

INSPECTION REPORT

**OUR LADY & ST OSWALD'S CATHOLIC
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Oswestry

LEA area: Shropshire

Unique reference number: 123553

Headteacher: Sister Josephine Swift

Reporting inspector: Ms Marjorie Glynne-Jones
2918

Dates of inspection: 13 – 15 June 2000

Inspection number: 190664

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Infant and junior
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	4 - 11
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Upper Brook Street Oswestry Shropshire
Postcode:	SY11 2TG
Telephone number:	01691 652 849
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Reverend Steve McKenna
Date of previous inspection:	December 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school is a small Catholic primary school in the North Shropshire town of Oswestry, an area recently designated as an Education Action Zone. Discussions are currently being held about ways in which the school may benefit from this designation. There are 135 pupils on roll who come from Oswestry, the surroundings areas and a number of villages. Most pupils are from white backgrounds. There are more girls than boys. When they join the school, pupils' attainment overall is as expected for their age. Sixteen pupils have special educational needs, a smaller proportion than other schools; for those with the highest level of need, two pupils, the proportion is about average. The needs mostly vary according to individuals, although three pupils are dyslexic. Pupils come from a wide range of social backgrounds which, overall, are neither particularly advantaged nor disadvantaged. Fewer pupils are entitled to free school meals than in other schools.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Our Lady and St Oswald's is a good school which is effective in providing value for money. The school community is a close and caring one. Standards are high because there is thoughtful, well-targeted teaching and pupils have a positive and sensible approach to their work. Leadership is strong. Management is not fully effective: this is because staff time, including the headteacher's time, has not been allocated for checking the quality of provision across the school in a systematic way.

What the school does well

- Standards are very high at Key Stage 2 in comparison to schools whose pupils have similar backgrounds; this is a very good achievement.
- School aims and values show very clearly in every aspect of day-to-day life.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Pupils contribute substantially to the quality of the school community; their attitudes and behaviour are a strength.
- The school's care for its pupils is a strong feature.
- Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development enriches pupils' experience.
- Parents think highly of the school's achievements.

What could be improved

- Governors do not have a sharp enough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Parents do not feel that the school's communication with them always works well.
- The requirements for the review of the headteacher's work have not been carried out by the governing body.

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. High standards have been maintained. Overall, the school has made sufficient progress on the seven key issues for improvement. There has been good improvement on the issue of 'strengthening the senior management team' through the allocation of senior responsibilities on the appointment of the new deputy headteacher. Suitable progress has been made on four issues: more able pupils are better challenged by the work set; provision for special educational needs has been strengthened and is now good; the liaison between teachers and classroom assistants is better and often works well; arrangements for appraising teachers have been implemented. There has been some progress on the remaining two issues. There is now a homework policy although it is not always used effectively. The policy for assessment and marking is

now put into practice better across the school; although the governors have recently reviewed the marking section, in practice the quality of marking is still rather patchy.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 7-year-olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests/tasks.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
reading	C	A	B	C
writing	D	B	B	C
mathematics	D	B	A	B

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

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
English	A	D	A	A
mathematics	B	A	A	A
science	A	A	A	A*

Key	
In the 5% highest nationally	A*
Well above average	A
Above average	B
Average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E

Between 1997 and 1999 results at Key Stage 1 improved in all three subjects in comparison with other schools nationally; the improvement in mathematics is particularly good. At Key Stage 2, high results have been generally maintained, while in 1999, for the first time, results in all three areas were well above average. These achievements are impressive because when pupils join the school their overall attainment is average. The results in English in 1998 were appropriate for the range of pupils' abilities in Year 6. The numbers of boys and girls in Year 2 and Year 6 in 1999 are too small to make valid comparisons with boys' and girls' results nationally.

The outstanding achievement is that St Oswald's pupils do very much better than those in schools where pupils' backgrounds are similar. This is true in English and mathematics, while in science pupils' results are exceptionally high and in the top five per cent nationally compared with similar schools.

