

INSPECTION REPORT

GOLDINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL

Bedford

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109642

Headteacher: Mr D M Johnson

Reporting inspector: Mr Philip Mason
3691

Dates of inspection: 5th – 7th June 2000

Inspection number: 186646

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Middle deemed secondary

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 9 to 13

Gender of pupils: Mixed

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Name of chair of governors: Mr M Hallett

Date of previous inspection: 15/01/1996

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Goldington Middle School is a mixed comprehensive school. It caters for girls and boys from ages 9 to 13 in almost equal numbers. The school is much larger than the typical middle school with 673 pupils on roll. It has been oversubscribed in recent years.

Attainment on entry varies slightly from year to year but is usually close to average. About 25% of pupils are from families whose heritage lies outside the United Kingdom. Of these, about 10% are from other European countries, and 15% are of Asian or Caribbean background. For about 5% of pupils, English is an additional language, which is higher than is found in most schools. The percentage of pupils having special educational needs is above average at 29%. Just under 2% have statements covering a wide range of difficulties. Pupils come from a broad cross-section of urban, social backgrounds. Around 12% of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is broadly in line with the national average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Goldington Middle School provides a very good quality of education overall. Its many strengths far outweigh any aspects needing further development. Pupils achieve well in all years; in some subjects standards are very good. In national tests in 1999, pupils reached very high standards in English. Mathematics and science results were broadly average. Teaching was good in almost three-quarters of all lessons observed during the inspection and very good in well over one third. Leadership and management are very effective, and the school's daily routines run smoothly. The good achievements of the pupils, and very effective deployment of resources by the school management, enable the school to provide very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Teaching is a strength. As a result, pupils' achievement and progress are good.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to learning. They show consideration to their teachers and to each other.
- Planning for the future is very effective. The headteacher and deputy head give a strong lead and are actively supported by committed governors.
- There is outstanding provision of high quality extra-curricular activities. Participation rates by pupils are very good.
- Pupils are very orderly as they move around the school. This creates a calm, purposeful atmosphere.
- Displays of high quality work set high expectations for achievement.

What could be improved

- In a relatively small proportion of lessons, the oral and written feedback given by teachers could focus more on raising pupils' achievement.
- In some lessons in Years 7 and 8, homework could be set more consistently, and some tasks could be more challenging.
- In some subjects, co-ordinators' skills in monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning could be improved further, in order to give greater consistency.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Good progress has been made since the previous inspection in January 1996. Since that time, there have been major changes including a new headteacher and deputy head. Between 1996 and 1999, the results in national tests taken in Year 6 have been above average. However, the trend for improvement has been slightly below the rapidly rising national trend. Standards in English, art, music and physical education remain strong. The management by the headteacher, deputy head and governors is impressive, as reported previously. There is now a stronger focus on planning to raise standards, and on using data on performance to monitor pupils' progress. Self-evaluation, already well in place at management and governor level, is currently being promoted well across the whole staff. The school has recently gained the national Sportsmark award in recognition of its high quality provision for physical education and involvement in competitive sports.

Key issues identified in the previous report have been addressed successfully. This has led to important improvements. Pupils' work is now assessed regularly to an agreed policy, but there is further work to be done in setting pupils targets for improvement. Information technology has been very successfully planned across different subjects to give pupils appropriate experiences. Identification of pupils with learning difficulties and analysis of their needs are now strengths. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating school effectiveness by the headteacher, deputy head and governors are strong. Reports to parents on pupils' progress during the year are now clear and helpful. Some further work is needed to improve the consistency of subject teachers' comments.

The school has a very good capacity to improve its standards and procedures still further.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
English	B	B	B	A
Mathematics	B	B	C	C
Science	B	B	C	C

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

1999 is the latest year for which verified national test results are available at the time of publication.

Between 1995 and 1997, there was a slight downward trend in the attainment of pupils entering the school. This improved in 1998 and 1999. Recent results in Key Stage 2 national tests, taken at the end of Year 6, have reflected this slight dip in comparison with results of all other schools. However, when the 1999 results are compared with similar schools, standards in English are well above average. Standards in mathematics and science are average, with performance in mathematics slightly lower than in science. Test results for girls have been higher than those of boys. In this respect the school follows the national picture very closely.

