

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **VERULAM SCHOOL**

St Albans

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117505

Headteacher: Robert Hawkes

Reporting inspector: Clare Gillies  
20597

Dates of inspection: 13 - 16 June 2000

Inspection number: 186582

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 18
Gender of pupils:	Boys
School address:	Brampton Road St Albans Hertfordshire
Postcode:	AL1 4PR
Telephone number:	01727 766100
Fax number:	01727 766256
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Brian Lakin
Date of previous inspection:	January 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
Clare Gillies	Registered inspector
Suzanne Smith	Lay inspector
Alan Brewerton	Team inspector
Derek Ebbage	Team inspector
Jon Lovgreen	Team inspector
Peter McKenzie	Team inspector

The inspection contractor was:

Cambridge Education Associates  
Demeter House  
Station Road  
Cambridge  
CB1 2RS

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Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	
Information about the school	6
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	7
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	8
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	9
Parents' and carers' views of the school	10
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL</b>	
GCSE results (well above average) and A-level results (above average)	11
Effective monitoring of pupils' progress, targets and results	12
Very good leadership and management of the school	12
The school's ethos, pupils' very good behaviour and respectful relationships	13
Particularly good sixth form curriculum	14
Strengths in the quality of teaching	14
Extra-curricular activities in sport and music	15
Excellent support for pupils with special educational needs	15
<b>WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED</b>	
Teaching which lacks sparkle and imagination	16
Underachievement in religious education	16
The quality of marking by a few teachers	17
The pace of development in information technology	17
The lack of consistency for developing literacy skills	18
Accommodation for mathematics and physical education	18
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	19
<b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	20

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

- Pupils in Years 11 and 13 were interviewed during the inspection but none of their lessons could be observed as they were taking examinations.

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Verulam is an average sized 11 to 18 comprehensive school for boys with over 990 pupils on roll. Almost 200 pupils are in the sixth form which is run in consortium with three other centres. The school is over-subscribed and has grown from just over 900 in 1995. Attainment on entry is well above the national average. Pupils come from a wide catchment area. This includes wards of St Albans which have a higher than national percentage of high social class households. Less than five per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals (below the national average). The percentage of pupils who speak English as an additional language is high but most of them speak English fluently. There are over 50 Pakistani and Indian pupils, but few other minority ethnic pupils – 87 per cent of pupils are white. The percentages of pupils with special educational needs and those with statements are below the national averages.

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

Verulam is a most effective and very good school with many impressive features. These include strong leadership and management, well above national average (and improving) standards, good or better teaching in almost 75 per cent of lessons, a positive ethos that learning is the top priority and can be enjoyable, and harmonious relationships at all levels. There is a well-organised and stable atmosphere in which pupils feel secure and well supported. The school provides good value for money.

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

- GCSE results are well above the national average. They improved significantly in 1996 and have remained high since then. The average points score at A-level has risen steadily over the last four years and was above the national average in 1999.
- Most effective monitoring of pupils' progress, targets and results has contributed to the rising standards.
- The leadership and management of the school are very good.
- The ethos nurtures strong moral and social standards which are reflected in the pupils' very good behaviour and the respectful relationships between teachers and pupils and between pupils.
- The sixth form curriculum is particularly good and benefits from the strong consortium links.
- Teaching is at least good in three out of four lessons and very good in one in three lessons. Teachers develop pupils' confidence to discuss and debate in groups and to articulate their ideas clearly.
- Extra-curricular activities in sport and music are numerous and enjoyed by many pupils.
- Support for pupils with special educational needs is excellent.

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

- The few lessons where teaching lacks sparkle and imagination and/or pupils make too little progress.
- Underachievement in religious education and too little time in Years 10 to 13 to meet legal requirements.
- The quality of marking by a few teachers, especially in Years 7 to 9.
- The pace of development in information technology: too few computers, a lack of up-to-date programs and computers not being used enough in lessons.
- The lack of consistency for developing literacy skills, particularly spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- The mobile mathematics classrooms and the accommodation for physical education.

*The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan. The present school development plan already includes references to all the issues raised in the box above.*

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Standards have improved considerably and overall progress since the last inspection has been good. GCSE results are now well above the national average and the average A-level points score has risen steadily over the last four years. The percentage of unsatisfactory teaching has dropped considerably, especially in mathematics, science and art, although there is scope for further improvement in the number of lessons where teaching is very good or outstanding. Progress in religious education has been too slow and statutory requirements for religious education in Years 10 to 13 and a daily act of collective worship are still not met. Staffing problems in recent months (now addressed) have held back the slow and steady progress in information technology since the last inspection (when it was a key issue), but the team is confident that the situation is now resolved.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	B
A-levels/AS-levels	C	C	B	

Key	
Well above average	A
Above average	B
Average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E

In 1999 the percentage of pupils attaining the expected national levels at the end of Year 9 was above the national average in English (but well below the average for similar schools) and well above the national average in mathematics and science (above for similar schools). Maintaining the high standards on entry to the school reflects good progress and learning in Years 7 to 9. These results have not altered much over the last few years although standards in English seen during the inspection were at least in line with the average for similar schools and therefore better than the previous year. In all years of the school there is underachievement in religious education.