In 1999, the school's Key Stage 1 targets were met for mathematics and exceeded for reading and writing. The Key Stage 2 targets were exceeded in all three subjects. Targets for 2000 are higher except in mathematics where account is properly taken of those pupils with special educational needs.

In the work seen during the inspection day there was some outstanding Year 6 work in English. A strength in Year 2 is that pupils of all abilities were achieving the standard expected, or above it, in mathematics. Overall at Key Stage 2, in English, mathematics and science pupils were working at a standard above that expected. At Key Stage 1, the majority of pupils were achieving the expected standard or beyond in English and mathematics.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good; pupils enjoy school; they are ready to work hard, and do so.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good; pupils behave very responsibly and courteously; they are exceptionally well-behaved at lunch.
Personal development and relationships	Good; pupils are lively, friendly and confident; they show gentle care for others.
Attendance	Good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Aged up to 5 years	Aged 5-7 years	aged 7-11 years
Lessons seen overall	*	Good.	Good.

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

* There is insufficient evidence from which to make a judgement about the teaching of the reception group.

All teaching is satisfactory, or better, an improvement from the last inspection; teaching is good in 50 per cent of lessons and very good in 17 per cent. Teachers' high expectations for pupils' achievement are a particular strength at Key Stage 2 and are backed up very well by the methods they use. Most planning is carefully matched to individual abilities. There is good teaching overall in English and mathematics. The oldest pupils at each stage are confident and independent learners and try hard to do their best.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum provides a suitable range of experiences for pupils; planning is done with care. Overall provision is effective.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good; achieved with sensitivity and thoroughness.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good; rich experiences are provided through assemblies, listening to music and singing, and through the quality of relationships in the school; most adults set a very good example of fair and thoughtful consideration for others.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good; every effort is made to attend to matters concerning pupils' welfare.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	There is strong leadership which is firmly rooted in the school's aims and values; these are very well reflected in all that the school does. Management is not fully effective; this is because staff time, including the headteacher's time, is not routinely allocated for checking the school's work. A start has been made to improve this. The overall judgement, taking account of strengths and weaknesses, is that leadership and management are effective.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	A strength of the governing body is the meticulous attention it gives to the many formal matters governors have to attend to. The chair's commitment is high and he gives generously of his time to the school. However, the headteacher's work has not been formally reviewed as required. Although governors are helpfully involved in reviewing school development, they are not able to have a sharp enough understanding of school strengths and weaknesses, particularly in teaching. This is because formal checking of teaching, with target-setting for improvement, is at an early stage; and because arrangements for governors to consider the evidence gained from this are not in place.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Some monitoring of teaching has brought about improvement, although this is not systematically carried out across the school, for example, for the year groups within classes.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are prudently acquired and used effectively in raising standards, although the time of staff managers is not used efficiently for monitoring. Financial management is good. Care is taken to obtain best value in purchasing. Overall, the school uses its resources effectively.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school. • Children make good progress. • Behaviour is good. • There is good teaching. • The school has high expectations. • Children are helped to grow into mature and sensible people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The arrangements for homework do not always work well. • They do not feel well informed about their children's progress. • It is not easy to raise questions and problems. • They do not feel that the school works closely with them. • There is a very limited range of activities outside lessons.

Inspectors agree with the positive comments made by the 45 parents who completed the questionnaire, and the 33 parents who attended the meeting. They find that there is a need to make the arrangements for homework more clear and to carry them out systematically. Where pupils' annual reports are concerned the team agrees with parents' views about the information they receive on their children's progress. This is not always explained clearly enough in each subject area to give parents a good idea of the strengths and weakness in their children's learning and how improvements can be made. While there is ample evidence of the ways in which the school seeks to work with parents, inspectors agree that this could be improved. Inspectors do not agree with parents' view about activities outside lessons. They find that a reasonable range of activities is provided although the programme is sometimes interrupted.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards are very high at Key Stage 2 in comparison to schools whose pupils have similar backgrounds; this is a very good achievement.