Standards seen during the inspection are high in art, English, French, music and physical education. In all other subjects, pupils attain standards that are typical for pupils of their

age. No lessons were observed in religious education. The attainment of younger pupils is above average in reading and writing. The implementation of the National Literacy Strategy and National Numeracy Strategy is having a positive impact on standards in English and mathematics in Years 5 and 6, where attainment is above that normally seen. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in meeting the targets set for them. Gifted and talented pupils benefit from well planned activities and achieve well. On balance, there is no difference between the achievement of girls and boys in lessons, or between those of English heritage and pupils from minority communities. The school has set demanding targets for raising achievement further by 2001, and progress towards them is encouraging.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils are eager to learn and are very well motivated in lessons. Large numbers participate in extra-curricular activities. They persevere well when they find work difficult.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. High standards are seen in lessons and in the way pupils conduct themselves around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils are very responsible. They work well with teachers and each other. Older pupils show maturity in undertaking a range of duties to ensure the school runs smoothly.
Attendance	Very good. Attendance for the last complete school year was above that of schools serving a similar age range. The attendance rate has risen further this year.

The aims of the school place a high value on giving all pupils good opportunities for self-development and self-fulfilment. These aspirations are achieved very well.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching is a strength of the school. Almost three-quarters of the lessons observed were of good quality. Well over one third were very good and sometimes lessons were excellent. This strong teaching enables pupils to make good progress. In other lessons, teaching was almost wholly satisfactory, and pupils made steady progress. High quality teaching enables pupils to achieve at an appropriate level. A strong feature of teaching is the clear way pupils are told what they will learn, at the start of lessons. Teachers plan lessons well, usually providing a number of relevant tasks. Work is marked thoroughly, but in a relatively small proportion of lessons, assessments are not focused well enough on helping pupils to understand how they can reach higher standards. In Years 5 and 6, teaching of literacy skills is a strength and provides continuous challenge. In Year 5, teaching of numeracy skills is mostly good. Teaching is sound in science. Across the school, teachers make lessons interesting and pupils understand that they are expected to work hard. However, in some subjects the homework set is not sufficiently demanding in Years 7 and 8. Some excellent teaching enables pupils to reach high standards in art, English, French, music and physical education.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The school provides a curriculum that is well balanced and covers all required subjects. Learning is extended well by speakers who come to school, and it is enriched by visits. The extensive range of extra-curricular activities is a very significant aspect of school life, especially in sport, music, dance and drama. Large numbers of pupils participate in these high quality activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good overall. The identification of pupils' needs is a strength. When withdrawn from lessons for specialist teaching, provision is very effective. In classes, pupils with special needs are fully included. Teachers' planning and support are good, although the work of learning support assistants needs targeting more carefully. A number of well planned initiatives extend gifted and talented pupils.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. Thorough planning and teaching results in good, and often very good, levels of achievement. Afro-Caribbean pupils benefit from a specific project which supports their learning.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Moral and social values underpin the life of the school. They are promoted particularly effectively by the Code of Conduct, assemblies and personal, health and social education (PHSE). Activities promoting cultural development are strong, particularly art, drama, music and dance. Art forms of all communities in the school are represented. Moments that engender spiritual growth are provided well through 'Thought for the Day' and arts subjects, to which pupils respond well.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Excellent. The school has very strong systems to assure the health, safety and well being of its pupils.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher and deputy head give a clear direction to the work of the school. They take a strong lead in strategic planning for future development. A corporate approach has been fostered and subject co-ordinators' planning skills are well developed. The school's management consults with staff, parents and pupils before taking important decisions. Not all subject co-ordinators are equally strong in monitoring the work of their subject teams, and the school's management is working hard to improve consistency.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Extremely well. Governors bring commitment and expertise. They support the headteacher and staff well, whilst holding the school to account. They are very well informed and meet all of their responsibilities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. This is becoming a strength. The headteacher, deputy head and governors have an accurate, shared analysis of the school's strengths and those aspects they wish to see improved. Data on pupil performance is used well to analyse achievement and set targets.
The strategic use of resources	Strong financial planning ensures that the school deploys resources very effectively, guided by its School Improvement Plan. The school gives careful consideration to the use of curriculum time, staff deployment and the purchases that it makes.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

WHAT PLEASES PARENTS MOST	What parents would like to see improved
The school expects pupils to work hard. Teaching is good. Pupils make good progress. The school is well led and managed. Pupils are helped to grow up well. They are comfortable about approaching the school. Behaviour is good. Pupils like school.	A significant minority is unhappy about the amount of homework set. A small number feels that the school should work more closely with them.

