

INSPECTION REPORT

**ST PETER'S RC HIGH SCHOOL
AND SIXTH FORM CENTRE**

Stroud Road, Tuffley

LEA area: Gloucester

Unique reference number: 115729

Headteacher: Mr L Montagu OBE

Reporting inspector: Mrs C Gillies
20597

Dates of inspection: 15th - 18th January 2001

Inspection number: 188769

Short inspection carried out under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary aided

Age range of students: 11 to 18 years

Gender of students: Mixed

School address: Stroud Road
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Gloucestershire
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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr P Baker

Date of previous inspection: 18th March 1996

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Peter's is a much larger than average 11-19 years voluntary aided, comprehensive Roman Catholic school with a large sixth form (376 students). Students come from six main Roman Catholic primary schools and numerous other primary schools. The catchment area is large and some students live far from the school. Attainment on entry is average though the percentage of higher attainers is slightly lower as there are six selective schools close by. Just under 10 per cent of students are eligible for free school meals (average). There are 15 refugees and asylum seekers (from Rwanda, Burundi and Croatia) and 20 students speak English as an additional language, of whom 13 are at an early stage. The main languages spoken are Burundi, French and Croat. Most of the building is just accessible for wheelchairs and the school provides strong support for those students in care or needing extra help. Four students have joined the recently opened speech and communication support unit which will eventually have 10 students. In total 24 students have statements of special educational needs (below average) and 139 are on the special educational needs register (well below average). At the end of Year 11 at least 60 per cent of students stay into the sixth form and at the end of Year 13, over 70 per cent continue into higher or further education.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Peter's is a particularly successful, effective and happy school. The headteacher and deputy head are outstanding and their commitment to the Christian ethos of the school is reflected in their constructive and supportive leadership. Standards have risen since the last inspection, GCSE results were extremely good in 2000, teaching is very good and students consistently achieve well. The income per student is low and the sixth form is extremely cost effective, so the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Teaching is very good. Teachers think carefully about how students learn, ask well chosen questions, boost students' confidence, and help them to work independently and think for themselves.
- Relationships are excellent. They totally reflect the key word of the school's mission statement – respect. Students behave very well and they, and their parents and carers, are very positive about school life. The school provides excellent guidance for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.
- Leadership and management are excellent. The school's evaluation of its performance is also excellent and the focus on developing teaching and learning in recent years has been most effective. Governors fulfil their responsibilities extremely well and provide strong support.
- The school cares for its students with sensitivity, kindness and much thought. Support for students with special educational needs, those who speak English as an additional language, refugees, and any requiring extra help, is excellent.
- GCSE results were well above average in 2000 and extremely high compared to schools with a similar uptake of free school meals. Overall students learn very well and achieve well.

What could be improved

- Below average standards in music.
- In Years 10 and 11 the balance between compulsory and optional subjects, and how optional subjects are grouped (in terms of expressive arts and a second modern foreign language) needs further consideration.
- The use of registers during emergency evacuation procedures.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan. They are already included in the school improvement plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Performance in Year 9 tests and GCSE results has improved since the last inspection and this year's GCSE results were particularly strong. They show that the school raises students' standards by a considerable margin. Value-added in the sixth form is also good overall, despite slightly disappointing results in 2000. Leadership and management continue to be excellent and the school regularly evaluates what it is doing and how things could be better. The issue raised in the previous report, about consistency in teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9, has been addressed well. The school has consulted with all parties about increasing the length of the school day but, as this would make coach journeys home extremely difficult, it has not changed. As one parent explained: 'We are happy with quality not quantity'. The final issue, about choice of languages and aesthetic options for GCSE, is complicated and much deliberation has taken place without any final solution as yet. This remains an area for further consideration. Overall progress since the last inspection has been good.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A*
A-levels/AS-levels	D	B	D	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

A shows extremely high standards which are in the top five per cent of schools.*

Similar schools are those where the percentage of students taking free school meals is the same.

Test results at the end of Year 9 in 2000 were above the national and similar school average in 2000 in English, mathematics and science. Over the last five years the average points for these subjects together has increased, matching the national trend. Since 1998 boys have performed slightly better than girls, which is different to the national picture. In work seen standards and progress were above average.

The average total points score for GCSE increased dramatically in 1997 and it has continued to inch up – the trend is above that seen nationally. In 2000 it was well above the national average and extremely high compared to similar schools. Sixty-six per cent of students attained five GCSE grades A*-C (national average 47 per cent) and the average points score was 46 (38 nationally). Although girls perform better, boys exceed the national averages for their gender by a greater margin than girls do. Over 20 per cent of grades attained were A* and A in art, drama, German, history and Spanish Progress and achievement are very good in these years. In work seen standards were above average overall and well above average in several subjects. Standards in music are below average.