1. Parents choose to send their children to Our Lady & St Oswald's not only because it is a Catholic school, but also because the school achieves high standards compared with standards in all schools nationally. High standards have been maintained since the last inspection. When children join the school, overall they attain as would be expected for their age-group, while some show well-developed language skills. During Years 1 and 2 they make good progress because they are encouraged well and taught well. This helps them to achieve results that are above average overall at the end of Key Stage 1; this includes well above average results in mathematics. The school adds value.
2. Over Years 3 to 6, the school adds further value so that, in comparison with all schools nationally, standards are exceptionally high in science, and high in English and mathematics.
3. A further achievement is shown by comparing the standards achieved at Key Stage 2 with the standards in those schools whose pupils come from similar backgrounds. This is a significant comparison because it is made in order to compare like with like. On this basis, pupils do very well indeed in English and mathematics, and exceptionally well in science. This comparison also confirms the improvement achieved from the end of Key Stage 1 to the end of Key Stage 2.
4. Teachers want pupils to be able to do their very best and to feel confident that they can. Booster classes are provided for Year 6 pupils. Staff are aware that pupils can feel pressure. This is something that worries some parents and the pupils.

School aims and values show very clearly in every aspect of its day-to-day work.

5. The school's day-to-day work is strongly rooted in Catholic values. The aims are a powerful statement of the ways in which the school community seeks to encourage children 'to rejoice in and develop their gifts and talents and to appreciate the gifts of others'. Pupils respond to others with care, courtesy and concern, the 'Three Cs', in lessons, when they are having lunch, and when they are playing outside. For example, when playing outside, a small group spoke gently to a younger pupil who is not so well, showing that they wanted to involve her in their conversation. In group reading, one Year 2 pupil helped another who was stuck over a word by giving some clues about how to work it out. At lunch, a Year 4 boy fetched a clean knife when a younger pupil dropped his on the floor. Adults almost always set an excellent example of the 'Three Cs' especially in the way they show respect for all members of the school community from the youngest upward.

Teaching and learning are good.

6. The particular features which, overall, make teaching as effective as it is, are the teachers' good subject knowledge, the thorough and detailed planning, their skills in managing pupils and their high expectations for pupils' success. Support staff generally make a good contribution. Resources are used well. Above all, teachers and assistants know pupils very well. This means that the comments and suggestions they make about pupils' work and in response to their questions, are generally pitched absolutely right to take learning forward. In good lessons, the pace keeps pupils on their toes, while the teacher skilfully adjusts the pace at times, for example, to enable a pupil with special learning needs to contribute confidently.
7. Good attention has been given to developing the planning for literacy and numeracy. Work is effectively prepared for the different year groups within classes and generally for the different abilities within year groups. Support staff are clear about their contribution, an improvement from last time. Where teaching is very good, the teacher sets an example of quietly focused thinking in relation to everything that happens in the lesson. The pupils respond with the same quality of thought and attentiveness. At another time, the teacher asks a series of thought-provoking questions that extends pupils' thinking in a sophisticated way, for example, when exploring a poem about Aesop. These approaches raise the standard of pupils' work.

Pupils contribute substantially to the quality of the school community; their attitudes and behaviour are a strength.

8. Pupils show mature attitudes to their work. They enjoy it and take care over it. They settle to work quickly in a business-like manner, setting about the daily routines sensibly and efficiently. When rain prevented a rounders game, pupils applied the same common sense in dealing with the cramped space in the hall. Behaviour is often impeccable. Across the age groups, concentration is good. Pupils listen well. Their responsiveness as listeners is notable in school assemblies. For example, they showed their pleasure, and sympathy, as the story of chocolate centres unfolded and three pupils discovered which centre they had chosen, soft and sweet, bitter or hard. The two with bitter and hard centres showed remarkable self-control and some humour in their chewing task.
9. Relationships between pupils are very good; the school's ethos and 'Three Cs' code contribute strongly to this. Pupils' relationships with adults are nearly always as good. They are unfailingly courteous to everyone. At breaks and lunchtimes the different age-groups mix well; pupils are lively, have fun and behave very well, even though play possibilities are limited. Both parents and pupils say that when the rare instances of bullying have occurred these have been effectively and quickly sorted out.