Parents are very supportive. The positive expressions about the school far outweigh any negative views. In response to the questionnaire, more than 90% of parents were pleased with statements in the left-hand column above. Inspectors agree with the positive comments. Only two questions, recorded in the right-hand column, received less than 80% positive support. The inspection team agrees with parents' views about the setting of homework. It is insufficiently regular in Years 7 and 8. Some pupils do not receive enough to extend them fully, and insufficient use is made of pupils' diaries. The inspection team cannot substantiate the view of the small number of parents that feels the school does not work closely enough with them. Parents receive a wide range of informative newsletters and communications during the school year. They have three opportunities to consult with staff each year at parents' evenings. This is more than is normally offered in secondary schools. Invitations are extended to parents to attend dance, drama and musical events. These are very well supported.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Teaching is a strength. As a result, pupils' achievement and progress are good.

- 1 Teaching is very good overall. During the inspection, in almost three-quarters of lessons observed the teaching was of good quality and in considerably more than one third it was very good or better. In some lessons the teaching was excellent. Practically all other teaching was satisfactory. This is a better picture than is typically seen. Teachers are hard working and caring. Lessons are well planned, so that most of the one-hour periods contain a number of different learning activities. This good variety engages pupils' interest and their endeavours do not falter. It ensures all pupils are fully engaged, but without slower learners falling behind. Strong teaching enables pupils to achieve well for their ages and learning is appropriately rapid in all years. Some excellent teaching enables pupils to reach high standards in art, English, French, music and physical education lessons.
- 2 The good and very good teaching is characterised by very positive relationships. Management of pupils is very effective because teachers have established clear codes for conduct. Lessons are well disciplined without being oppressive. Pupils understand that teachers expect them to work hard and do their best, but they know that teachers are approachable and will readily assist when help is required. Much teaching encourages pupils to work co-operatively. This was seen, for instance, in a Year 8 history lesson, when the class worked very well together discussing Sundance rituals of American Indians. Pupils work purposefully in groups or pairs, such as in science, where they conduct experiments, or in physical education when they work in teams. The good teaching routines ensure that a minimum amount of time is spent getting out equipment or resources. This adds to the good pace of learning.
- 3 The planning and teaching of the National Literacy Strategy, for pupils in Years 5 and 6, is very good. Highly appropriate teaching strategies are used that ensure pupils are provided with continuous challenge throughout the Literacy Hour. For example, an excellent Year 6 lesson started with the poem 'Macavity the Mystery Cat'. Pupils were taught to use skills of analysis to describe the cat's appearance and attributes. Technical terms such as simile, alliteration and rhyming couplet were discussed and pupils' understanding of vocabulary was checked. There was very effective questioning and the overhead projector was used well to promote interest and understanding. Small groups of pupils then used this poem as a starting point for their own writing. The teacher used group work and resources to match activities extremely well to individual pupils' learning needs, including pupils with special educational needs. A plenary session provided effective reinforcement to pupils' understanding. High quality learning resulted from the teacher's detailed knowledge of pupils' prior attainment, expertise in lesson planning and excellent management of pupils.
- 4 Teachers have gained confidence in adopting the National Numeracy Strategy, despite initial staffing difficulties owing to a change of co-ordinator. Some numeracy lessons are of very good quality, such as was seen in a Year 5 lesson where introductory questioning focused the whole class on the appropriateness of different

graphs. Pupils then worked in groups and consolidated their understanding of percentage, mean, mode and frequency. A plenary session successfully checked the knowledge they had acquired.

- 5 Teachers' command of the subjects that they teach is very good overall. Where this expertise is combined with carefully planned tasks and an enthusiastic presentation, the learning promotes high quality outcomes. This was seen in a Year 5 music class, when pupils sang the negro spiritual 'Rock Ma Soul' as a round, and in a Year 7 French lesson where the whole class contributed well to develop their understanding of increasingly complex phrases. Even when teachers are not specialists, they have a sufficiently sound understanding of the subject to enable pupils to make steady progress, but on occasions they could challenge pupils further. For example, in a Year 6 science lesson, repeating a simple experiment on electro-magnetism would have increased the validity of pupils' findings, and predicting the outcome would have extended their scientific thinking.
- 6 A good feature of almost all teaching is that many staff across subjects set clear learning objectives for their lessons, often writing them on the board before the pupils arrive. Although less frequently observed, good pace is secured when teachers give the actual time by which pupils should complete tasks. This occurred for example, in a Year 7 art lesson, where a number of short observational studies of folded textiles were sketched at rapid intervals.
- 7 In lessons where the teaching does not reach the good or very good quality seen in the large majority of lessons, it is almost always satisfactory and leads to pupils making steady progress. At all ages, teaching makes a positive impact on pupils' enthusiasm for learning. There is no difference in the progress of boys and girls, or those from different community groups in lessons. Teachers have successfully established the expectation that with support, all can, and will, succeed.
- 8 In the pre-inspection questionnaire, 96% of parents indicated that they believe teaching at the school is good. The inspection fully confirms their views.