Since 1996, when less than 100 students took two or more A/AS-levels, the average points score per student has been below the national average, but it was close in 1998 and 1999. In 2000, 145 students took A/AS-levels or GNVQs; the percentage of A and B grades (28 per cent) was lower than expected, but 53 per cent of grades were A to C and the overall pass rate was 93 per cent. One hundred per cent pass grades were attained in art, chemistry, economics, English literature, German, media studies, music and Spanish. In GNVQ business studies seven out of nine students attained merit and one attained distinction. The school's analysis shows that 25 per cent or more students attained higher than their predicted grades in art, design and technology, economics, English, media studies, music and theatre studies. In work seen standards were above average overall and were pupils achieving well.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Students, and their parents and carers, are very positive about school life. They know they are expected to work hard and achieve their best. They are proud to be members of the school and are appreciative of all it provides for them.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Students behave very well in lessons and around the school. In a minority of lessons a few of them find it hard to concentrate for 55 minutes.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are excellent between all members of the school community. They totally reflect the key word of the school's mission statement: respect. Students' development is supported extremely well by the high quality of pastoral support given by all teachers.
Attendance	Well above average. Unauthorised absence is below average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	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 very good in 55 per cent of lessons observed – an impressive percentage. It was always satisfactory and at least good in 82 per cent of lessons. The deputy head has made a significant contribution to these high standards of teaching. Teaching has improved since the last inspection. Over 70 per cent of teaching was very good in Years 11 and 12; the lowest percentage of good and very good teaching was in Year 7 (also the year with the lowest percentage of above average attainment). Literacy and numeracy are taught very well and students with low reading ages on entry make rapid progress. Students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language are taught very well and they make very good progress.

Excellent teaching was observed in ten lessons and less effective elements of teaching were observed in design and technology, geography, music and science. All teaching was very good in art and physical education and all was at least good in history, information and communication technology, mathematics and modern foreign languages. In the great majority of lessons teachers vary the pace of tasks and use a subtle range of techniques to maintain concentration and interest. The extra qualities observed that made so much teaching very good included humour, consideration of how students learn, well chosen questions, boosting students' confidence, and helping them to work independently. Consequently, pupils' learning is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in all other years.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good overall, particularly in the sixth form where a wide range of subjects is offered. In Years 10 and 11, French, geography and history are compulsory so the choice of optional subjects is limited. For example students cannot study a second modern foreign language with any expressive arts subject, or two of the latter.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Excellent. The level of support provided for Year 7 students is exceptional. This means any required intervention is early, and it is effective. The special educational needs co-ordinator leads a committed team of experienced support assistants extremely well. They make sure that students, who have a wide range of needs, make very good progress.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Excellent. The majority of these students are refugees; they receive the highest quality of language and emotional support (from within and outside the school). Students who arrived at the school ten months ago are already speaking English very well and tackling examination courses confidently.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent. The Christian ethos is celebrated across the curriculum and contributes to the excellent relationships. High moral and social standards are expected, and achieved, so that bullying or racial discrimination are practically non-existent. A wide range of cultures are studied in many subjects.
How well the school cares for its students	Very good. The school cares for its students with sensitivity, kindness and much thought. Support for past and present students and refugees, requiring any extra help, is particularly good. Emergency evacuation procedures are not thorough enough.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher is extremely well supported by an equally effective deputy head, a strong senior management team, competent heads of departments and pastoral teams, and three advanced skills teachers. All are well qualified and experienced and work very hard both to maintain the ethos of the school and to drive forward improvements.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Extremely well. The governors bring a wide range of expertise to their work and apply common sense, combined with strong support, to discussions. They involve themselves in many school activities and are valued members of the community. They provide an extra layer of commitment to the Christian ethos of the school.

The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent. The school uses the LEA's detailed analysis of data well, to pinpoint relatively weak performance. Lessons are observed regularly and teachers given constructive feedback. Departments systematically monitor their progress. The new style school improvement plan is evolving well from thorough consultation, and evaluation of what needs to be done.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The budget is tightly controlled and funds are allocated well. The school obtains as much extra funding as possible and uses it carefully.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
Practically all responses to the parents' questionnaires were extremely positive, as were their written comments and those they made at the parents' evening. Without doubt they feel the school does an excellent job.	A very small number express concerns about homework – mainly that there is too much. They observe that in a few subjects students cannot bring textbooks home.

Over 600 parents and carers returned the questionnaire and about 70 came to the parents' evening. The inspection confirmed their positive comments about the school. The school certainly expects students to work hard at home but it provides helpful guidelines about how to tackle homework and much guidance about coping with revision and coursework for GCSE and sixth-form students. The school is aware of the need to have more textbooks and the number is increasing.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Teaching is very good. Teachers think carefully about how students learn, ask well chosen questions, boost students' confidence, and help them to work independently and think for themselves.

References to subjects (often in brackets), merely record examples of teaching skills observed during the inspection. Discussions with students, and examination of their books, make it clear that the positive features are common in many subjects.