The school's care for its pupils is a strong feature.

10. Arrangements for ensuring that the school is a safe, secure place and a supportive community are very effective. Staff show strong commitment to the care of pupils. Teachers keep good records, and liaise closely with welfare services when necessary. Together with their good knowledge of individual children's circumstances, these all ensure timely and extensive action in supporting pupils

when there are personal difficulties. The headteacher's reports to governors keep them well informed about major issues of care.

Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development enriches pupils' experience.

11. A significant strength is the way in which different aspects of the school's provision interrelate. The school's Christian values, relationships, care for pupils, quality of teaching and pupils' attitudes all combine in supporting pupils' personal development. Assemblies are special occasions, providing rich opportunities for spiritual awareness through listening to stories and music, through prayers and through singing hymns. An unequivocal moral code is a thread of school life and the 'Three Cs' instil in pupils a strong sense of their social responsibility. The study of literature in Year 6, Year 6 pupils' drama on the story of Antigone, the display of Egyptian and Islamic patterns in art, listening to Vivaldi in assembly and singing the Jewish hymn 'Hevenu shalom aleikhem' support cultural development well.
12. The headteacher aptly describes the school as a singing school. As pupils from the reception class upwards sang confidently and thoughtfully in assembly and hymn practice they were drawn into the experience more deeply, not only because of the quality of the corporate occasion but because of their response to the expressiveness of the singing.

Parents think highly of the school's achievements.

13. Parents strongly support school values and are pleased that their children are happy at school. They appreciate the care shown for children. Both of these were judged to be very important by parents attending the meeting. Parents are pleased with the high standards of work and behaviour.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Governors do not have a sharp enough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

14. There are two things which are not working well enough. Both affect the extent to which governors can feel confident in accounting for the quality of the school's provision. The minutes of governing body meetings show meticulous attention to ensuring that school policies are in place and regularly reviewed and updated. However, the same quality of attention is not given to the evidence that shows how effectively the policies are being put into practice. Governors rely on the headteacher's report to keep them informed. These reports are full and interesting accounts of the school's work and achievements which make good reading. Governors helpfully attend the staff development day at which the year's developments are reviewed; the numeracy governor has been involved in training and has spent time in school. However, governors have not asked for, nor been offered, reports outlining the strengths and weaknesses that have been identified through systematic checking of provision, particularly teaching. There can be an effect on pupils' progress. For example, the school has not picked up the continuing variation in homework arrangements because checks across the school are not formally and regularly carried out and reported. Although concern about the quality of marking led helpfully to the governors' review of the marking policy earlier

in the year, provision across the school is still patchy. These two issues from the last inspection both need further work through checks and targets to ensure that the policy is properly followed.

15. The school has made a start on allocating staff time for monitoring the quality of teaching. This has been effective in bringing about some improvements. However, it is not a regular feature of the school's current work. Although the headteacher and deputy headteacher were able to observe lessons, teachers with responsibility for subjects have not all been able to do so. This means that they are not in a position to know first hand what is working well in their area of responsibility and what needs attention. Without a basis of first hand evidence, gathered through looking rigorously at teaching and other aspects of the school's work, staff managers cannot be fully effective. Without this information from staff the governing body cannot account for the school's performance with confidence.

Parents do not feel that the school's communication with them always works well.