Pupils have very good attitudes to learning. They show consideration to their teachers and to each other.

- 9 Pupils' attitudes are very good in lessons, and when they participate in extra-curricular activities attitudes are excellent. They come to school to work hard and do their best. Pupils listen very well to teachers and work enthusiastically on the tasks set. They concentrate for a longer time span than is normally seen. This is because teachers plan work that engages their interest and there is normally a good variety of learning tasks. Pupils of all abilities volunteer answers to questions, with girls and boys participating orally in roughly equal proportions. Their answers are mostly thoughtful, drawing on prior knowledge and understanding. Pupils do not put others down when one of their peers makes a mistake. The only exception to these very good attitudes occurred in one lesson, observed at the end of the day, when pupils were unsettled on arrival and remained too noisy throughout.
- 10 Pupils are courteous to teachers in lessons and around the school. Very good relationships with class teachers are evident at registration times. The morning 'Thought for the Day' often provokes interested comments and questions by pupils on the issue being considered. This was seen, for instance, in a Year 6 class on the

theme 'Like rotten apples, one good thing can spread'. Following teacher questioning, pupils made connections between the meaning behind the saying and their experiences of life. Boys and girls contributed equally and thoughtful reference was made to literature they had studied. The discussion provided pupils with the opportunity to reflect collectively on moral issues. In lessons that bring the whole year group together, pupils listen very well, such as in a Year 7 PHSE (personal, health and social education) lesson on resuscitation techniques, or a Year 8 lesson on drugs, led by a local policeman.

- 11 A very positive feature of learning is the way pupils work with each other in pairs and small groups. They work readily with whom the teacher places them. Boys and girls, and those from different cultural backgrounds, work together without any sign of awkwardness. This was seen, for example, in a mixed gender physical education lesson in Year 8, where pupils were taught the skills of baton changing when relay running. They worked very harmoniously together, despite each team having pupils with different levels of athletic skill. When running a series of short, timed races, they encouraged each other to succeed and were generous to those who found the techniques difficult.

Planning for the future is very effective. The headteacher and deputy head give a strong lead and are actively supported by committed governors.

- 12 The School Improvement Plan is the focus for future development and this is based on a strong commitment to raising standards further. The 1996 inspection report praised the school's approach to planning, but criticised its evaluation procedures. Since that time, planning has been refined and there is now an appropriate emphasis on setting targets and monitoring outcomes.
- 13 The headteacher and deputy head demonstrate strong leadership in the management of strategic planning. Both take a strong lead by analysing national and local issues that should be considered as school priorities. Planning starts from a careful analysis of the progress towards targets in the current year's Plan. A very strong feature of the School Improvement Plan for 2000-01 is its links to the LEA's priorities, set out in the Bedfordshire Education Development Plan. The school's use of planning grids has resulted in a very well co-ordinated approach by all who have responsibility for different subjects or aspects. These ensure planning focuses on the school's priorities, as well as specific subject needs. The headteacher and deputy head have worked very effectively with subject co-ordinators to develop their skills, so plans are now written with measurable outcomes. Good progress has been made, although in some subject plans the success criteria are still too general.
- 14 Governors are very thoroughly involved with planning. They are active in monitoring and in this way they hold the school to account. One governor takes responsibility for charting progress using computer graphics software. This enables all to see clearly how successful the school is at meeting its yearly targets. As a result of their own monitoring, governors are very well informed about what priorities should be included in the School Improvement Plan. In partnership with the headteacher, the governing body ensures that it is fully accountable for the strategic direction of the school.
- 15 Over the past two years, the school has made excellent progress in the use of performance data to monitor pupils' progress. This information has been used well

to set school targets for national tests in the three core subjects. Data is being used very successfully to support the School Improvement Plan priority to 'raise and maintain standards of pupil performance'. The school has used a governor's expertise very effectively to develop a systematic approach to the analysis of data. Also, it has been pro-active in determining the value it adds to pupils' performance during their four years at the school. It is now seeking to strengthen its data collection and analysis further through involvement in an LEA pilot scheme for electronic transfer of data.