1. Teaching was very good in 55 per cent of lessons observed – an impressive percentage. It was never less than satisfactory and at least good in 82 per cent of lessons. The significant contribution of the deputy head to these high standards of teaching is described in paragraph 19. Teaching has improved since the last inspection. Over 70 per cent of teaching was very good in Years 11 and 12; the lowest percentage of good and very good teaching was in Year 7 (also the year with the lowest percentage of above average attainment). Excellent teaching was observed in ten lessons: four in English, three in modern foreign languages, and one in each of physical education, mathematics and science. Less effective elements of teaching were observed in design and technology, geography, music and science. All teaching was very good in art and physical education and all was at least good in history, information and communication technology, mathematics and modern foreign languages.
2. In the great majority of lessons teachers state the objectives clearly and refer to them at the end. They plan well, vary the pace of tasks and use a subtle range of techniques to maintain concentration and interest. In practically all lessons their subject knowledge is very good and it is never less than satisfactory. These are important features of successful lessons but it is the extra qualities observed that make so much teaching very good. Effective use of humour was noted in many lessons: students listened carefully in English so they did not miss any subtle jokes, laughter made a sociology lesson fun and stimulated students to contribute well, and amusing references to recent television programmes in psychology lured students into discussion. Students thoroughly enjoyed discussing the pros and cons of 'Big Brother' in German.
3. To help students learn, teachers effectively review new knowledge and understanding in a variety of ways: summarising key points at the end of activities, creating small breaks to check on progress and share ideas, handing out helpful lists of key words and checking that students can define them, and sharing marking criteria with students so they know what they must do to attain high grades. In physical education, frequent breaks in energetic practice are used to give a demonstration, or to discuss why some skills are working better than others. In theatre studies, presentation work is interwoven with astute questioning which focuses students' critical thinking. In many lessons teachers share with students how work is going to develop over several weeks, so they know what they are aiming for and feel fully involved. Several departments offer general help, revision or coursework sessions, during the lunch hour, after school and on Saturday mornings, all of which students greatly appreciate.
4. Students' learning observed during the inspection was always satisfactory, and good in over 80 per cent of lessons. This is partly explained by the significant number of teachers who reflect on the different ways students learn, and plan accordingly. It is

encouraging that the present school improvement plan includes further development of this focus. Examples of teachers applying this skill effectively include:

- showing students how to learn from their own mistakes (design and technology) and being strongly, but fairly, critical of their work – in marking and class comments – before quickly moving on to identify how they can improve (science and design and technology) predicting well the aspects of topics which students are likely to find difficult and planning in advance to negotiate round them (science);
- presenting students with several alternative ways to make calculations, presenting explanation, justification and proof of difficult statistics in careful stages, seeing simple problems through the eyes of lower attaining students, or using predictions linked to graphic calculators exceptionally well (mathematics);
- using a carefully planned variety of learning styles, such as reading, watching videos, class and group discussion (media studies, history), role play, memorisation, listening to tapes and vocabulary work - all within forty minutes (French);
- developing empathy skills interpreting poetry (English);
- creating interesting ways to develop understanding, such as building up sentences from oral prompts and pictures (French) or careful guidance about difficult concepts using the overhead projector well (economics);
- stimulating focused discussion in group work so students learn from each other (history);
- determining not to have a house style so that every individual approach is valued (artwork seen confirms that this is achieved);
- linking topics with those studied in earlier years and expecting students to remember! (geography, theatre studies and Spanish linked to French);
- getting students to be alert by energetic and stimulating opening questions or games (mathematics);
- explaining tricky physical processes with well-thought-out everyday references (geography);
- instilling dictionary skills and confidence to extend vocabulary (German).

5. All answers to questions are accepted and valued, and then manipulated carefully if they were in fact wrong. Students are never made to feel that their opinions and ideas are not important, hence the great majority contributes well in class. In response to a correct answer one teacher addressed another student, who had earlier found the question difficult, commenting: 'I think that's what you were trying to say'. Teachers circulate well round groups in lessons, guide discussions skilfully and interject with carefully chosen questions to stretch students' ideas. They make one question lead to another, or mix questions requiring long and short answers so students have to be alert.

6. In several lessons, particularly in modern foreign languages, the pace of questioning was electric with students desperate to answer questions. Regularly the response to questions is followed by 'Why?', until as much detail as possible has been covered, or 'Can you go a little further?', 'Yes, but what would an examiner look for?', 'Where is your evidence for that?', 'How do we know?', 'Where have we seen this, can you remind me?'. Comments are turned round to make students think about a point from a different angle, for example in English: 'Picture this character and imagine how she feels'. In information and communication technology an interesting question such as 'What was the point of that homework?' made students think. In mathematics for the lowest attainers: 'I find this method stressful, is there an easier way?', certainly encouraged students to keep going with percentages.

