

INSPECTION REPORT

PLANTSBROOK COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

Sutton Coldfield

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103527

Headteacher: Mr M Osborne-Town

Reporting inspector: Henry White
2795

Dates of inspection: 5 to 8 February 2001

Inspection number: 187334

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:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr R Jones
Date of previous inspection:	4 - 8 March 1996

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Plantsbrook School is a large, popular over subscribed comprehensive school attended by 1256 pupils aged 11 to 18. There are 179 students in the Sixth Form with equal numbers of boys and girls in Year 13 and 62 girls and 40 boys in Year 12. Pupils come from a wide geographical residential area, some coming from urban areas of high social disadvantage. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is average. The attainment of pupils on entering the school in Year 7 has improved since the last inspection and is now average. The school operates within the selective education context of this part of Birmingham and consequently, although there are pupils from the highest ability range in the school, this section of the school population is underrepresented. Approximately 30% of the local 11 year old pupils attend grammar schools. The number of pupils on the register of special educational need is average. The number of pupils with statements of special educational need is above average. Provision is made for 44 pupils with statements of special educational need; 18 are pupils with visual impairment, others have learning, behaviour or physical difficulties. Thirty-five pupils have English as an additional language. This is higher than in most schools; their main languages are Panjabi, Urdu and Bangla.

About 10% of pupils are of minority ethnic communities. The school receives grant aid for specific support for 127 pupils from minority ethnic groups.

The school is part of the Excellence in Cities project. It is the lead school in its area for organising activities for gifted and talented pupils; there is also a learning mentor scheme funded by this initiative. The school has recently been granted Technology College status.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Plantsbrook is a very good school. Standards are above average in the Sixth Form. They are average for fourteen year olds and for the achievement of pupils gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C. Teaching and learning are very good. The leadership that is provided by the headteacher and senior staff is excellent. The work of the governing body is very good. The Sixth Form provision is very effective. Overall the school continues to give good value for money.

What the school does well

- Teaching is of a very high standard. Pupils make very good progress in their personal development; their academic progress is good.
- There is a high level of commitment by staff to their pupils.
- Leadership and management are of very high quality.

What could be improved

- The methods the school uses to track the progress of individual pupils.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in 1996.

Standards of attainment in the GCSE and A-level GCSE examinations have improved more than the national trend since the last inspection.

The teaching at the school has improved considerably since the last report. The quality of teaching observed in this inspection was very good with no unsatisfactory teaching observed. The opportunities for pupils to extend their learning through purposeful talk and the use of more challenging questions by teachers have also improved. Further work is needed to ensure that teachers uniformly and consistently apply the school's marking and assessment policy.

The school has made generally good progress in tackling the other issues raised in the last inspection. The quality and number of books in the library has improved since the last inspection. The school is aware that access remains difficult and the school is planning radical changes to make it a more effective learning resource. An equal opportunities policy is now in place. Staff, governors and pupils regularly review this policy. Pupils have translated it into student friendly language. They have also translated the school's behaviour policy into a 'responsibilities and rights' document. Guidance is given in the staff handbook regarding classroom strategies to use to raise the attainment of boys. The school still does not meet its statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

Since the last inspection improvements have also been made in the provision of computers throughout the school, the building of a new sports hall and the conversion of a hall into classroom provision. The school has improved the curriculum provision for gifted and talented pupils. The use of learning mentors is having a significant impact on the attitudes, behaviour and attendance of those pupils who are underachieving or are at risk of losing their commitment to their schoolwork. Additional posts of responsibility to strengthen the management of special educational needs and the pastoral system have improved the overall quality of care which pupils receive.

Overall the school has made good progress since the last inspection.

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				<i>Key</i>
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	C	C	C	B	well above average A average
A-levels/AS-levels	D	C	B		above average B average C below average D well below average E

Over recent years, the improvements in standards in English, mathematics and science in the

national tests for 14 year old pupils have been broadly in line with the national trend. This was not sustained in 2000 when the English results were below those of previous years. From the examination of pupils' work and the observation in lessons, inspectors judge that the standards of pupils' current work is now in line with the national average in English, mathematics and science.