- 16 Planning for future development is a strength of school management. Its long-term objective is to become a 'self evaluating school'. The school's strengths in systematic planning, monitoring and evaluation are assisting it to move towards this aspiration.

There is outstanding provision of high quality extra-curricular activities. Participation rates by pupils are very good.

- 17 There is an extremely wide range of extra-curricular activities for a school of its size. Participation rates are very good, and the well planned activities that pupils experience are of high quality. This rich extra-curricular programme gives pupils very good opportunities to develop skills and enhance their personal development beyond the scope of the school's timetabled curriculum.
- 18 The school has a strong reputation for sport. Extra-curricular physical activities take place at lunch-time, after school, at weekends and during school holidays. It has recently gained the prestigious Sport England 'Sportsmark' award in recognition of its provision and the very good level of pupil participation. It shortly intends to apply for the Gold Standard. The wide range of extra-curricular sports activities includes all major team games, as well as fencing, golf and orienteering. Visits abroad for skiing and watersports are popular. There is an extensive calendar of fixtures for competitive sports against other schools and Goldington experiences considerable success. Whilst the school strives for excellence, there are also good opportunities for those who do not reach competitive standards to participate in the fun and challenge of sport through team games within the year group.
- 19 Extra-curricular music thrives at Goldington Middle School. There is an exceptional range of musical activity. Choirs, ensembles and orchestras practice at breaks, lunchtimes and after school. A hand-bell group meets before school. Two evenings weekly, some pupils return in the early evening to learn keyboard skills. These activities are popular and all who wish to participate can find a place in music making. A feature of many practice sessions is that pupils who are not participants come to listen. Evening and matinee concerts are highlights of the school calendar, to which parents are invited. They attend in large numbers. Pupils also take their musical skills to audiences in the local community and town. Many talented pupils achieve high grades in instrumental examinations. School choirs regularly gain top awards in Bedfordshire music festivals.
- 20 There are good opportunities for drama and dance. Practices occur regularly for evening performances, which are well supported. During the inspection, daily rehearsals were taking place for a performance of 'The Silver Sword', later in the term. Performances provide opportunities for pupil participation backstage as well as for actors. Evening gymnastics and dance performances are provided for

parents and friends, and there were over three hundred participants in a recent display. A feature of these events is the celebration of dances from the different cultural traditions represented at the school.

- 21 It is intended that all pupils should find an outlet for their interests in the wide range of extra-curricular activities offered. These also include a writers' guild, Saturday morning art and computer sessions and participation in the local Children's University. Pre-school Latin classes are regularly attended by over 30 pupils, two mornings every week. An After School Club provides structured recreational activities daily and there are regular discos run by the parent teacher association. There are good opportunities to participate in residential activities in England and abroad.
- 22 This outstanding provision for extra-curricular activities is made possible through the commitment of many staff, members of the local authority music service and groups of parents. These thriving activities benefit the development of young people of the school, and in discussion pupils say that they appreciate the rich opportunities that are provided.

Pupils are very orderly as they move around the school. This creates a calm, purposeful atmosphere.

- 23 Routines for pupil movement around the school are impressive, despite the difficulties presented by a building with rooms located on three floors. The Code of Conduct states what is expected and pupils respond well. Although teachers and members of the non-teaching staff establish an overt presence during times of movement, such as arrival in the morning, lesson change over, break and lunch-time, discipline is not oppressive. The school has created a very strong climate of self-discipline. Pupils say that they appreciate the reasons for the conventions that have been established, such as walking on the left.
- 24 Because many classrooms are situated in the three-storey teaching block, pupils have to move up and down stairways a number of times every day. Being a larger than average sized school for the age range, this could present difficulties in access to rooms. Pupils respond to this situation by applying the school's Code very well, demonstrating patience and care for each other. Older pupils are aware of younger pupils; there is no pushing, and safety is assured. A very positive feature that aids smooth movement in restricted areas, is the fact that pupils do not have to carry large bags or outdoor clothing with them throughout the day, as is seen in many schools. The provision of lockers and coat racks in classrooms means that pupils never need books and equipment for more than two consecutive lessons.
- 25 Movement to and in the dining hall at lunchtimes is extremely orderly. It enables large numbers to eat in a calm and civilised environment. The lunch rota, by which different year groups eat at different times over a four-week cycle, avoids lengthy queues. Routines are very well established. These smooth arrangements are made possible by thorough monitoring by duty staff and lunchtime supervisors, who apply the Code of Conduct consistently. Pupils from Year 8 form a duty team, and it plays an important part in ensuring that dining routines run smoothly, by overseeing pupils waiting to be served and when clearing away their utensils. As well as providing a good opportunity for service to the school, the responsibilities they