7. In several sixth-form lessons discussions had the flavour of university tutorials (interestingly, particularly in the lessons taught after school). Students argue points with each other and show their confidence in debate. Many teachers have such transparent enthusiasm for their subjects that students are most keen to gain recognition and approval. It is perhaps unusual to praise the qualities of a lesson because little evidence of direct teaching was seen, but it is possible to compliment a few teachers' skills, as directing learning extremely well, or pointing the way but leading from the back. Teachers are sharing with students the unknown standards of the new AS courses and hence creating a 'working together' approach. One information and communication technology teacher remarked to a sixth-form group 'There's lots of things I don't know, but I do know where to look them up'. An art teacher encouraged students by observing: 'Some of your colour experiments are better than mine'.
8. A further important element that has been, and continues to be, a whole-school focus, is to stimulate students to learn independently and confidently. Many teachers are consciously nurturing such skills. Examples of good practice seen included:
- preparing students well before a video extract so they watched it critically (physical education);
 - stimulating students to create their own variations on tunes (music);
 - expecting them to use advanced computer skills, for example PowerPoint presentations in Year 7 (information and communication technology);
 - stressing the depth of explanation required to attain high National Curriculum levels (geography);
 - showing students different interpretations of plays to develop critical analysis;
 - devising original ways to help lower attaining students with their revision (science);
 - not spoon-feeding students but stating 'That's not working – back to the formula' (information and communication technology);
 - assuming higher attainers will work independently through entire projects (food technology);
 - stressing the links between theory and practice (chemistry);
 - writing Internet investigation questions which become progressively more challenging (history – in the department's own computer suite, a definite bonus for learning);
 - challenging students in subtle ways: 'You'd be happier if you did some more research' (art).
9. Examples of teaching which was satisfactory (usually a balance of effective and less effective points) include:
- too little emphasis on health and safety (design and technology);
 - a lack of eye contact with students as a technique to make sure they all listen to each other; indulgence in role play for too long so that important understanding is not consolidated or poorly presented worksheets which hinder understanding and do not encourage high standards of presentation (geography);
 - cramming in too much information without a clear focus for lower attainers, failing to explore concepts in enough detail for higher attainers, or practical sessions which are not well organised or simply lack of careful planning (science);
 - aspects of music teaching which need to improve are described in paragraphs 39 and 40.

Relationships, which are excellent, totally reflect the key word of the school's mission statement – respect. Students behave very well and they, and their parents and

carers, are very positive about school life. The school provides excellent guidance for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.

10. Teachers never speak to students disrespectfully and so a cheerful and productive atmosphere is dominant in lessons. Perhaps this is one significant reason why almost all parents and carers agree that teaching is good, and well over half of them that it is very good. In one lesson a teacher skilfully worked with a student who was losing focus and later shared a good observation he made with the whole class. Another teacher purposefully involved a lively group of boys in a demonstration, and effectively curbed their energies. Such subtle handling of potential problems is at the heart of the very good relationships and behaviour seen in class. As they feel confident, students are articulate and quite happy to ask for help or further explanation. Students are encouraged to share each other's successes, whether hearing good news over the tannoy or during registration, or in lessons. If they are late for a lesson, teachers assume students have a good reason (which will certainly be checked) and they are welcomed warmly.
11. The positive way teachers respond to students' answers, whatever their quality, is significant. Rather than say 'No', a teacher might say 'I think you are on the right lines', or 'you are 90 per cent right!' This, and all the other strengths of teaching described above, creates a calm environment of mutual support and respect, which both reflects and underpins the excellent ethos of the school. Applause for fine answers is enjoyed, even by older students and 'Well done' is heard frequently. Students have a sense of achievement on many occasions, particularly in physical education. In all respects students are well prepared for life after they have left school.
12. Year 7 students describe their first few weeks at St Peter's enthusiastically. Much careful preparation, for months beforehand, contributes to the success of their transfer from primary school. They say that 'Everyone is so welcoming' and describe the fun lessons they had where games helped them to get to know each other. Primary students, identified as gifted, attended a summer course at the school. It was successful, but many members of staff have reservations about offering these students, in any year, more opportunities than others. They fully support providing them with challenging lessons and extension work.
13. The excellent care and attention given to each student is reflected in the strong support by parents and carers for the school and all it stands for. It is certainly unusual for them to describe parents' evenings as the best they have ever attended. The regular newsletters are interesting and informative. One parent commented that 'You can hear the headteacher speaking as you read them'. The senior choir invites parents and carers to join in for some concerts. Several important links with the local community provide valuable experiences for students; a member of staff is developing contact with the Afro Caribbean Centre. Many students have volunteered to work there on Saturday mornings.
14. Personal and social education is partly delivered through religious education and in one form lesson a week, which could not be observed during the inspection. The programme is well planned and students describe the lessons as worthwhile. Spiritual aspects of school life are described in the separate inspection report. Inevitably, the Christian values generated in the school contribute significantly to all areas of students' personal development and their very good behaviour. Students particularly appreciate the experience of going on retreat and value the opportunities for reflection.