In the GCSE examinations the improvement in average results of all pupils has been above the national trend. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE passes at Grades A* - C is now close to the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* -G is well above the national average. The school is in the top 5% of schools nationally for the number of pupils gaining at least one GCSE pass at grades A* -G. The school's entry data shows that when boys enter the school their ability is consistently below that of girls. Based on this entry data, both boys and girls do better than would be predicted at GCSE, although girls make better progress than boys. Standards of pupils taking two or more A-levels have also improved; they are now above the national average. From the examination of pupils' work and the observation in lessons, inspectors judge that the standards of pupils' current work reflect these recent levels of attainment in GCSE and A-level GCE examinations. The school is setting appropriately challenging targets for attainment at 14, 16 and in the Sixth Form.

Pupils make good progress throughout the school. The pupils who most recently took their GCSE examinations in 2000 were below average on entry and there were very few above average pupils in the year group. The school's value added analyses show that 7% more boys gained five or more passes at grades A* -C than predicted whilst 18% more girls exceeded their expectations. Pupils of all ages, abilities and background make generally good progress in response to the very good teaching and purposeful ethos. Progress is particularly good in their attitudes to school, behaviour and personal development. Their academic progress is good.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils of all ages, abilities and backgrounds are enthusiastic about the school. They respect their teachers and value their learning and each other.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Teachers consistently reinforce good behaviour and lessons are carefully structured.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils relate well with teachers and each other. They work together well, co-operating willingly and effectively.
Attendance	Satisfactory. The school works very hard to promote good attendance with some success particularly in Year 10.

Pupils' attitudes, motivation and behaviour were excellent in one in four lessons observed and very good in a further two out of four lessons. Their confidence and self-esteem are developed well throughout the school. Pupils make the most of the additional learning

opportunities that are offered including the valuable support offered by their learning mentors to those pupils who are underachieving or are at risk of losing their commitment to their school work. Pupils take their responsibilities for each other seriously, especially when negotiating crowded stairways. Exclusions are low.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	Aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Very good	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.

Teaching was observed in 47 lessons and five tutorial sessions. The quality of teaching and learning was excellent in one in four lessons and very good in a further two out of four lessons. No unsatisfactory teaching or learning was observed. There is little variation in the high quality of teaching between key stages or between English, mathematics and science. This improvement in teaching since the last report reflects the staff development that has taken place and the monitoring of teaching that has been carried out by the leadership team.

Teaching is very good overall because teachers plan exciting and varied activities and manage learning well. They establish a positive work ethos by rapidly involving pupils in enjoyable tasks that have a clear purpose and allow pupils to consolidate their knowledge and understanding. The teaching of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy is very good. Pupils are well taught to use subject vocabulary, to explain their ideas clearly and develop their ideas through group discussions; and to apply their mathematical skills in subjects such as science. Teachers know their pupils well and they match the work very well to the needs of all pupils including those with special educational needs, visual impairment and the gifted and talented. Classroom assistants are effectively used to improve learning. The school marking policy is not consistently applied. More effective marking which provides targets for improvement should be consistently implemented in all subjects.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The wide range of opportunities within the lessons, at lunchtime and after school and through weekend and residential experiences offers pupils rich and relevant educational experiences. However the information and communication technology curriculum at Years 10 and 11 does not offer all pupils the full range of experiences set out in the National Curriculum.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Attention to detail in lesson planning, the very positive attitude of teachers, their commitment to inclusion and the high quality of support provided by learning assistants enable the wide range of learning needs to be well provided for.
Aspect	Comment

Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good; in addition to focussed support in English, information and communication technology and science, additional learning opportunities are offered at lunchtimes and after school. Good contact is maintained with parents.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Good. The school has improved the provision for cultural development particularly within the arts and humanities subjects. The racial harmony group is a powerful means of raising the awareness of pupils, staff and the wider community of issues in this area of personal development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Excellent. The school is rightly known for the high quality of support it provides for pupils and the care it extends to them. Pupils feel safe and confident.