assume promote their personal development.

- 26 Punctuality on arrival in the morning, and to lessons, is good. Pupils move smartly, but are considerate of others when entering doors and moving along the corridors. The priority that has been given to establishing systems for the orderly movement of pupils results in a very calm school.

Displays of high quality work set high expectations for achievement.

- 27 High quality work by pupils is displayed around the school in public spaces, corridors and classrooms. As well as work from subjects, there are many displays of photographs of visits, and certificates of pupils' achievements. This has the benefit of creating a lively and visually stimulating school environment, but it goes further than this. Examples of completed work set high standards to which others can aspire. An excellent example is the display of high quality art in a mini-gallery adjacent to the dining servery and along corridors. During the inspection, displays included drawings and paintings of the human face, inspired from close personal observation, and from the study of German expressionist artists. Another extensive display featured the work of younger pupils, based on lively studies of letter-forms, inspired by the artist Jasper Johns. In classrooms, many teachers mount and display work of high quality, such as expressive writing and poetry in English and desk-top published graphics in information technology. In some classes, high quality display is used directly to support the teaching of topics. For example, in a Year 6 classroom, historic photographs and drawings of buildings that had formerly existed when Goldington was a village, were displayed to provide source material for local studies in history. Although much of the work displayed is of high quality, the school has a policy that all pupils' work should be recognised and displayed when it represents their best effort.
- 28 A very positive recent development has been the redecoration of the stair-wells in the three-storey classroom block. Patterns that pupils themselves have created in art lessons have been re-drawn and enlarged to form murals, painted onto the walls. Pupils going to and from lessons now pass bright, lively images created by their peers.
- 29 The school has used its resources very well to provide a working environment that is clean, safe and very well maintained. It is the school management's view that pupils should be educated in facilities that are the best that are reasonably possible and in this they meet their intentions very well. The building and grounds are maintained to high standards by the hard work of the site staff.
- 30 The stimulating displays in public areas and classrooms make a very positive statement about the school's attitude to quality learning experiences. They lift the spirit and set expectations for high achievement.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

In a relatively small proportion of lessons, the oral and written feedback given by teachers could focus more on raising pupils' achievement.

- 31 In approximately one quarter of lessons observed, the feedback given to pupils on their work could be improved further, although the teaching is satisfactory overall. Firstly, written comments pupils receive in their exercise books, and on other work, are insufficiently detailed. Secondly, oral feedback given during lessons could be more precise. In the substantial majority of lessons observed, the good clarity and depth of feedback have a positive effect in promoting progress. It is the lower level of feedback that pupils receive in the smaller proportion of generally satisfactory lessons, that marks them out from those lessons where teaching is good, often very good and sometimes excellent.
- 32 Teachers apply the school marking policy conscientiously by correcting spelling, grammar and punctuation. In most groups, work is assessed regularly, but in some classes the written feedback that pupils receive is too limited. Where this occurs, comments in exercise books, or on other work, are too bland. Comments fail to pinpoint exactly what pupils need to do next in order to improve on weaknesses or to build further upon their strengths. Often in these classes, work is assessed with grades or marks, but when asked pupils are unsure of what they could have done better to have gained a higher grade. This is because they are not sufficiently aware of the criteria being used for assessment. For example, in a Year 6 information technology lesson, pupils were unaware of the steps they could take to improve their poster layouts, and thereby gain higher grades, when using graphics software. A similar picture emerged in a history lesson in Year 5, about important events in Tudor times. In this class, books were carefully corrected and warm comments were made on the quality of drawings, but pupils had received relatively little feedback about historical content, historical skills or specialist vocabulary. In these lessons, pupils were making steady progress, but their progress could have been more rapid if the feedback they received from marking and assessment had highlighted more precisely how they could improve their work.
- 33 There are many examples where pupils receive good feedback, and this helps them to target their efforts. For example, good feedback from assessment was seen in a Year 8 design and technology lesson, where pupils were designing an item for a children's playground. Clear assessment criteria, written in small steps of increasing difficulty, had been given at the start of the project. At the conclusion of the project, pupils evaluate their work using the assessment criteria, discuss it with their teacher and then set targets for further improvement in their next design project.
- 34 Where oral feedback in lessons is not sufficiently specific, the comments made by teachers typically provide praise for good effort and encouragement to those who find the work difficult. However, these comments fail to get to the heart of what pupils need to learn. In some of these lessons teachers concentrate on pupil organisation and resources, and opportunities are lost for challenging pupils to extend their learning. Although these lessons are satisfactory, they lack the depth of comment and precision of questioning that characterises good or very good teaching. In the great majority of classes teachers give feedback very effectively, highlighting what pupils have done well and indicating weaknesses that need to be overcome. A very good example of this was seen in a Year 5 English lesson, where pupils were learning to use persuasive writing. The teacher circulated, giving very effective oral feedback, which assisted pupils to analyse the text they had written and their use of vocabulary. In another English lesson, Year 8 pupils received very good oral feedback through the teacher's carefully targeted questions as pupils spoke about what it felt like moving around the school blindfolded, in a simulated exercise to develop an understanding of how blind people experience the world.