15. Moral and cultural issues are addressed in practically all subjects and some fine examples were observed during the inspection. In all the lessons referred to below, teachers explored issues sensitively and developed students' awareness of other lifestyles and cultures in the UK and beyond:
- free will in psychology;
 - second World War and its impact on different groups in history;
 - the role of women in sociology and English and the significance of race in Shakespeare's plays;
 - the style of charity letters in English and the manipulation of news items in media studies;
 - features of urban poverty in geography;
 - the meaning behind aboriginal designs in art;
 - ethics related to market research in business studies or government spending in economics;
 - different school systems in Europe in modern foreign languages;
 - hooliganism and drugs in sports studies.
16. Students' social skills are developed strongly by the way teachers treat them respectfully and by the expectations teachers establish for behaviour. Hence it is assumed that students will work well (alone, as a class or in groups), be considerate of each others' views, help each other and be kind – they are. Every year they collect an impressive amount for charities (for example children in Ghana or Children in Need) and students and staff help disabled children on a pilgrimage to Lourdes. The choir sings in Gloucester before Christmas, and last year's efforts, despite the headteacher's contribution to the percussion, were most warmly received. The choir was urged to go back the next night.
17. Only high standards of fair play are accepted in physical education and the numerous matches played, against a wide range of schools, certainly develop students' social awareness. In the sixth form the enrichment programme provides many useful experiences; team skills are vital for the successful Engineering Education Scheme, and for those students who work in the community (including a hospice, old people's home, mental health day centre and primary schools), or are bold enough to visit Ecuador as part of the World Challenge scheme. Work experience for Year 11 students, and the full careers programme, is very well organised. A good range of trips and visits take place every year and the school receives letters complimenting the students' behaviour.

Leadership and management are excellent. The school's evaluation of its performance is also excellent and the focus on developing teaching and learning in recent years has been most effective. Governors fulfil their responsibilities extremely well and provide strong support.

18. The headteacher has already received recognition for his service to education, and has directed St Peter's with a sure hand for seventeen years. He still has the enthusiasm and dedication of those less experienced headteachers for whom he delivers training and support programmes. In discussion with students and all members of the community, they are united in their confidence that it is the headteacher who makes the atmosphere of St Peter's so special. Indeed, one pointed to the tannoy system and remarked that the headteacher's voice, heard several times a day, means that all students hear the same messages, prayers and pronouncements, and are therefore united. This system clearly works very well, but having seen a few occasions where his words were not absorbed, the inspectors would urge the headteacher to visualise the time it takes for teachers in classrooms to get all students to be attentive!
19. The headteacher and deputy head are knowledgeable about teachers' strengths and weaknesses and they work hard to develop the former and offer constructive comments about the latter. The deputy head is particularly skilled at teaching and at how to encourage teachers to aim for excellence (her own having been recognised nationally). She is well respected and many teachers observe how helpful they have found her support and suggestions. She has helped many heads of departments to improve their lesson observation and feedback skills. Underpinning her teaching and advice is her strong conviction that students can do better than they think they can. The headteacher observes that her work in recent years has 'dramatically raised the standard of teaching and learning'. Such is the deputy head's experience and skills that she is often asked to support and guide other schools in the authority – a task she undertakes very well.
20. Apart from stimulating improvement in teaching overall, the headteacher recognises teachers' strengths and exploits them well. Heads of department with particular skills have recently been appointed to the leadership group, and good appointments made to fill their positions. For posts at this level, the deputy head visits short listed external applicants to see them teach, and so the school is confident that it appoints the best possible candidates. The leadership group (seven hard-working and dedicated teachers who debate issues freely with the headteacher) and the layer of middle managers beneath, all contribute extremely well to the ethos and success of the school. Leadership and management at all levels are excellent.
21. Three recently designated advanced skills teachers, who delivered impressive lessons during the inspection, are sharing their expertise within the school and in the local authority. Almost 40 teachers have crossed the threshold, and talented younger teachers are spotted and moved onto the fast track route. The headteacher and governors therefore recognise the value of rewarding teachers' energy and success financially; a high percentage of the budget is wisely allowed for this. To nurture interest in teaching as a profession, the school has introduced a particularly valuable option for Year 12 students whereby they learn about, and work in primary schools.
22. Another area where spending is relatively high is the allocation for the experienced and valuable support assistants. Every Year 7 form has an assistant in class for about half the week. This means that students' learning, or social problems are spotted early and the right support swings into action. After ten weeks of intensive

tuition in the autumn term 2000, 75 per cent of students with a reading age of 10 years or less on entry had significantly improved. Further examples of the success of the special educational needs department as a whole are described in paragraph 27. Financial administration and budget controls are very well organised and the relatively low income the school has is spent wisely. The school provides very good value for money.

23. The Local Education Authority (LEA) provides the school with much helpful performance data, presented in clear charts and diagrams. The school uses this well to highlight how departments are performing relative to other subjects and county and national figures. It also examines performance by teaching groups and groups of students, so that encouragement and advice can be channelled towards those students or teachers who are not performing as well as the school would wish. Regular monitoring, evaluation and review department meetings are attended by senior managers, so the headteacher and deputy head have a very sure grasp of what is going on. These meetings also reveal how well most teachers know their students.
24. The headteacher and senior managers are alert to issues of concern to some students, parents and carers. For example, several girls perceive rugby as dominating sports too much: 'The school would buy rugby shirts before mathematics books'. Wisely, the headteacher has appointed a female, county level hockey player as head of department, who complements the other teachers in the department and who is specifically developing girls' hockey. The headteacher has formal meetings with heads of department every term and all teachers once a year. Support staff also have formal meetings with a senior manager, an improvement since the last inspection. Many of them feel fully involved as members of the school community and clearly feel appreciated. The school is determined to find funds to install a lift to the staff room; at present a teacher who uses a wheelchair cannot get there.
25. The governors fulfil their responsibilities extremely well. They bring a wide range of expertise to their work and apply common sense, combined with strong support, to discussions. They involve themselves in many school activities and are valued members of the community. They provide an extra layer of commitment to the Christian ethos of the school. The majority of subjects have an attached governor; several of these links are most effective and others are developing well. Governors have been fully involved in the changes to the management structure for several years, and they are pleased with the progress made. They are sensitive to a few parents' and carers' concern that the school, particularly the sixth form, is getting very large. Nevertheless, they are rightly confident that, so far, the school continues to address the needs of all groups of pupils very well.