The provision for pupils with visual impairment is well organised, resourced and managed.

Form tutors are not consistently well informed of the progress that their pupils are making in each subject. This limits their effectiveness in monitoring and guiding pupils' academic progress.

The Excellence in Cities funding is making a good contribution to the curriculum by increased use of educational technology, extensive extra-curricular and community involvement, and through extension activities in lessons. The very good use of learning mentors is improving the attitudes, attendance and motivation of those pupils who are supported. Links with parents have improved.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. Inspirational leadership of the headteacher, well supported by the leadership team enables all staff to fulfil their roles very well and do their best for the pupils. New initiatives are grasped and benefit from early planning.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. Governors are well informed and play an important role in the development of the long term and day to day development of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school is particularly good at observing and improving teaching and learning. Analysis of data is well established and improving. Self-evaluation is a strong feature in some curriculum areas.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The headteacher and governors make well-considered judgements about allocating resources to meet their agreed priorities. This has a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

The school's main focus is to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Priority is given to the appointing of high calibre staff, to staff training and development and to the investment

in learning support assistants. The school makes good use of non-teaching staff to allow teachers to concentrate on teaching and learning. Very good use is made of excellent display throughout the corridors and classrooms. Although the school is short of accommodation, governors have well thought out plans to improve the school through the Technology College bid.

PARENTS’ AND CARERS’ VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good teaching and high expectations help pupils make good progress and develop maturity and responsibility. • Staff care for their pupils and are always approachable to parents. • The school has an excellent headteacher who is committed to making comprehensive education work. • Parents are kept well informed about how their child is getting on. • The school provides a wide range of additional activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amounts of homework pupils are asked to do at home.

The inspection team agrees with most of these views. Although the quality of homework set is good, it is inconsistently set, and sometimes pupils get too much to do at once. End of year reports do not give sufficient subject-specific information about what a pupil does well, what needs to be improved or the progress that has been made.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Teaching is of a very high standard. Pupils make very good progress in their personal development; their academic progress is good.

- 1 Teaching is excellent in one in four lessons and very good in a further two in four lessons. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Pupils make very good progress in their personal development and their academic progress is good. This improvement in teaching since the last report reflects the staff development that has taken place and the monitoring of teaching carried out by the leadership team.
- 2 Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject and how to teach it. The use of hydrographs to explain flow and flow patterns, the style and genre of Teleman, the concepts of motivation and drive theory and the importance of notation and co-notation were significant factors in securing very good learning in A-level geography, music, physical education and media studies. Teachers' understanding of the use of level descriptors in Year 9 design and technology and in science in Years 10 and 11 help ensure that pupils have a clear understanding of their achievements in their work and what they must do to improve it. The staff handbook contains practical guidance to raise the achievement of boys in lessons. In a Year 9 lesson on *Twelfth Night*, pupils worked well together in mixed gender pairs. When pupils then worked in groups of four, a balanced discussion took place involving boys and girls and all pupils deepened their understanding of the difficult text they were studying.
- 3 Lesson planning is consistently very good. What pupils are expected to know, understand and do at the end of their lesson is well thought out by teachers. Frequently these intentions are shared with pupils at the start of the lesson, referred to during the lesson and used for review at the end of the lesson. This helps pupils understand what they are doing and recognise their developing ideas and understanding. In a Year 7 design and technology lesson this helped pupils focus on the quality control aspect of this work rather than just on the food they were preparing. Work is well matched to pupils' needs and very good use is made of learning support assistants. In a Year 7 English lesson, good individual support during the briefing on *Lord of the Flies* helped pupils stay on task, respond well to the lesson and show a keenness when making their own contribution. Support for a visually impaired pupil was excellent in art. As a result of painstaking and sensitive support, the pupil was able to produce a wax design of satisfactory standards and was also able to experiment with an ink wash. In food technology and information and communication technology, the technician also supported some pupils in their work and helped them make good progress.
- 4 Teachers use well established classroom routines which help pupils settle to their work, stay on task and so learn effectively. A range of techniques is used at the start of the lesson. In history pupils are greeted, hurried into class and high expectations for learning are set. In languages good use is made of word-searches and anagrams to engage pupils in learning new vocabulary. In mathematics practice questions are set and discussed. In food technology, pupils have a well established entry routine which