- 35 Senior management has a clear understanding of the potential of target setting in increasing the level of feedback received by pupils, and as a means of raising attainment further. The use of step-by-step targets, as a regular feature of subject assessment, is being applied well in design and technology and literacy. In science, a positive start has been made in producing assessment statements to be used in target setting. Step-by-step assessments for each aspect of numeracy are being written. These positive actions are addressing the School Improvement Plan priority to develop target setting with individual pupils.

In some lessons in Years 7 and 8, homework could be set more consistently, and some tasks could be more challenging.

- 36 The school has an appropriate homework policy that provides sound guidance to teachers. All pupils are expected to undertake homework, which increases in amount and regularity as they move from Year 5 to Year 8. Parents are informed of the school's expectation and pupils are provided with a diary, which should be completed when homework is set. Parents are requested to sign diaries weekly and class teachers check them regularly. This is a very positive system because it enables parents to play their part in the Home-School Agreement as active partners.
- 37 Pupils in Years 5 and 6 are consistently set an appropriate amount of homework. However, in some subjects, not all classes receive sufficiently regular homework in Years 7 and 8, and some of it lacks challenge. Whilst most pupils have regular homework, there are some for whom the amount set falls below the school's stated expectation, and occasionally well below. Pupils' diaries indicate that homework is set regularly at the start of terms, but for some it becomes increasingly irregular as the term progresses. The pattern is largely teacher dependent, as within the same subject some classes receive regular homework, whilst in others it is spasmodic. English and mathematics are good examples where homework is set regularly.
- 38 Where homework lacks sufficient challenge it too often involves finishing off work started in class or revision. Whilst these can be suitable activities if well structured, discussion with pupils indicates that some of this is undemanding. As a result rapid workers have too little work to complete at home. In some subjects, such as geography, history and science, teachers are restricted in the variety of homework they can set, owing to the school being unable to release textbooks for pupils to take home for reference.
- 39 There was a mixed response to the question about homework in the pre-inspection questionnaire and in additional comments parents made in writing. Whilst a large majority tend to agree that their child gets the right amount of work to do at home, a small number said that in their opinion too much homework is set in Year 5. However, a larger proportion stated that in Years 7 and 8 their child does insufficient homework. Parents have much greater concern about the setting of homework than any other aspect of school life, according to their questionnaire responses. The inspection team cannot substantiate the view that pupils in Years 5 and 6 have too much homework; it does find some inconsistency in setting homework in Years 7 and 8, and this results in some pupils having too little.

In some subjects, co-ordinators' skills in monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning could be improved further, in order to give greater consistency.