The school cares for its students with sensitivity, kindness and much thought. Support for students with special educational needs, those who speak English as an additional language, refugees, and any requiring extra help, is excellent.

26. Once again the word respect underpins the school's approach to caring for students in the best possible way. A strong team of middle managers have clearly defined responsibilities, to monitor academic progress, how well students are working and whether they have any personal problems. They carry out these duties extremely well. The quality of yearly reports, recording standards and achievements, has improved since the last inspection. Distinct from these, summary records of how students are working in class and homework are sent to parents and carers five times a year.

Parents and carers value these as they provide an opening for them to discuss things with their children, and the school if necessary.

27. In addition to refugees and those with special educational needs or English as an additional language, other students needing support, for example those in care, adopted, teenage mothers, or carers themselves – are well known to the school. They are supported very well, in some cases after they have left school. The special needs department's weekly meeting confirmed how well organised it is and how attentive to detail. Many examples of fine support were observed during the inspection. A student having difficulty with word sounds made good progress and kept up well in an English lesson, explained by focused workshops and helpful support with writing in class. In a science lesson a hearing impaired student made very good progress with just the right amount of support, as did a visually impaired student in mathematics. A student with motor skills problems was well supported in a science lesson. Evidence from teachers' records shows that, after one term, several Year 7 students have moved down a stage or come off the register of special needs.
28. Those who speak English as an additional language are not pressurised to contribute in class if they are more confident about writing than speaking. The progress they make learning English is most impressive – they speak appreciatively of the intensive tuition they have. Teachers support them particularly well by careful observation of their reaction to lesson content and level. They give excellent and patient help, for example to understand specialist vocabulary in extra mathematics sessions. Refugee students, and others who would find it difficult to cope with four AS courses in the sixth form, follow particularly well chosen combinations of courses (mixtures of AS, vocational AS and GCSEs), and several are enjoying following the new vocational AS information and communication technology course. Students who speak several languages are encouraged to achieve formal recognition of their talents. Examples of foreign language students' writings are translated and placed in the school library as a valuable resource.
29. Year 11 students have the chance to mentor younger ones in Year 7. They visit forms twice a week, help with assemblies, retreats, and any problems students have. Students have to apply for these positions, complete forms and be interviewed and selected by their predecessors. 'Study buddies' are students who volunteer to support new arrivals to school, another example of caring well for individuals. School councils meet termly for Years 8 and 9. Sixth-form students organise a major pantomime each year, which is on twice a day for almost a week, and enjoyed enormously by many primary school pupils. Sixth-formers are also involved in running Christmas parties for the elderly and charity collections; their personal development is strengthened by such activities.

GCSE results were well above average in 2000 and extremely high compared to schools with a similar uptake of free school meals. Overall students learn very well and achieve well.

30. Having improved dramatically in the year following the last inspection, the average total points score for GCSE has continued to inch up and the trend is above that seen nationally. In 2000 it was well above the national average and extremely high compared to schools with a similar uptake of free school meals. Although girls perform better than boys at GCSE, boys exceed the national average for their gender by a greater margin than girls do.