Good progress and achievement continues in Years 10 and 11. The percentage of pupils achieving five grades A\*-C has been well above the national average for four years. GCSE results are particularly good in science, design and technology and French, but less so in history and physical education studies. Overall standards seen in Year 10 during the inspection were very high in mathematics, science and design and technology. In 1999 over 45 per cent of A-level grades were A and B, well above the national average, as is the average points score per student. Students achieve well. All students attained pass grades at A-level in business education, design and technology (communications), English literature, English, geography, history, music, physical education, further mathematics and German. Numbers studying the sciences, English, geography, mathematics and economics are high. Standards seen in Year 12 during the inspection were very high overall with significant improvement since the last inspection in chemistry and sociology.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good because pupils appreciate the traditions and high standards expected and are generally keen to work hard in lessons.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good because pupils are courteous, considerate and thoughtful. In lessons it is rare that any time is lost establishing discipline.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils take an active part in school life and there is a noticeable ethos of harmony and respect between teachers and pupils and between pupils. This certainly contributes to the purposeful atmosphere in most lessons.
Attendance	Above the national average but the school is determined to improve this by installing an electronic recording system during the next school year.

Pupils' behaviour was very good in over half the lessons observed and exemplary on several occasions. Many are proud to be members of the school community. They are tolerant of each other's ideas and feelings. Punctuality is very good in the morning and, allowing for movement, most lessons start promptly.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

During the inspection teaching was satisfactory or better in 94 per cent of lessons, good or better in 73 per cent and very good in 32 per cent. Teaching was excellent in four lessons. It was most effective in Year 10 but less very good teaching was seen in Year 8. It has improved considerably since the last inspection when approximately 20 per cent was unsatisfactory. Teaching and learning are now good in English, mathematics and science as several new teachers are contributing to improving teaching. Numeracy skills are taught well but the development of literacy, especially in Years 7 to 9, is an area for improvement. During the inspection teaching was unsatisfactory in five lessons – in five different subjects – as pupils did not achieve enough by the end of fifty minutes. In several lessons, although they were sound overall, teaching lacked sparkle and imagination. In a few modern foreign language lessons pupils did not “use everyday classroom events as a context for spontaneous speech” (National Curriculum). The school addresses the needs of all pupils, whatever their capabilities.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The sixth form curriculum is particularly good and benefits from the strong consortium links. Pupils have a good choice of subjects at GCSE and valuable alternative courses are offered for lower attaining pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Excellent. The co-ordinator (who is also head of Year 7) is very experienced and well-organised so that pupils receive most effective



	support. Their progress is reviewed frequently.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good. The visiting specialist not only supports individuals but also advises teachers how to adapt work for those pupils who speak English well but need to develop confidence with their reading and writing.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. Assemblies (and the annual service in the abbey) make a good contribution to the ethos of the school but little further evidence of spiritual input through the curriculum was noted. Pupils respond well to the very strong moral and social ethos of the school. Development of cultural awareness is good, but more opportunities could be provided.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well. Effective levels of academic and personal guidance are combined with a high level of care for all pupils. A few monitoring routines lack rigour (for example recording all minor incidents in a first aid book).

Sixth form students can follow A-level and GNVQ courses or combine them and select new subjects such as sociology or photography. Legal requirements for religious education in Years 10 to 13 and for a daily act of collective worship are not met - a key issue in the last inspection report. The school works well with parents and both asks for, and responds to, their observations about school life.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher provides clear, strong, realistic and effective leadership for the present and future progress of all pupils. He is ably supported by two most competent deputy heads, senior teachers and administration staff, all of whom work well together. Management of finances has improved since the last inspection, when it was a key issue.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. Governors are supportive, well-informed, reflective and practical. They have a good range of length of service and professional backgrounds and experiences. The full governing body and several committees meet at least twice a term so their knowledge of school issues is up-to-date and they plan ahead carefully.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Most effective. Although quite a cumbersome document, the school development plan (a key issue in the previous report) is now carefully and sensibly reviewed to determine the next one and outline plans exist for the next two years. Detailed analysis of pupils' performance, to pinpoint any weaknesses in teaching and to set targets for pupils, has contributed to rising standards.
The strategic use of resources	Funds are allocated properly and appropriately and used well. Professional development for staff is valuable and staff are deployed efficiently. The headteacher uses all financial and human resources well to maintain and improve standards.