includes putting on their aprons, washing their hands, setting out ingredients and greasing tins in readiness for the lesson. Short, provocative statements are well used to get students talking about images in Sixth Form general studies. Throughout the lessons, clear instructions are given such as 'look at me', 'look at the board' and 'turn over'. This consistency of approach across the staff helps to ensure that pupils follow the lesson and concentrate well on their work. Time targets are frequently used to help pupils learn at a brisk pace: in a Year 11 lesson on health issues the teacher made good use of an egg timer to maintain the pace of learning! In French and food technology good use is made of the 'speaking card' system that enables pupils to gain points during the lesson. Pupils are finding this a motivating approach that engages them with their learning but also adds to their self-assessment of their work. Most lessons end with a plenary session in which skilful questioning helps pupils review what they have learned and helps them apply new ideas to novel situations. In several mathematics and design and technology lessons pupils also knew how to improve their work next time. In a Year 11 careers lesson pupils completed an action plan for future reference.

- 5 Teachers devote much thought to using novel ways to engage pupils in their learning. In a Year 8 French lesson an exceptional series of varied and inter-related activities increased the level of challenge presented to pupils, but also linked to different ways in which pupils learn (oral, aural, visual, writing and kinaesthetic). In a Year 11 science lesson pupils engaged readily in the novel activities which gave them practice in balancing chemical equations from several points of view: progress in their learning was very good. There was effective use of a video and a commercial evaluation kit to ensure that good learning about product evaluation within the design process took place in a Year 11 design and technology lesson. This lesson was extended to include a discussion on careers in engineering and manufacturing and the Sixth Form courses they would need to study. In Year 8 religious education pupils sorted statements to help them reflect on various aspects of fasting and were thus physically able to distinguish between the purpose and consequences of fasting. Several examples were observed on teachers making activities relevant to pupils. Chocolate bars were used in a Year 11 lesson to engage pupils' interest in rotational symmetry, scaling factors and formula. Year 7 pupils were engaged when asked to solve the problem of making ginger beer from root ginger in order that the teacher who is a Muslim and does not take alcohol could have a refreshing drink that she enjoys.
- 6 Well established routines and a stimulating set of activities featured in a lesson which had been planned by the racial harmony group consisting of pupils from Years 8 and 9. They delivered a very effective lesson to a group of Year 7 pupils to help them understand how the needs of groups and individuals could be reflected in a Charter of Human Rights.
- 7 Good use is made of new technology in lessons. Several lessons were observed where an interactive white board was used to good effect to promote good learning. These included a Year 7 mathematics lessons to explore Euler's rule, a Year 7 mathematics lesson using a *PowerPoint* presentation on angles, a Year 9 information and communication technology lesson to exemplify website/page design and a Year 11 information and communication technology lesson in which the technology was used very effectively by four pupils to make individual presentations of the web sites they

are designing – these four gifted pupils had responded well to the intellectual challenge which they had been set.

