

INSPECTION REPORT

**ST. JOSEPH'S ROMAN CATHOLIC
VOLUNTARY AIDED PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Smailes Lane, Highfield, Rowlands Gill,
Gateshead. NE39 2DB

LEA area: Gateshead

Unique reference number: 108391

Head teacher: Miss T. March

Reporting inspector: Mrs. E. Graham
16431

Dates of inspection: 15th to 17th January 2001

Inspection number: 195482

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 to 11 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Smailes Lane,
Highfield,
Rowlands Gill,
Gateshead.

Postcode: NE39 2DB

Telephone number: 01207 542647

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr. P. Houghton

Date of previous inspection: 8th July 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Highfield, is a smaller than average school for pupils aged from 4 to 11. It presently has 99 pupils on roll. It serves the parishes of St. Joseph's Highfield and Our Lady of Lourdes Chopwell and children travel to the school from several surrounding villages. All of its pupils have English as a first language. Around 20% are eligible for free school meals, which is above the national average. The percentage of pupils identified as having special educational needs is below the national average but the number of pupils with statements of special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average. Children come to the school from three or more nursery classes and on entry to the reception class their attainment is broadly average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school with some very good features. It provides a secure and supportive environment in which children achieve well. When they leave at 11 they attain above the national average and more highly than pupils in similar schools in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are very good and the school provides very well for their personal development. The strong leadership and good management of the head teacher and the good quality of the teaching contribute to the school's success. Although the school has very high costs, pupils' current achievement is good, the school therefore provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards in English, mathematics and science are high due to effective teaching.
- Teaching is well planned and predominantly good. This is a significant factor in helping pupils to learn at a good rate.
- The school benefits from strong leadership that encourages effective teamwork and promotes high standards.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good and as a result they make good progress.
- The school provides very well for pupils' personal, spiritual, moral and social development, helping them to develop very positive relationships, attitudes and to behave very well.

What could be improved

- Improve provision for ICT so that pupils have better access on a more regular basis to activities using the computer.
- Develop further the role of governors in the management of the school so that they play a more active part in deciding and monitoring major priorities for development.

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 July 1996. Since then it has improved considerably, especially in the standards its pupils achieve in English, mathematics and science by the end of Key Stage 2. It has successfully addressed the issues raised in the last report:

- standards in information technology are now satisfactory, having previously been judged as unsatisfactory in both Key Stages 1 and 2;
- systems for monitoring and evaluating the attainment of pupils are now thorough;
- a very detailed development plan outlines and costs the priorities for the school and is used to evaluate its progress. The process now needs to be further refined to take account of information gathered through the school's own evaluation of its work;
- teachers' planning is now consistently good;
- procedures for assessing pupils' work are consistently carried out;
- a clear health and safety policy is now in place.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
English	B	C	A*	A*
mathematics	A	E	A	A*
science	A	D	A	A*

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Pupils are attaining high standards in English, mathematics and science. In the most recent tests for 11 year old pupils a much greater proportion achieved higher levels than the national average. Boys and girls attain similar levels and pupils with special educational needs attain levels that are high for their abilities. In comparison with similar schools the pupils' achievement is very high in English, mathematics and science.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have very good attitudes to school. They enjoy their lessons and opportunities to learn.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is very good. Pupils respect one another and their teachers and, as a result, the school is an orderly community.
Personal development and relationships	Personal development is very good. Pupils are confident, mature and independent. Relationships are always caring and supportive with pupils taking responsibility for themselves and others.
Attendance	Attendance is very good, reflecting pupils' enthusiasm for, and enjoyment of, school.

Pupils' attitudes, personal development and behaviour are real strengths of the school. Pupils work very hard to achieve their best. They get on together extremely well. Older pupils welcome opportunities to take on roles of responsibility, including caring and supporting younger children.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years	aged 7-11 years
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Good	Good

Teaching is good across the school and there are examples of very good and excellent teaching.

Teachers provide interesting and challenging activities for pupils at all levels of attainment. Lessons always build on previous learning which means that the pace is brisk and purposeful. Teachers'

knowledge and enthusiasm for their subjects and their skills at getting pupils actively involved in lessons help them to make good progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The foundation curriculum provides a good start to pupils' schooling. In Key Stages 1 and 2 the literacy and numeracy strategies are fully in place and are having an impact on attainment.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Children's needs are carefully assessed and programmes of support are well planned to help them make good progress. Teachers and other staff offer good quality teaching and support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. The school works hard to provide a wide range of opportunities to develop pupils' personal skills. The provision for their spiritual, social and moral development is a strength of the school. These aspects are supported strongly in assemblies.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school has a happy, caring family atmosphere. Staff know their pupils well and provide high levels of care.