The mobile mathematics classrooms and the accommodation for physical education both need attention. Practically all heads of departments are good at leading their teams and monitoring standards of teaching and learning. Principles of best value are applied well and costs are carefully balanced against effectiveness.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The strong leadership and management of the school.</li> <li>• Staff who are thoughtful and respond helpfully to parents' questions or problems.</li> <li>• Pupils make good progress in their learning.</li> <li>• The speed and quality of homework marking and the very good reports.</li> <li>• The home-school agreement.</li> <li>• Very good behaviour by the majority of boys.</li> <li>• Pastoral care throughout the school and particularly in Year 7.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homework: a quarter feel that their sons get too little or too much. Particular concerns are when homework is not set regularly or is just to finish off work done in class.</li> <li>• Poor behaviour by a minority of pupils.</li> <li>• Punishment of a whole class for what a few boys have done.</li> <li>• The school's approach to organised games.</li> <li>• Year 7 work when it repeats what boys have covered at primary school.</li> </ul>

The inspection confirmed all the positive views expressed by parents although generally the quality of marking is less good in the first three years than later and not all teachers write detailed and helpful reports. In most subjects, excluding religious education, homework is set regularly and finishing of work done in class is not particularly common. Only a very small minority of boys find it hard to behave well and the school has good strategies to cope with them. Occasions when whole classes are punished are very rare and strongly discouraged by senior staff. The observation about organised games was possibly true in the past but boys no longer feel this is a fair comment; any of them who attend practices regularly are given opportunities to participate in matches. Some work in Year 7 mathematics does overlap with that done in primary schools but in the next academic year setting will be introduced in the second term.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL**

**GCSE results are well above the national average. They improved significantly in 1996 and have remained high since then. The average points score at A-level has risen steadily over the last four years.**

1. In the last six months before the 1996 GCSE examinations the headteacher introduced intensive mentoring and support for selected pupils. The percentage of pupils attaining five grades A\*-C increased dramatically from only 56 per cent in 1995 to 71 per cent of pupils in 1996 and 74 per cent in 1998. Although this percentage dropped slightly in 1999, this year group entered the school with a relatively low verbal reasoning score, so the 1999 results were at least as commendable as in the previous year. Over 25 per cent of GCSE grades attained in 1999 were A or A\* (nationally 15 per cent) and thirteen per cent of pupils attained seven grade A or better GCSEs. Over the last three years GCSE results have been particularly high in science, design and technology and French, but less so in history and physical education. Overall standards seen in Year 10 during the inspection were very high in mathematics, science and design and technology.
2. In 1999 over 47 per cent of A-level grades were A and B, which was well above the national average, as was the average points score per student. Three years earlier only 26 per cent of grades were A and B and the average points score was below the national average. Such improvement is explained by the better quality of teaching as well as the determined approach to targets and monitoring (described below). Out of over two hundred individual entries in 1999 only eleven did not attain a pass grade. One hundred per cent pass grades were achieved in business education, design and technology (communications), English literature, English, geography, history, music, physical education, further mathematics and German. Standards seen in Year 12 during the inspection were very high overall.
3. Pupils are quite happy about the setting arrangement in several subjects and there is no evidence that pupils in lower sets feel under-valued. Teachers prepare work at the right level for the different sets and also for different pupils within sets; thus learning is good and pupils make good progress. An accelerated mathematics set in Year 9 take GCSE at the end of Year 10 and then move on to appropriately challenging AS-level mathematics work. In January 2001 sets will be introduced in mathematics in the second term of Year 7, earlier than at present, to avoid repeating some work which is covered in primary schools, a concern expressed by parents.
4. Although In 1999 the percentage of pupils attaining the expected national levels at the end of Year 9 was above the national average in English and well above it in mathematics and science, results have been fairly static for the last few years. Maintaining the high standards on entry to the school reflects good progress and learning in Years 7 to 9 but the school is determined to improve standards, particularly in English where results in 1999 were well below average for similar schools (though they were above average in mathematics and science). A recently appointed new head of faculty has already raised standards in English by altering the curriculum and encouraging writing to be more imaginative rather than just competent. English work seen during the inspection was at least in line with the average for similar schools.
5. The headteacher is determined to increase standards further, by using graphs which show national data relating performance in different years, at the end of Year 9 with GCSE results, for example. Despite the results in most subjects being above the national average, staff are expected to respond accordingly when confronted with data which shows even greater progress could be made. In history for example, where GCSE results were just below the national average in 1999, and in physical education, where they were significantly below, clear plans have been established to tackle any under-performance. Standards in English, mathematics, chemistry and art have improved as several most effective staff have joined the school and teaching is now much better.