- 40 Monitoring and evaluation are less effective at subject level than at whole school level, where the activities of the management and governors are strong. Developing the skills of subject co-ordinators in monitoring teaching and learning is a school priority, and there is some developing good practice, particularly in English. In a number of other subjects monitoring is not yet sufficiently consistent. Co-ordinators undertake a range of monitoring activities, such as reviewing lesson plans and checking books. They are now engaged in observing lessons taught by their subject teams, but this needs further development. This has been identified for action in the School Improvement Plan.
- 41 The effectiveness of current monitoring is uneven. This is evident from instances of inconsistency among teachers' work within the same subject and this indicates the need for greater rigour. For example, in many classes pupils receive very helpful oral and written feedback on their work but, in a relatively small proportion of lessons, feedback does not enable pupils to understand sufficiently well what they must do to improve. The variation among teachers in the setting of regular homework indicates the need for stronger monitoring by co-ordinators. Subject reports received by parents at the end of year are mostly helpful in giving good information about achievement. However, some are too bland. This is because they give parents useful information about the pupil's application to the subject, but comments are vague about progress that has taken place over the year. Another area of inconsistency is that in some lessons, the work of learning support assistants is not sufficiently well targeted on developing the subject skills of pupils with special educational needs. In other lessons, in the same subject, learning support assistants are working very well in focusing on improving subject achievement. These examples, where teaching falls below the good and often very good practice seen across the school, could be reduced by more rigorous monitoring.
- 42 The school management has been very effective in developing the skills of subject co-ordinators in monitoring subject improvement plans, in an initiative led very well by the deputy head. The current work in developing co-ordinators' skills in monitoring the effectiveness of teaching is another positive initiative. The training, planned for the Autumn term, will focus on using observation criteria, standardising judgements and increasing staff confidence in monitoring teaching and learning. Strengthening these aspects of the co-ordinators' management role has been appropriately identified as a priority in the current School Improvement Plan.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- 43 The governing body, senior management and staff should develop strategies to:
- 1 Raise the quality of oral and written feedback pupils receive in lessons where teaching is satisfactory, to the good and very good levels typical in the large majority of lessons.

- 2 Improve the consistency and quality of homework set in some Year 7 and 8 lessons.
- 3 Provide co-ordinators with further training in the skills required to monitor and evaluate the teaching and learning in their subjects.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	*38
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils (*The work of learning support assistants was observed in a further 3 lessons)	19

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
13	29	32	24	3	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons. Percentages are rounded to whole numbers.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils on the school's roll	673
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	81

Special educational needs	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	11
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	195

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	35

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	19
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	29

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	5.0
National comparative data	6.0

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	0.4

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	85	86	171

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	67	57	71
	Girls	75	60	69
	Total	142	117	140
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	83 (72)	68 (66)	82 (78)
	National	70 (65)	69 (59)	78 (69)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	59	59	67
	Girls	74	61	71
	Total	133	120	138
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	78 (71)	70 (73)	81 (81)
	National	68 (65)	69 (65)	75 (72)

**Figures in brackets refer to tests taken in 1998*

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	24
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	0
Indian	27
Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	4
White	571
Any other minority ethnic group	41

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other	1	
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	1	
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y5 – Y8

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	31.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y5 – Y8

Total number of education support staff	7
Total aggregate hours worked per week	114

Deployment of teachers: Y5 – Y8

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	82.9%
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Average teaching group size: Y5 – Y8

Key Stage 2	24.6
Key Stage 3	24.9

Financial information

Financial year	1998-1999
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	£
Total income	1163393
Total expenditure	1183441
Expenditure per pupil	1838
Balance brought forward from previous year	31833
Balance carried forward to next year	11785

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	673
Number of questionnaires returned	136

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	44	47	7	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	46	49	5	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	35	57	4	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21	49	28	2	0
The teaching is good.	44	52	1	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	40	48	11	1	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	61	32	5	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	36	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	26	54	18	0	1
The school is well led and managed.	46	48	1	1	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	43	50	2	0	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	46	39	12	1	2

(Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and may not add up to 100%)

Other issues raised by parents

The pre-inspection meeting was overwhelmingly positive about the school. Parents stated that they particularly welcome the information that they receive termly about what will be covered in lessons. Some stated that they would like a greater understanding of the teaching approaches to literacy and numeracy. Parents stated they are very satisfied with the way the school deals with issues relating to the social development of their children, such as bullying and relationships.

Most additional comments attached to returned questionnaires made positive comments about life and work at the school. However, the issue of homework raised a number of comments. A small number of parents of children in Year 5 felt that the school sets too much homework, whereas a larger number with children in Years 7 and 8 believe that not enough homework is set. The inspection has found that the level of homework in Year 5 is appropriate, but in Years 7 and 8 homework is set too inconsistently and its content is sometimes insufficiently challenging.