- 8 When pupils' work was examined some good examples of marking which helped pupils improve their work were noted. In Year 7 history a pupil was advised to 'add more detail next time'. In some science books good annotation helps pupils improve various aspects of their practical investigations, and in another book the teacher added notes to clarify the difference between pitch and frequency. Overall, however, use of annotations to help pupils improve their work is inconsistent within and between departmental teams. Some interesting and motivating homework tasks were set during the inspection. Asking pupils to write instructions to help Deepak extract sugar from sugar cane, or to accompany a leaflet on Batik work are helpful exercises for pupils to consolidate and extend their understanding. In French pupils produced a well thought out card game which they could each use during the week to help develop their vocabulary. In history some pupils were asked to explain what they had learned to a member of their family (the family member would then sign the pupil's planner) whilst an internet search required Year 11 pupils to research further into health issues. In Year 10 geography, different homework was set to different groups of pupils to extend their understanding of national parks to different levels. Although the quality of homework set is good, it is inconsistently set, and sometimes pupils get too much set to do at once.
- 9 The teaching of basic skills is very good. In a Year 9 science lesson with low attaining pupils magnetic letters on a white board were used effectively to check pupils' knowledge of spellings of parts of a cell and their location on a diagram. Good use was made of modelling clay to illustrate the division of bacteria; pupils then readily completed a mathematical study on the rate of cell division and readily completed their graph because the basic concept had been readily grasped. Word walls are regularly used to support the teaching of subjects such as music, mathematics and food technology. In a Year 8 religious education lesson the teacher skilfully helped pupils convert one word or short answers into a well constructed sentence. In a Year 13 general studies lesson, a student's answer that cathedrals are overwhelming was sensitively developed into 'Churches are built to create an image of God that is powerful, awe-inspiring and all consuming'. In Spanish good quality activities were based on pupil reading text, and in business education in Year 10 pupils were encouraged to "speak clearly, listen, take notes and produce good explanations". Discussion is a feature that contributes significantly to learning in group work. It was well used to discuss ideas of the changing nature of Rita's character in a Year 11 lesson studying *Educating Rita* and in a Year 10 business education lesson considering the moral and social issues relating to financial sources. Mathematical skills are well developed in science. In a Year 11 lesson the learning support assistant helped check the pupils' readings of their force meters, the recording of their results and the completion of their graphs.

There is a high level of commitment by staff to their pupils.

- 10 Plantsbrook is a very caring school. Pastoral care is excellent. There are good

procedures for monitoring attendance and tracking authorised and unauthorised absence. The school works hard to promote attendance across the school through the regular inter-form and inter-year comparisons that are published to staff and pupils. Weekly tutorial and personal and social education lessons support the pastoral system. These lessons, together with registration and assembly time, are used effectively to reinforce the aims of the school, the behaviour policy and the responsibility and rights statement. All pupils are encouraged to “Be the best you can be” and the school is rightly proud of the very high numbers of commendatory letters that are posted home to parents to praise their children for their efforts and achievement. Little bullying and harassment occurs; the school has a “telling” culture and pupils say that they feel there is always someone they can turn to with confidence should they encounter any problems.

- 11 A strong feature of the school is the quality of provision for mentoring pupils’ learning. Their form tutor, starting in Year 7, mentors all pupils and the form tutor remains with the group until Year 11. Parents value the continuity this provides. Additional mentoring is provided for African-Caribbean and Asian pupils. Adults from the local community, including some local youth workers are employed as part time learning mentors; they are having a significant impact on the attitudes, behaviour and attendance of those pupils who are underachieving or at risk of losing their commitment to school work. Pupils were able to explain to inspectors how mentoring is having a significant impact on their achievement.
- 12 The staff devote much time to organising additional activities which take place outside of lessons. Most staff offer at least one lunchtime activity each week. GCSE courses in statistics and Spanish are offered during lunchtimes and after school. Opportunities exist for pupils to improve their work in areas such as art, design technology, information and communication technology and science; a wide range of sport and musical activities is also offered. Other activities include paired reading support, a raising achievement club and opportunities to undertake coursework or homework. There are focussed support groups for pupils with special educational needs, visual impairment, those receiving ethnic minority attainment grant support and those identified as gifted and talented. Educational trips are regularly arranged to France, Spain, Italy and the USA. The school also provides opportunities for the Duke of Edinburgh Award, residential team building activities for Years 7 and 12, careers linked problem solving days for Years 9, 10 and 12 and there is an established link with the University of the First Age for Year 8 pupils. Pupils’ independence and the need to take responsibility is further developed through the school and year group councils which have a budget for projects and are used for pupil consultation. The Racial Harmony Group is effective in raising many issues across the school; One World Week is given high priority and useful links have been established with a school in Soweto. Parents agree that this rich provision of additional curriculum has a significant impact on pupils’ self esteem, their independence and of feeling valued.
- 13 Much effort is devoted to building good relationships with parents. In addition to the regular newsletters and Parent-Teacher Association meetings, good parental relationships have been particularly formed with parents of pupils with special educational needs, with visual impairment, receiving ethnic minority achievement

grant, and those supported by external learning mentors. Parents of gifted and talented pupils receive invitations offering additional opportunities for their children. Parents value the efforts which the school makes to support the needs of individual pupils.