**Most effective monitoring of pupils' progress, targets and results has contributed to the rising standards.**

6. The impact of the first year of intensive pre-GCSE monitoring in 1996 is described in paragraph one. Analysis of progress made by sixth formers started in 1994, and this has also resulted in steadily improving results. Pupils in Year 7 know that they have targets for their Year 9 national assessments and will have targets for all their GCSE and A-level subjects, and they are aware of steps they should take to meet them. The culture of monitoring, reviewing and improving on previous performance is now well established for both teachers and pupils and it has undoubtedly contributed to the improved examination grades. Targets are reviewed regularly and adjusted as needed. The headteacher and several heads of faculties are now analysing individual pupils' progress towards their predicted grades, and are using this data to encourage and support better learning.
7. Pupils are fully aware of their targets (although these could be reported more clearly to parents) which are based on three elements: staff predictions, previous results (for example tests taken on entry to the school or end of key stage national tests) and pupils' aspirations. This combination makes targets meaningful and pupils in Years 10 and 11 have to focus on them when they meet formally with a member of the senior staff. A number of Year 11 pupils are successfully mentored by members of staff who encourage them to meet their targets. Form tutors stay with their pupils in Years 8 and 9 and again in Years 10 and 11. This means they know them particularly well as they approach examinations and tests. In Year 9 last year, parents of pupils who had relatively low effort grades were contacted and these pupils received helpful extra encouragement at home and in school. Pupils receive regular reminders about the deadlines for handing in coursework.
8. All teachers, particularly those whose pupils do not perform as relatively well as they should, are expected to consider how they could adjust their teaching to achieve higher results and meet challenging targets. Such an approach ensures that complacency does not set in and that standards are expected to rise. As well as setting the statutory school targets for GCSE, the headteacher has set them for A-levels in order to boost performance. All heads of faculty observe members of their team teaching at least once a year. Their observations, and those done by senior managers, are carried out in an atmosphere of encouragement and support, and evidence shows that the follow-up advice offered to certain teachers has improved standards or led to appropriate alterations in the allocation of non-specialist teachers.

**The leadership and management of the school are very good.**

9. The headteacher must take the credit for the push towards monitoring, mentoring and target setting which has led to the improved results described above. Many heads of faculty support such analysis and see the benefits this brings. Lines of communication within the school are clear, open and effective, which contributes to the unity between all teaching and non-teaching staff. The deputy heads are efficient in administration and effective in monitoring behaviour around the school. Senior teachers and middle managers also contribute to the calm organisation of the school which generates the right atmosphere for learning. GCSE and A-level examinations proceeded very smoothly at the same time as the inspection, which itself necessitated further room changes. The financial staff have contributed to the improved quality and regularity of information for governors – an issue in the last inspection report. Principles of best value are applied rigorously, spending is closely linked to the school development plan and the sixth form is cost effective.
10. The governing body contributes to the very good leadership and management, for example by having a strategy group which discusses large issues and presents its findings to the full governing body. One member of the governing body was closely involved in the development of the worthwhile home-school agreement; parents' views were sought in advance and then after the document had been in place for a year – an example of the way that management takes parents' views seriously. Helpful discussion evenings are held with parents, for example about drugs education or other major issues. The pre-inspection questionnaire showed that 96

per cent of parents feel the school is well led and managed.

11. The governing body considers “the need to build staff confidence and momentum” and it is the latter word which best describes the effectiveness of the headteacher. All his decisions are carefully considered with the specific aim of driving standards up whilst respecting the atmosphere and traditions of the past. At the same time he is totally realistic about what pupils experience outside school and therefore wants their time in school to be enjoyable and stimulating. Pupils particularly appreciate his innovative homework-free week for those of them who are completely up-to-date with work. For those who are not it is an excellent opportunity for them to catch up. Year 7 pupils enjoy the weekly formal assemblies taken by the headteacher and refer to the wooden panelling in the entrance hall as an imposing reminder of the traditions of the school. They are proud to be members of the school community.

**The ethos nurtures strong moral and social standards which are reflected in the pupils’ very good behaviour and the respectful relationships between teachers and pupils and between pupils.**

