There is not a regular programme of visits to the school by governors to observe its work at first hand, however.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Attainment overall in GCSE examinations is high, but some departments are more consistently successful than others. There is a need to raise the effectiveness of teaching and learning so that they are equally good in all subject areas.

30. All pupils at the school, including those with special educational needs and the very few for whom English is an additional language, achieve well. However, there are differences between the attainment of boys and that of girls and a related difference between the effectiveness of subject departments in GCSE examinations. There is, however, no significant difference in boys' and girls' performance in the National Curriculum tests for 14 year olds. Both boys and girls performed well, compared with boys' and girls' results across the country as a whole. Over the last three years, boys have on average exceeded the national point score for all three core subjects by 2.1 points. Girls have exceeded their national average by a very similar amount, 2.4 points. This makes both boys and girls more than two terms ahead of boys and girls nationally.

31. The overall picture in terms of GCSE examination results shows a picture even more positive, reflecting the very good teaching and very good progress made by pupils in Years 10 and 11. Over the last three years, boys have exceeded the average for boys' nationally by 9 points. Their average GCSE point score is 44.3, compared with 35.3 for the country as a whole. Girls have performed almost equally well. Their average point score for the same period is 49.0, against 40.4 for girls nationally. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, boys at this school were 9.4 points above the national average for boys and girls were 9.6 points ahead. This level of performance is well above the national average.

32. However, some subjects are much better at motivating boys than others. These subjects, such as history and geography, are the ones in which all pupils tend to gain their highest grades in the examination. Those subjects, such as German and humanities (World Studies) in which pupils attained least well, were areas in which boys under-performed. For example, the humanities course was one of the least successful of the GCSE courses in 2000 and one of the few in which the school's A* to C grades were below the percentage nationally. In the country as a whole, 42.8 per cent of candidates obtained a pass in A* to C range. In this school, the percentage was 28.9. It was a subject taken mainly by boys and their relative performance in this subject was poor compared with their levels of attainment in many other subjects. Another example is information technology, which had a disappointing year in 2000. Nevertheless, the girls who took it did much better than the boys. Half of them gained a pass in the A* to C range, compared with 58 per cent nationally. The proportion gaining grade B was double the national average. Boys' results were much poorer. Only 29.7 per cent gained a pass in the A* to C range, compared with over 51.2 per cent nationally, and 8.1 per cent gained grade B, compared with 13.9 per cent across the country as a whole.

33. As this shows, where subjects perform relatively less well in GCSE examinations it is mainly, though not totally, because of underperformance by boys. The school needs to continue to monitor the effectiveness of teaching in Years 10 and 11 to ascertain the factors that bring success for all pupils, of whatever gender or prior attainment, and the factors that bring about underachievement. The inspection found the following areas in which improvements could usefully be made:

- the quality of teaching. In the most successful subjects, teaching is almost always good or very good. The teachers are experienced and confident practitioners. They know their pupils well and have a thorough knowledge of the requirements of the examination syllabuses. In contrast, there have been staffing problems in German, where results were disappointing in 2000. The humanities course was being taught for the first time and so teachers last year were not all confident of the best ways to prepare pupils for the GCSE examination.
- the motivation of lower-attaining boys. Where teachers are confident, prepare interesting lessons and have good class control, all pupils are motivated, concentrate and work hard. Where the activities are not stimulating or relevant enough to sustain pupils' interest for a full hour, there are problems – especially in keeping the attention of low-attaining boys.
- The appropriacy of the tasks set by the teacher. In most classes, pupils are set by ability. Many teachers devise a series of common tasks for all pupils in the group. Generally, these are appropriate for the vast majority and the better teachers support lower attaining pupils, using their own knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses to target additional help as necessary. There are occasions when a common task is not appropriate and some pupils are not sufficiently challenged by the work set or it is too difficult and so they do not make sufficient progress. Even though classes are set, there is a wide range of ability in many and teachers need to ensure that the work set is meeting individual needs. Related to this, is the inconsistency between departments in the implementation of the school's assessment policy. There is a need for greater use of prior assessment data to set accurate targets for pupils and to use these targets to monitor pupils' progress effectively. Not all departments are doing this well. Similarly, some departments are not using National Curriculum levels when assessing and setting targets for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 and this inconsistency is causing some confusion and a lack of precision.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

This is a very successful school. In order to continue to improve and to raise levels of attainment even further, the governors, headteacher and teaching staff, with the support of the local education authority, should:

- evaluate the successful strategies used by those departments that attain a relatively high proportion of A* to C passes in GCSE examinations, especially with boys, and adapt them in other subject areas to raise the attainment and motivation of pupils so that it is more consistently high across the school.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	40
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	27

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	30	47.5	22.5	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of students on the school's roll	1241
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	43

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	30
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	198

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	32
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	38

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	7.1

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.6

National comparative data	7.66
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National comparative data	1.08
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Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Year 9

Number of registered students in final year of Year 9 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	114	128	242

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	76	87	87
	Girls	91	99	95
	Total	167	186	182
Percentage of students at NC Level 5 or above	School	69(82)	77(82)	76(73)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of students at NC Level 6 or above	School	27 (28)	51 (62)	39(28)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	65	85	84
	Girls	94	104	102
	Total	159	189	186
Percentage of students at NC Level 5 or above	School	66 (79)	79 (82)	78 (68)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of students at NC Level 6 or above	School	28 (41)	52 (58)	45 (39)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Year 11

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	112	102	214

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	64	106	110
	Girls	73	96	99
	Total	137	202	209
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	64 (67)	94 (99)	98 (100)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	48
	National	38.4

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	1236
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	24	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes:

Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	63
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	19.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff:

Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	21
Total aggregate hours worked per week	531.8 5

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	2576149.00
Total expenditure	2638570.00
Expenditure per pupil	2126.16.00

Balance brought forward from previous year	34140.00
Balance carried forward to next year	40334.00

Deployment of teachers:

Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	80
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Average teaching group size:

Y7– Y11

Key Stage 3	26.8
Key Stage 4	21.4

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1241
Number of questionnaires returned	246

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	30	57	10	6	1
My child is making good progress in school.	44	48	6	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	17	59	10	5	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	16	62	11	5	2
The teaching is good.	30	62	3	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	31	52	13	4	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48	45	6	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	51	43	4	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	21	49	22	4	4
The school is well led and managed.	24	53	11	3	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	30	57	5	2	7
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	22	52	14	2	10