- 14 This unusually high quality of staff commitment to their pupils reflects the determination of the leadership team and governors to provide a caring school which ‘provides a happy, secure and yet demanding and stimulating environment both inside and outside the classroom’. Staff respond well to this clearly established goal. They are well supported by the leadership team in maintaining this focus.

Leadership and management are of very high quality

- 15 Since the last inspection a clear focus has been to improve the quality of teaching and learning at the school. In-service training together with regular observations of lessons from senior staff and departmental colleagues have produced an openness from which strengths and weaknesses are readily shared at departmental meetings. Classroom observations have an agreed agenda that includes the issues from the last inspection report regarding improving pupil discussion and the quality of teachers’ questioning. Improving the quality of teaching and learning is a key consideration in all teaching staff appointments. It is also the first priority in the school’s improvement plan. Governors allocate funding generously to enable teachers to undertake necessary in-service training, and the level of departmental capitation reflects governors’ insistence that all teachers should have quality resources, including access to computers, for quality teaching. Further funding is available from a ‘gifted and talented’ budget to enable departments to provide visits, speakers, materials for classroom use and master-classes. Good use was made of materials in an ‘extension study box’ for gifted and talented pupils in Year 7 history lesson on The Roman Empire. During the inspection good use of paired observation enabled a very experienced English teacher to demonstrate the teaching of poetry to a less experienced colleague; this was an effective staff development strategy. Teachers are well served by the team of learning assistants, which makes a significant contribution to the quality of teaching and learning. These strategies have been well managed – hence the improvement from 90% satisfactory teaching with 10% unsatisfactory at the time of the last report to the current very good teaching overall.
- 16 The headteacher and all members of the leadership team have a high profile around the school. They are good role models to staff and pupils. They ensure that pupils move between lessons quickly and calmly, and they insist on high standards of pupils’ behaviour at lunchtimes. They know their pupils well, and brief conversations with pupils reinforce the caring ethos that pervades the school. They set high standards of caring for the environment in the example they show in picking up isolated items of litter; the school is generally free of litter and graffiti. If needed, the senior staff willingly support other teachers in lessons; classroom teachers appreciate this. The leadership team are effective line managers to subject and pastoral teams – they know their school well and can effectively identify areas of support and improvement that are needed.
- 17 The headteacher recognises the link between staff welfare and the quality of teaching

in the classroom. Consequently a range of helpful strategies are in place to support staff and ensure that their main focus is the quality of their teaching and their pupils' learning. On returning from illness, teachers will not be asked to undertake cover and teachers are never used for cover for more than half their allocated free time. If teachers identify pupils with challenging learning needs, they receive support from available staff from the cover list. If they have any personal difficulties outside the school, everything is done to help them focus on the teaching and learning of their timetabled classes; non-teaching demands are reduced. Additional staff are employed full time to enable some aspects of staff absence to be managed and this often means that only limited cover is required from teaching supply agencies. This is a school that cares for its staff; the leadership team have supported several colleagues through long term illnesses and helped them return to the classroom. High priority is also given to compliment staff for their hard work when individual projects or tasks are undertaken. Daily meetings that take place between the headteacher and the assistant headteacher with responsibility for staff welfare secure this caring ethos. As a result of these strategies, the leadership team has reduced staff absence due to sickness from 3.7% in 1997 down to 1.8%. These strategies have made a considerable contribution to the improvement in the quality of teaching and learning.