12. At Verulam all teachers and staff get on well together and this generates a warmth which permeates downwards to the pupils. The teachers (almost equal numbers of men and women) are good role models for pupils setting high professional standards for themselves and expecting the same from the pupils. Parents particularly commented on how helpful the reception staff are. Many teachers give up much time to support extra-curricular activities (described in paragraphs 22 and 23), many of which develop strong moral and social standards. In all years, but most importantly in Year 7, pupils feel safe, cared for and supported. Punctuality in the morning is very good which helps to set the work ethic for each day. Some teachers have received effective training on behaviour management and following a whole-school initiative more faculties - particularly science, modern foreign languages and business - now deal with negative behaviour quickly and without referring to senior staff. However, when necessary and appropriate, pupils are withdrawn from lessons and receive extremely helpful encouragement to change their attitudes.
13. The school council does have some influence on procedures and it insisted on inserting a firm reference to the unacceptability of bullying in the home-school agreement. Indeed, all pupils feel confident that any rare incidents of bullying are dealt with promptly and firmly. Temporary exclusions are used carefully and effectively to modify unacceptable behaviour. Exclusion is fairly automatic if pupils display any physical aggression and on one rare occasion a group of pupils were excluded for leaving the school premises without authority and because some of them were smoking. Pupils understand and accept the school rules and in general they are well behaved and considerate. The Youth Action Group develops a wide range of skills; Year 10 pupils are trained by Childline and then run a drop-in centre for any pupils who wish to air problems, about relationships for example. Prefects in Years 12 and 13 are well-respected and help to maintain order, for example over the one-way system that operates to reduce congestion.
14. During the inspection pupils clearly wanted to support their teachers and behaviour in classes was at least very good in over half the lessons observed. Pupils’ behaviour in the dining room and around the school was sensible and the school grounds are remarkably clear of litter. In many lessons pupils’ behaviour was exemplary: they listened carefully to the teacher and each other, and got down to written work efficiently, enjoying the work, responding well to questions and showing an enthusiasm to make progress. One small group of Year 10 pupils were uncooperative in a modern foreign languages lesson and a few in another where the work was too difficult. Behaviour slipped in one English lesson where the teaching lacked firm direction.

**The sixth form curriculum is particularly good and it benefits from the strong consortium links.**

15. In addition to the full range of National Curriculum subjects studied in Years 10 and 11, sixth form students can follow A-level courses in photography, sociology, business studies, economics, physical education and further mathematics. A small but increasing number of students follow an advanced business GNVQ course and at other schools in the consortium students select from a wide range of courses including GNVQ science, psychology and Spanish. Verulam has been a major player in developing valuable links with other institutions and timetables are now integrated to give students as much flexibility as possible. Numbers studying English, mathematics, biology, economics and geography are high but relatively few pupils choose to study history, German or music.
16. Some sixth form students find that the Year 12 general studies course (sometimes offered as an AS level) is worthwhile, others do not and the same mixed response is offered about the personal and social education programme. Particularly appreciated are occasions when visiting speakers address the sixth form. The curriculum committee of the governing body is fully aware of the fine balance needed between curriculum ideals and the financial implications, particularly in the sixth form. Other strengths in the curriculum lower down the school include Latin as a twilight subject, business studies and economics for GCSE and courses for lower attaining pupils (described in paragraph 25).

**Teaching is at least good in nearly three out of four lessons and very good in one in three lessons. Teachers develop pupils' confidence to discuss and debate in groups and to articulate their ideas clearly.**

17. The great majority of teachers have very good knowledge of their subjects and use it to explain the objectives of lessons clearly, to ask probing and stimulating questions, and to challenge sixth formers academically. A particular feature of successful lessons is how teachers alter questions until the pupils work out the answers required and pause to give pupils time to absorb and reflect on ideas as they emerge. They also break up lessons, for example just by using a short video clip or an overhead projector sheet or by regularly getting pupils to do something different.
18. In a Year 7 drama lesson the teacher's clear and lively explanation of the task led to considerable progress, with all pupils striving to improve their performances and direct each other. In history, Year 7 pupils had a very good understanding of chronology and teachers guided questions and built on answers so that pupils felt they had worked everything out for themselves. In information technology, focused questions at the end of lessons helped to remind pupils of the important skills they had mastered. Year 9 pupils learned most effectively about applications of modern technology when planning to make swipe cards for the school, or discussing man-made and artificial fibres. In history a Year 9 lesson on the interpretation of Dunkirk was most stimulating with recent television material used very well. In a mathematics lesson pupils' understanding was increased when they were urged to explain how they reached their answers. In Latin pupils were particularly interested in the well-explained links between language and culture.
19. In English Year 10 pupils made very good progress studying Macbeth as discussion focused well on the links between performance, quotation and character. In another English lesson the teacher correctly revised the lesson plan because homework had shown that the pupils needed further direction on the techniques needed to study poems. An appropriate blend of directed teaching and independent study resulted in a very good business education lesson in Year 10. In a GCSE mathematics lesson the teacher knew exactly when to guide individuals or groups or to address the whole class.