16. The comments made by parents at the meeting, the written comments on the questionnaires and the questionnaire returns show that, while parents value the school's achievements and values, they do not feel well informed or well involved in the school's activities and development.
17. It is clear from the file of school letters home that parents are notified of events and trips and have received the school's apologies for late notification on occasion, an issue raised by some parents. The school has improved its communication with parents through termly newsletters, initiated in January 2000, giving information on learning topics and the curriculum as well as on day-to-day matters. These are helpful and interesting. In the current year, there has been a programme of parents' evenings, including a session on the numeracy strategy. Pupils' annual reports for each subject do not always give clear information about strengths and weaknesses in the subject but can focus, for example, on lack of interest or behaviour. In a similar way, across the key stages, some marking does not make clear what needs to be done to make improvements. When this occurs, it is unhelpful for pupils as well as for their parents.
18. What appears not to be well in place are opportunities for dialogue between the school and parents, including dialogue with the Parents' Association. The school has not extended the way in which it works with parents to incorporate consultation over future developments; for example, over changes which are being considered, over areas that parents would like to see developed, or over any major school expenditure plans. The home-school agreement does not recognise such consultation sufficiently.

The requirements for the appraisal of the headteacher have not been carried out by the governing body.

19. The governing body has not carried out a formal review of the headteacher's work. From September 1999 this has been a statutory requirement.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

20. The following issues are in order of importance for raising standards further. They

should be included in the governors' post-inspection action plan.

1. Ensure that governors have a clear understanding of school strengths and weaknesses
through
 - reviewing policy together with the evidence of practice;
 - arranging the programme of reviews by the governing body (of policy and practice) so that it works in tandem with a staff monitoring programme;
 - implementing staffing arrangements which enable senior staff and other staff managers to carry out their monitoring responsibility effectively;
 - establishing an annual programme of monitoring of teaching and the curriculum by staff included in the school diary and manageable;
 - involving governors in the review of evidence from monitoring;
 - ensuring that development planning takes into account the evidence from monitoring.*paragraphs 14-15*

2. Strengthen the school's partnership with parents
through
 - establishing arrangements for dialogue with parents as a regular feature of school life;
 - clarifying teachers' role in working with parents, for example, in preparing for children's starting school;
 - ensuring that communications are timely and explanatory;
 - ensuring that annual reports give adequate information about pupils' strengths and weaknesses in subjects.*paragraphs 16-18*

3. Meet requirements for the formal review of the headteacher's work.
paragraph 13

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

13

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

15

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	17	33	50	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	YR – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	141
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	15
Special educational needs	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	16
English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0
Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	5
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.5
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	0.5

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 1

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	11	10	21

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	10	10	10
	Girls	10	10	9
	Total	20	20	19
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	95 (100)	95 (95)	90 (95)
	National	82 (77)	83 (81)	87(84)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	10	10	11
	Girls	9	10	10
	Total	19	20	21
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	90 (95)	95 (95)	100 (100)
	National	82 (81)	86 (85)	87 (86)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	11	11	22

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	9	10	11
	Girls	10	10	11
	Total	19	20	22
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	86 (57)	91(57)	100 (76)
	National	70 (65)	69 (59)	78 (69)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	9	9	10
	Girls	10	10	10
	Total	19	19	20
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	86 (62)	86 (67)	91(76)
	National	68 (65)	69 (65)	75 (72)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	110
Any other minority ethnic group	7

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	5.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	26.0
Average class size	28.2

Education support staff: YR– Y6

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	38.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999-00
	£
Total income	235,121
Total expenditure	234,444
Expenditure per pupil	1,722
Balance brought forward from previous year	30,236
Balance carried forward to next year	30,913

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	135
Number of questionnaires returned	45

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	4	39	3	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	37	50	3	3	7
Behaviour in the school is good.	40	52	0	3	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	46	16	15	3
The teaching is good.	41	46	2	0	12
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	23	33	26	16	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	36	38	17	9	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	48	47	0	0	5
The school works closely with parents.	18	38	27	13	3
The school is well led and managed.	29	42	10	8	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	40	53	2	2	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	5	25	33	34	3