- 18 Planning for new initiatives is very good. Governors have a clear view of their school, its needs, priorities and strategic direction. They are closely involved in the daily life and work of the school. Regular consultation takes place between the governing body and the parents via the Parent-Teacher Association. As a result of such consultations the decision was made to seek Technology College status. Such is the relationship between the Parent-Teacher Association and the governing body that the parents' suggestions that biology, chemistry and physics are offered to the gifted and talented pupils in Years 10 and 11 has been adopted. Before embarking upon any such major initiative a cost-benefit analysis is undertaken so that the ultimate improvements in teaching and learning are clearly understood by all concerned. When major beneficial developments are identified, the school makes early preparations. The school moved quickly to introduce performance management so that it was developed on the good practice of classroom observation already established. A well thought out approach has been made for the introduction to key skills into the Sixth Form. An imaginative, well structured and relevant strategy has linked the delivery of key skills across personal, social and health education, general studies and other A-level subjects; this is leading to students producing high quality work. A sensible, pragmatic approach has been taken to the introduction of work on citizenship. An extensive audit has taken place, areas of existing good practice have been identified and celebrated, and areas for development, such as the need to make more use of people from the community have been identified. The drafting of a policy has started, supported by a member of the leadership team and the co-ordinator for personal, social and health education. These are examples of the way the school grasps relevant new initiatives and benefits from early planning. Governors are then well informed and able to link resources to the developing priorities; the strategic use of resources is very good.
- 19 Staff and governors are committed to continuing improvement. In all conversations between inspectors and staff about teaching and learning or their various management roles, staff were self-critical and striving to improve their individual contribution to

school improvement. Staff are very positive about the observations of their teaching by members of the leadership team and their peers. They welcome performance management as another method of further developing the school's improvement strategies that are already in place. Self-evaluation is a strong feature in some departments. Staff recognise the support they have from the governing body in terms of the allocations of funding to support their own professional development, the maintenance of high levels of capitation and the commitment to high quality learning support. The leadership team has a clear focus on school improvement. The headteacher and deputies are taking the lead in improving teaching and learning and raising pupil achievement. The assistant headteachers undertake the more traditional maintenance roles as well as making a significant contribution to the ethos of school improvement. Governors consider alternative strategies once a significant area of school improvement has been identified. Governors are committed to the improvements contained in the Technology College bid. They had been proactive in identifying alternative funding sources to enable the improvements in accommodation and curriculum provision to progress had the Technology College bid been unsuccessful. Effective links have already been established with appropriate beacon schools to enable the improvements in the Key Stage 4 curriculum provision for information and communication technology to commence from next September. This will address the non-compliance issue that the school has already identified.

- 20 This very high quality of leadership and management is having a significant impact on the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. Pupils of all ages, abilities and background make generally good progress in response to the very good teaching and purposeful ethos. Progress is particularly good in their attitudes to school, behaviour and personal development. Their academic progress is good.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The methods the school uses to track the progress of individual pupils

- 21 The school has a well established database showing the attainment of pupils in the national tests for 11 and 14 year old pupils and this is supplemented with information gained from external tests taken in Years 7 and 10. All staff have this information on a spreadsheet. This is used to set pupils' achievement targets from Year 7. Insufficient use to support target setting is made of the national data published in the autumn relating to Key Stages 2, 3 and GCSE results and the spring data on A-level results. Consequently opportunities are missed to refine the targets set to pupils in Years 7 to 11 in English, mathematics and science.
- 22 Extensive analysis of the GCSE results is undertaken during the summer holidays. A-level results are analysed through an external national project. An interesting project now compares the achievement of pupils receiving ethnic minority achievement grant with a similar group of white pupils. Insufficient analysis is yet carried out to combat the underachievement of boys, or to check on the effectiveness of the learning mentor project or the provision for gifted and talented pupils. The school knows its GCSE results are above average when compared to schools with similar free school meal entitlement. However, it does not use the autumn published information that would help the school monitor the number of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C

compared to their attainment in the national tests at 14; currently these pupils are achieving below the average compared with similar schools. Attendance data is not yet analysed by gender nor according to the area from which they receive additional support.