20. Year 12 physical education students make very good progress when constantly challenged to improve their skills. Good relationships were the cornerstone of many effective lessons, well exemplified in Year 12 business education lessons. In the same year the quality of debate and discussion in a geography lesson was very good and the teacher stimulated understanding of a particular ecosystem by reference to carefully selected statistical and descriptive materials. In several science lessons the pace, changing teaching methods and time limits set for particular tasks meant pupils had to concentrate. This was achieved with humour, and excellent relationships contributed to several science lessons which had a purposeful buzz.
21. Evidence from pupils' books and lessons shows that they think for themselves and rarely copy sections from textbooks but base their answers on discussions and group work. In many lessons during the inspection teachers led lively debates and pupils listened respectfully to each other's views. When debating ideas in groups pupils rarely diverted from the tasks set. Many teachers successfully relate topics to pupils' interests; numerous references to Euro 2000 slipped into lessons during the week of the inspection!

**Extra-curricular activities in sport and music are numerous and enjoyed by many pupils.**

22. In music the school orchestra, choirs, wind and jazz bands, string ensemble and many other groups are well supported. The choir sings confidently in four parts and the orchestra plays with much verve and enthusiasm. All these practices take place in the exciting new music block. Almost a quarter of the pupils learn instruments (financially subsidised by the school) and the governing body, aware of the benefits this brings, is keen to continue this arrangement. Pupils play games frequently if they choose to attend practices. In rugby, soccer, cricket, tennis and athletics, school teams are most successful in county and national championships. The school runs an extensive fixture list, particularly on Saturdays, and "believes in the provision of sport for all coupled with the pursuit of excellence for some". Many pupils represent district, county and regional sides. Such extra-curricular activities support the strong moral and social development of pupils in all years.
23. The Duke of Edinburgh Award is followed by up to 80 pupils a year and (also in Years 10 and 11) pupils follow first aid training and support pensioners. In addition to the annual dramatic production, there are many trips and outings. Almost half the pupils in Year 7 go to the Lake District in the summer term, the rest to interesting places in London; they all gain enormously from the team spirit generated and the enthusiasm shown by staff. Several clubs, for example for art, bridge or chess, were not operating during the inspection as many pupils understandably prefer to be outside in the summer. Pupils in several years comment that, apart from music and sport, there is not much to do in the lunchhour or after school. In response to these observations, the school could consider whether it advertises all the extra-curricular activities clearly and whether the range could be further extended.

**Support for pupils with special educational needs (and lower attaining pupils) is excellent.**

24. The head of Year 7, who is also the special educational needs co-ordinator, organises visits to all the feeder primary schools so that any particular issues about individual pupils are picked up early on. All pupils enjoy their visit to the school in the summer term before they start and those with special educational needs particularly appreciate being able to meet staff and to get to know their way round the school. Individual education plans for pupils are not just pieces of paper but working documents; all staff are aware of them and the targets are sensible, practical and reviewed regularly.
25. The programme "Teaching of Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Scheme" is used most effectively in Year 7 and the special educational needs co-ordinator teaches the lower attaining mathematics set for GCSE extremely well. In Year 7 pupils with special educational needs are given most effective structured work, helpful advice and encouragement in English, and in several other subjects further examples of well-thought out tasks were observed during the

inspection. Sixth form students sometimes help pupils with special educational needs and this is a most effective arrangement which has benefits for all involved.

26. For those pupils who do not study two languages in Years 8 and 9 extra support with English and other basic skills is well provided by the special educational needs department. A few pupils follow a single science GCSE course and combine this with a foundation GNVQ course in information technology. A few pupils who find languages difficult are entered for the Certificate of Achievement in French rather than GCSE. Such modifications to the curriculum are well considered and serve pupils well.

## **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

### **The few lessons where teaching lacks sparkle and imagination and/or pupils make too little progress.**

27. The common factor in the few unsuccessful lessons was that pupils did not achieve enough by the end of fifty minutes, which indicates that it was planning and content that was the problem rather than teaching style. One English lesson was not successful, despite the teacher having an engaging manner, as it lacked careful planning for what pupils were meant to learn and firm encouragement to focus pupils on the written task. In a music lesson several pupils did not practise their keyboard skills at all and others made very limited progress. In a games lesson several pupils sat around for long periods, waiting to participate in an athletics activity.
28. Lessons which are not inspiring usually feature the teacher talking for too long without any questions to engage pupils' involvement, as happened, for example, in a Year 8 religious education lesson. The teacher spoke for too long and pupils lost interest in the topic, especially as the main resource used was several unexciting worksheets. When pupils' attention wandered and they began to chatter, the teacher did not effectively correct them. If pupils switch off during the first half an hour of a lesson then their behaviour or fidgeting is likely to reflect lack of concentration. If a lesson is based on worksheets alone, without any other visual stimulus, then learning can be superficial; for example when Year 7 studied weather instruments on paper they had no sense of scale.
29. In a few modern foreign language lessons progress overall was reasonable but pupils did not hear or speak the language enough. It is accepted that English can be used effectively to explain points of grammar or vocabulary but on occasions pupils are not, as the National Curriculum states, "using everyday classroom events as a context for spontaneous speech". As some Year 7 pupils comment that "French teaching is brilliant because we speak French all the time" it is clear that several teachers overcome the problem of pupils being embarrassed when speaking a foreign language in front of each other.