31. The governors rightly describe the 2000 results as 'magnificent', particularly as teachers had to work extra hard to motivate the particular students involved (after particularly worrying mock examination results). Governors are proud that 162 out of 177 students attained at least one GCSE grade A*-C and refer to the 'outstanding' facts that 35 per cent of students passed all their subjects at grades A*-C and the average points score was 46 (38 nationally). The LEA predicted the school would attain 49 per cent of students with five grades A*-C, but it reached 66 per cent (compared to 47 per cent nationally). Over 20 per cent of grades attained were A* and A in art, drama, German, history and Spanish. The inspection confirmed that students make very good progress in Years 10 and 11.
32. Comparison of students' points scores in Year 9 national tests with GCSE two years later, shows that the school is adding much value to their attainment, well above that seen nationally. The headteacher refers to the 'quite staggering' value-added between 1998 and 2000, the best seen in the county. Progress and achievement in Years 10 and 11 are more dramatic than in Years 7 to 9, but, partly in response to a key issue in the previous report, test results at the end of Year 9 have improved, and the focus on teaching and learning in these years continues. Mathematics and science test results improved significantly in 2000. During the inspection, only one-third of attainment seen in Year 7 lessons was above average (less than in all other years) but if the seeds of progress are sown in this year, and bear fruit later, especially in Year 11, then the school is clearly heading in the right direction.
33. The average points score for students taking less than two A/AS levels (very few since 1997) has exceeded the national average for several years. Since 1996, when less than 100 students took two or more A/AS-levels, the average points score per student has been below the national average, but it was close in 1998 and 1999. In 2000, 145 students took A/AS-levels or GNVQs, and although the school was disappointed with the percentage of A and B grades 53 per cent of grades were A to C and the overall pass rate was 93 per cent. One hundred per cent pass grades were attained in art, chemistry, economics, English literature, German, media studies, music (two students only) and Spanish. In GNVQ business studies seven out of nine students attained merit and one attained distinction.
34. In terms of value-added in the sixth-form, the school's analysis shows that at least one in four students attained higher than their expected grades in art, design and technology, economics, English, media studies and theatre studies. Compared to high results in previous years results were low in biology and physics; the school has undertaken much analysis to understand them. A further contributory factor to the 2000 results was that a relatively lower percentage of students, particularly boys, attained five GCSE grades A*-C in 1998. This year group exceeded the LEA predicted grades by a relatively low percentage compared to other years. What is important is that the school allows students to enter the sixth form with only four grade C passes at GCSE. It is determined not to alter this admission criterion, as it knows that many students achieve extremely well and proceed on to worthwhile further education courses. Respect for individuals' attainment is what drives the school forwards, rather than regard for league tables and county averages.
35. Students' learning is directly related to the very good quality of teaching, so it has been referred to in paragraphs 3 to 8. A few examples of particularly good achievement and progress noted during the inspection are mentioned here:
 - In English, by Year 9, students offer meaning and opinions about Shakespeare plays, in Year 11 they express their views clearly using a mature vocabulary

(though spelling and sentence structure are not quite so strong) and in the sixth form they analyse text and plays in considerable depth.

- Middle attaining students in Year 11 understand the need for accuracy and speed to gain maximum marks in mathematics and a year later, those following the AS course have exceptionally good understanding of trigonometry.
- In Year 9 higher attaining students organise apparatus efficiently and display results graphically, using the correct terms. In all three sciences in the sixth form, students are producing work of above average standards.
- By Year 8 students are skilled at merging their designs with colouring techniques in art and at least half of them have very good gymnastic skills.
- By Year 9 students can evaluate well the usefulness of a variety of sources in history and begin to understand cause and effect in physical geography.
- Year 10 food technology students apply their knowledge well to modify recipes and Year 11 basketball players are able to evaluate strategies to use against different teams. The success of the rugby teams is well known in the county.
- Also in Year 11, many students have reasonable accents in modern foreign languages, as they are used to lessons delivered without any English being spoken.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Below average standards in music.

36. Standards in music by the end of Year 9 are below average. Students' basic musical skills, such as a sense of rhythm or how to play keyboards, are weak. Their knowledge of the elements of music and their use of appropriate technical language is elementary, so they do not discuss music with the maturity expected for their age. They do not understand the difference between length of notes and the speed of music, or appreciate different pitch — concepts which should be mastered during Year 7. Practical work is better than their knowledge and understanding, but still below average. Most students can change a simple melody and appreciate how variations are built up, but their progress is rather more hit and miss than carefully structured.
37. GCSE results are not consistent, they have fluctuated over the last three years from well below average to broadly average. Music is the only subject without any grades A* or A in 2000. The statistical significance of these results is weak because fewer than twenty students study the course; less than expected for the size of school (partly explained by the option choices). Even so, students do not do as well in music as in their other subjects and results are low compared to LEA and national figures.
38. Over the last three years students' attainment at the beginning of Year 10, measured by their verbal reasoning levels, has been higher for those studying music than for those studying sports studies. Yet, in art, drama and sports studies, which have the same amount of teaching time, students have attained average points scores of 5.4 and higher over these three years — but they attained 3.4 in music and boys' performance was lower. In recent years only a few students have taken A-level: four out of six passed in 1999 and two students gained grades A and C in 2000, one achieving a higher grade than predicted.
39. Teaching was just satisfactory in lessons seen during the inspection, but other evidence reveals there are significant weaknesses overall. Planning does not define and focus on exactly what students are meant to learn during a particular unit. The best way to present certain topics, taking into account what individual students need,

is not considered carefully. Music teachers are not fully aware of students' special educational needs, so work is not always adapted as it needs to be.

40. Lack of emphasis on developing musical skills, which are the building blocks of successful music-making, results in students' efforts being neither satisfying nor uplifting. Assessment in lessons is not used to tell students how well they are achieving and what they need to do to improve. Students' achievements, in terms of skills, knowledge and understanding, are not recorded consistently in order to monitor their progress towards National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades. As a result students do not hold music in high regard when choosing subjects for GCSE and the sixth form.
41. The major asset that the department has is the teachers' high quality of musicianship which enlivens lessons and, on occasions, inspires students. This is particularly the case in extra-curricular activities which are the department's greatest strength. Only a small number of groups rehearse on a regular basis (fewer than might be expected for the number of students in the school). Students are rightly proud to belong to the bands and choirs, which have recorded some of their performances. Over 150 students have instrumental and vocal lessons and most show a high level of commitment. The arrangements for these lessons are not planned well and the school does not gain the best value from the service.
42. Opportunities to make work exciting are hampered by the lack of a computer, recording equipment and headphones for the keyboards. The demands of the curriculum in all years are such that the department needs to bring equipment up to date as soon as possible. Plans are approved for new premises, which will provide a fine opportunity to do this. The member of the governing body linked to the music department is extremely supportive and, with senior managers, fully aware of the major developments needed.