- 23 Much worthwhile effort has been devoted to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom, and using the information gained to improve teaching and learning. Insufficient attention has been devoted to looking at pupils' work, although this is a rapidly developing feature of several subject departments. Inspection examination of pupils' work revealed that the school's policy on marking is not consistently applied within or between departments. Pupils do not get sufficient guidance on how to improve their work. Inspectors also found it difficult to track the homework that is set to pupils; pupils' planners indicate the inconsistency with which homework is sometimes set.
- 24 Good use is made in Year 9 design and technology of the National Curriculum level descriptors to inform pupils about the standard of their work and how to improve it. Assessment is related to national curriculum levels in other subjects such as geography, history, physical education, religious education and science. In science, at Key Stage 3, pupils keep a record of the levels they achieve in their science tests but these results are not used to set curriculum targets and so help pupils improve their work. At Key Stage 4, the science department makes good use of the externally marked module results to monitor the progress of pupils by class. Despite such substantial good practice, there is no consistent approach to the assessment of pupils' work. Consequently the quality of the on-going use of this information to help pupils improve their work through subject specific targets is patchy and varies between subjects. Year and form tutors and mentors do not have a clear and consistent picture of each pupil's progress and the targets set in each of their subjects. This limits the value and effectiveness of the work done by teachers and mentors in monitoring and supporting their pupils' academic progress. This in turn contributes to the gradual improvement in academic standards, despite the high quality of much of the teaching and the very high standards of pupils' personal development.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

25 **A culture of tracking pupils' progress and using this information to help pupils improve their work has been established at the school. The governors, in conjunction with the headteacher and staff should take the following actions to improve the following aspects of this process by:**

- Establishing procedures for examining pupils' work to:
 - i) monitor the quality of marking and the annotations to help pupils improve their work, [23]
 - ii) monitor the consistency, quality and workload of the homework that is set. [23]
- Improving the quality of assessment to:
 - i) ensure that all pupils understand the criteria that are being used to assess their work, [24]
 - ii) enable subject-specific improvement targets to be set consistently across all subjects, [24]
 - iii) assist form tutors and learning mentors in gaining a clearer understanding of what each pupil needs to do to improve their work across the curriculum, [24]
 - iv) provide more accurate and consistent information to enrich the existing whole school database. [21]
- Extending the use of the school database on performance to:
 - i) compare individual pupils' progress with the expectations set out in the national information produced in autumn, [21]
 - ii) monitor the progress of groups of pupils such as boys/girls, individual classes, gifted and talented, those receiving ethnic minority attainment grant support and pupils assisted by learning mentors. [22]

The numbers in brackets relate to the main paragraphs of this report where these issues are mentioned.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	52
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	45

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
23	52	13	12	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1077	179
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	167	-

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	40	4
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	193	4

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	6
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	23

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.4
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.6
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 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2000	123	108	231

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	56	92	85
	Girls	75	77	68
	Total	131	169	153
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	57 (78)	73 (72)	66 (59)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	19 (36)	42 (41)	31 (19)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	85	83	91
	Girls	90	76	76
	Total	175	159	167
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	76 (70)	69 (72)	72 (69)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	41 (29)	30 (44)	32 (23)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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
	2000	94	110	204

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	30	89	97
	Girls	64	108	111
	Total	94	197	208
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	46 (44)	97 (96)	100 (98)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	38
	National	38.4

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0
	National	N/a

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
	2000	22	44	66

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	16.5	19.7	18.6	N/a	2.0	2.0
National	17.7	18.6	18.2	2.6	2.9	2.7

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	N/a	N/a
	National		N/a

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	0	N/a
	National		76.5

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	21
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	0
Indian	13
Pakistani	15
Bangladeshi	6
Chinese	0
White	1129
Any other minority ethnic group	71

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	1	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	7	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	79.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	25
Total aggregate hours worked per week	813

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.9
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.1
Key Stage 4	19.8

Financial information

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	3,592,592
Total expenditure	3,573,022
Expenditure per pupil	2,845
Balance brought forward from previous year	220,628
Balance carried forward to next year	240,198

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1256
Number of questionnaires returned	220

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	50	44	4	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	60	37	3	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	30	57	8	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	30	54	12	4	0
The teaching is good.	42	55	0	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	38	47	11	2	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	64	32	2	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	71	26	1	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	37	46	11	2	4
The school is well led and managed.	64	32	2	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	53	40	4	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	51	39	3	0	7