### **Underachievement in religious education which in Years 10 to 13 is partly explained by too little time.**

30. The status of religious education is not high enough and pupils do not value this subject. They have only just over 30 lessons in two years to cover the short GCSE syllabus; this is too little time to cover the course, to meet legal requirements and to generate pupils' interest and enthusiasm. Few pupils felt they had benefited from following the short GCSE course in religious education. In the sixth form students only receive religious education as part of the general studies or personal and social programme. The deputy head in charge of the curriculum acknowledges this is "very thin" provision, again not enough to meet legal requirements. The head of department, who teaches many classes in Years 7 to 9, is the only full-time specialist and although the quality of teaching by non-specialists can be good, these teachers are too involved with other subjects or responsibilities to contribute fully to the development of religious education.
31. Examination of pupils' religious education books shows that marking is too often no more than ticks, with few corrections or comments to challenge pupils to improve. Younger pupils observe that they rarely have homework in religious education and Year 11 pupils that "marking has not



been good for two years". Too much work is incomplete or not marked. Although it has strengths in the early part of Year 7 and some sections are imaginative, the curriculum is not well-planned overall, expectations are not high enough (evidence of too much childish illustration) and assessment is not specific enough. The last inspection report noted "low standards of written work, lack of rigour in marking, underachievement, and lesson plans that did not fully reflect the locally agreed syllabus". The school has tried to address these issues but progress has been too slow.

32. Many pupils appreciate the spirituality of the weekly assemblies in the hall, taken by the headteacher and like the recently introduced "Pause for Thought". However, they do not feel that religious education lessons contribute to their sense of spirituality though they do enjoy studying different religions. In Year 8 pupils comment that they find aspects of lessons difficult to understand and work seen suggests that their knowledge is better developed than their understanding. The school does not meet legal requirements for a daily act of collective worship, a key issue in the last report.

### **The poor quality of marking by a few teachers, especially in Years 7 to 9.**

33. Books examined during the inspection showed that in general the quality of marking is better in Years 10 upwards than in Years 7 to 9. Helpful English marking in Year 10, for example, enters into a dialogue between the teacher and pupil and the quality of marking in science in Years 10 upwards is very good, particularly for the higher attainers. In Years 7 to 9 however, marking in science is erratic, ranging from fine diagnostic comments which help improvement to superficial ticks or bland statements such as "good". In English no clear strategy for marking is evident from the pupils' books although some teachers provide helpful diagnostic comments. Most marking in mathematics is good with hints about how pupils can improve both the presentation and precision of answers.
34. Some excellent marking is noted in history and art, but pupils need more guidance than just "prepare to write greater in detail" for real progress. In geography, religious education, information technology and GCSE physical education, a wide range of marking is evident, from books that have not been marked for months to those with detailed comments. Again a contrast is seen in modern foreign language books with much marking that is very good indeed but it is worrying if mistakes in grammar books are not pointed out.
35. In all subjects, regardless of the quality of the original marking, not all teachers follow up their requests for corrections to be completed or work to be set out in a different way. When teachers remember to pursue comments, work can be seen to improve, for example in some lower attaining mathematics books; in others, axes remain without labels.

### **The pace of development in information technology: too few computers, a lack of up-to-date programs and computers not being used enough in lessons.**

36. After several years of slow but steady progress, the development of information technology across the school ground to a halt. Staffing problems, particularly in co-ordination and network management, made progress difficult. In addition, lack of funds has meant that the ratio of computers to pupils is below the national average and many of the machines are old. Although the majority of pupils have computers at home which are generally more sophisticated than those at school, to ensure equal access the school must develop its provision rapidly and systematically. Individual teachers or faculties, such as the head of modern foreign languages or the science faculty, use up-to-date programmes to make their teaching more interesting; others have not appreciated the potential for their subject, partly frustrated by the lack of machines to use in lessons.
37. The recently appointed co-ordinator has a clear plan which rightly includes different courses, new courses in the sixth form, greater use of email and the Internet, communication with parents via email, curriculum initiatives to incorporate Curriculum 2000 and major and immediate growth in hardware and software. Many pupils, particularly in Years 10 and 11, are keen to follow a full course in information and communications technology.