In Years 10 and 11 the balance between compulsory and optional subjects, and how optional subjects are grouped (in terms of expressive arts and a second modern foreign language) needs further consideration.

43. The last inspection report noted that the grouping of subjects in Years 10 and 11 was not ideal. The majority of students are happy to study both geography and history and this means that these subjects can be taught in setted groups – then not all students need follow the full course. However, results in the GCSE short course geography and history (taken by between 40 and 50 per cent of students) are below average. In addition, making all students study geography and history clogs up the compulsory curriculum (which has to include a significant percentage of time for religious education), and means there can only be two option boxes. One option box contains design and technology and business studies, the other art, music, drama, sports studies and a second modern foreign language – German in one year and Spanish in the next – depending on which one students started in Year 8.
44. About one-quarter of Year 8 and 9 students study two languages. As French is compulsory in all years, only 17 students have chosen German GCSE in Year 10, and 28 Spanish in Year 11. Parents, carers and students express concerns that students cannot study any single language of their choice and that if they study two they cannot follow an expressive arts course. There are several students who would like to study two of the expressive arts courses. Certain factors beyond the school's control contribute to the dilemma: recruiting German and Spanish teachers is extremely difficult, and students who live far from school may depend on buses to get home, so

offering a subject such as music after school hours is a solution that creates problems for individuals. The school has certainly debated the issue fully, but as yet no solution has been found.

The use of registers during emergency evacuation procedures

45. The school covers a large site and many separate buildings are spread out, mostly in an L shape. If there is an emergency students assemble in two different areas of the school (the points of the L shape), depending on which buildings they are in. As one set of registers cannot be taken to the two distant assembly points, the school has devised a 'sweeping' system, whereby staff check buildings methodically to ensure they are empty. The fire brigade has tested the system during a fire practice, by 'hiding' people in various places, and it is confident that the system works – all students were evacuated in under four minutes. The inspection team has concerns about what might happen if a building was enveloped in smoke or fumes: how could the sweeping method then operate efficiently and how would the school know which students were missing? The school is already considering introducing electronic registration systems, and it is clearly sensible to do this with consideration for safety at the same time.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

To build on the considerable strengths and success the school already has, the governing body should address the following:

- Raise standards in music by addressing the detailed points raised in paragraphs 36 to 42.
- Persevere with efforts to broaden the options available to students in Years 10 and 11 (paragraphs 43 and 44).
- Review the present emergency evacuation procedures so that all students are accounted for at the evacuation sites, in addition to checking the buildings are empty (Paragraph 45).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	74
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	40

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
14	41	27	17	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll

	Y7 to 11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	1134	376
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	108	N/A

Special educational needs

	Y7 to 11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	22	2
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	132	7

English as an additional language

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	20

Student mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	14
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	32

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.9
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	115	101	216

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	77	90	88
	Girls	79	73	66
	Total	156	163	154
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	72 (84)	75 (68)	71 (62)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	28 (57)	43 (37)	32 (21)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	90	96	80
	Girls	89	88	72
	Total	179	184	152
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	83 (81)	86 (71)	70 (64)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	40 (41)	46 (33)	28 (29)
	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	93	84	177

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	60	90	91
	Girls	56	81	82
	Total	116	171	173
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	66 (63)	97 (95)	98 (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 student	School	48 (46)
	National	38.4 (38.0)

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	54	98	152

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	13.2 (16.7)	14.9 (17.1)	14.4 (16.9)	3.3 (N/A)	4.0 (3.3)	3.4 (3.3)
National	17.7 (17.7)	18.6 (17.9)	18.2 (17.9)	2.6 (2.7)	2.9 (2.8)	2.7 (2.8)

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 students who achieved all those they studied	School	9 100
	National	

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	23
Black – African heritage	8
Black – other	14
Indian	2
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	1443
Any other minority ethnic group	19

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	1
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	25	0
Any other minority ethnic group	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 to Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	85.0
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 to Y13

Total number of education support staff	23.0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	669

Deployment of teachers: Y7 to Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.2
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Average teaching group size: Y7 to Y13

Key Stage 3	27.5
Key Stage 4	22.7

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	3,270,320
Total expenditure	3,264,500
Expenditure per student	2,258
Balance brought forward from previous year	39,695
Balance carried forward to next year	45,515

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1510
Number of questionnaires returned	628

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	54	42	3	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	60	38	2	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	50	46	2	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	41	48	8	1	2
The teaching is good.	65	34	0	0	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	61	34	4	1	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	70	26	3	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	85	15	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	53	41	4	0	1
The school is well led and managed.	81	18	0	0	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	67	31	1	0	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	56	37	3	0	4