**The lack of consistency for developing literacy skills, particularly spelling, punctuation and grammar.**

38. In several books wrong spellings are not corrected ('pilgrimage' in religious education for example) and words which should have capital letters are ignored (such as 'romans', 'asia' or 'europe', in more than one subject). A consistent approach would help pupils to realise the importance of these details. Some teachers seize every opportunity to develop vocabulary, for example in history "Be careful not to confuse motte and moat" or in geography "Work out what igneous means", but others miss chances to expand on such issues. Quick vocabulary tests, seen in history, help pupils to learn spellings and definitions and in business education pupils make very good progress mastering new terms in a methodical and well-planned way.

**The mobile mathematics classrooms and the accommodation for physical education.**

39. The mathematics classrooms in the mobiles are unwelcoming and unattractive to work in. They are too cold in winter and too hot in summer. At the main site the gymnasium needs to be modernised. Whilst the open-air swimming pool is an asset, it is narrow, which makes it difficult for a whole class, which has to use widths, to practise well. The distance to the playing fields is a problem that the school addresses well but it places a strain on teachers and obviously reduces the amount of time pupils are engaged in games. If it rains or is extremely cold, there is too little space indoors so some pupils have to face the elements.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- Improve teaching in those lessons which lack sparkle and imagination by (where appropriate):
  - breaking lessons up into sections with different activities,
  - being absolutely clear on what knowledge and understanding are to be covered, or what skills developed by the end of a lesson,
  - avoiding the use of too many worksheets,
  - sharing good practice by observing lessons in other subjects and
  - considering whether lessons could include any more stimulating and original ideas.  
*(Paragraphs 27-29)*
  
- Improve achievement in religious education by reviewing the curriculum plans, raising expectations, introducing more rigorous assessment and increasing the amount of time for the subject in Years 10 to 13.  
*(Paragraphs 30-32)*
  
- Improve the quality of marking, particularly in Years 7 to 9, with rigorous monitoring by the senior management team and heads of faculty. Ensure that pupils respond to suggestions and requests for corrections.  
*(Paragraphs 33-35)*
  
- Persevere with, and develop rapidly, the recently finalised arrangements for information technology so that all pupils use computers regularly in as many subjects as possible. Review the value of the half-course information technology GCSE course. Increase the number of machines, the range of programs and teachers' confidence in using machines.  
*(Paragraphs 36, 37)*
  
- Literacy: build on the good practice which exists in pockets around the school so that all teachers correct spelling, punctuation and grammar in the same way, and all pupils develop their vocabulary well.  
*(Paragraph 38)*
  
- Improve accommodation for physical education, particularly the gymnasium, and replace the mathematics mobile rooms.  
*(Paragraph 39)*

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	79
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	48

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	27	41	21	6	0	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 to 11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	794	197
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	51	

Special educational needs	Y7 to 11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	7	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	133	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	115

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	4
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	9

### Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	7.0
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	1.1

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	165	0

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	121	141	144
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	121	141	144
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	73 (86)	85 (79)	87 (83)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	33 (50)	65 (64)	56 (53)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	144	141	149
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	144	141	149
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	87 (80)	85 (83)	90 (76)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	38 (35)	71 (69)	58 (41)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	153	0	153

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	109	148	150
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	109	148	150
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	71.2 (74.2)	96.7 (94.8)	98 (99)
	National	46.6 (44.6)	90.9 (89.8)	95.8 (95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	48.1 (46.6)
	National	38.0 (36.8)

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

### Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	103	0	103

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	18.6 (17.6)	N/A	18.6 (17.6)	2.5 (5.3)	N/A	2.5 (5.3)
National	17.7 (17.6)	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7 (2.3)	2.8	2.8 (2.3)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	4	50.0
	National		72.9

### **Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	8
Black – African heritage	4
Black – other	19
Indian	25
Pakistani	27
Bangladeshi	14
Chinese	6
White	864
Any other minority ethnic group	24

### **Exclusions in the last school year**

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	1	0
Pakistani	4	0
Bangladeshi	1	0
Chinese	1	0
White	42	1
Other minority ethnic groups	1	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 to Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	59.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.5

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

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

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	234

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

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

Key Stage 3	24.6
Key Stage 4	20.8

### **Financial information**

Financial year	1998-1999
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	£
Total income	2,493,185
Total expenditure	2,517,574
Expenditure per pupil	2,531
Balance brought forward from previous year	32,937
Balance carried forward to next year	8,548

## **Results of the survey of parents and carers**

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	991
Number of questionnaires returned	213

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	49	6	4	1
My child is making good progress in school.	42	50	6	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	26	64	7	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21	53	21	2	2
The teaching is good.	30	61	6	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	36	49	12	2	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	58	35	4	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	57	37	3	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	29	56	10	3	2
The school is well led and managed.	59	37	0	3	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	46	44	3	3	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	29	51	9	3	8