The school provides an interesting and balanced curriculum with an appropriate emphasis of literacy and numeracy. It also provides very well for pupils' personal development and makes sure that they are safe and well supported during their time in the school.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the head teacher and other key staff	The head teacher provides good leadership. She has a clear view of the school's strengths and areas for development and has realistic plans for how it can continue to improve. The deputy head teacher and other staff support her effectively and ensure that developments are carefully planned and rigorously implemented.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is very supportive of the head teacher. It fulfils its statutory duty. Governors are increasingly involved in the life of the school and are beginning to monitor its work. A more active involvement in determining the major areas for development would help the head teacher in her planning.
The school's evaluation of its performance	There are good monitoring systems in place to enable the school to evaluate its teaching and the standards children are achieving.
The strategic use of resources	The school uses the resources available to it very well. The head teacher is very successful at securing extra funding for specific projects and these have helped to support identified priorities. Principles of best value are recognised and applied to the use of the school budget.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The progress their children make.• The good teaching.• The quality of the leadership and management.• The ways in which the school keeps them informed.• The support the school gives their children in their personal development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There were no significant suggestions for improvement except that a very small number of parents would like more activities outside lessons.

The inspection team agrees that the positive comments reflect the school's strengths. The range of activities provided outside lessons is satisfactory for a small school with a staff of this size.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards in English, mathematics and science are high due to effective teaching

1. On entry to the school the attainment of the children is usually broadly average. The attainment of the children presently in the reception class is above average in language, literacy and mathematical skills. As a result of very good teaching, pupils make good progress in these aspects of their learning and by the age of five a significant number of them are working at levels above what might be expected for children of this age nationally.
2. In Key Stage 1 children continue to make good progress in their reading which is taught effectively within the literacy hour when the class read together stories such as “Dick Whittington”. They are also carefully taught particular skills, such as how to recognise separate phonemes and that different sounds may have different spellings, when working in groups with their teacher. In addition to work in the literacy hour, pupils are given good opportunities to practise their skills during shared reading sessions with older pupils and classroom assistants. The school successfully encourages parents to support their children in learning to read. Both parents and staff value the home/school reading record. As a result of this comprehensive support and structured teaching, by the age of seven, children’s reading skills are above average and their progress is rapid.
3. By the time they are eleven, the majority of children are fluent and confident readers. Teachers give them access to a wide variety of forms of texts through work in the library, through the literacy hour and in work across the curriculum.
4. The school is very good at giving children the skills and encouraging them to have the confidence to use spoken language effectively. This begins in the reception class when, for example, the teacher made use of the “big book” entitled “Toys” to help children to frame their own questions about the toys in the pictures. By the end of Key Stage 1 they are able to have lively and well informed discussions about what they have observed. A good example was seen in a class of Year 1 and 2 pupils when they were able to discuss the similarities and differences between the performance of the pantomime “Dick Whittington” and the story version they had been reading. Older pupils show in a variety of situations that they have a good grasp of spoken language that they can adapt according to the situation. For example, in an English lesson looking at advertisements for houses, pupils could discuss clearly how estate agents sometimes turn negative aspects of houses into selling points and in assembly they were able to speak clearly and concisely to a larger audience.
5. The school has identified standards in aspects of writing as something it wants to improve, especially in Key Stage 2, nevertheless the majority of pupils are exceeding the national average in writing by the end of Key Stage 1 and are making good progress in Key Stage 2. Teaching of writing through the literacy hour is well structured. Teachers skilfully link learning about the structure of language with the development of writing skills. As a consequence, pupils in Year 3 for example, were able to improve the impact of their poems because they understood how strong adjectives can be used to lift their work.

6. In mathematics standards are also high. By the end of both key stages they are above average and pupils have made good gains in their skills, knowledge and understanding of most aspects of numeracy. Most can use mental methods very successfully to arrive quickly at accurate answers to number problems. A good example was seen in Year 6 when pupils were able to calculate $\frac{4}{5}$ of 40, $\frac{1}{100}$ of 42 and $\frac{2}{9}$ of 27 quickly and accurately in their heads. Though pupils are not quite as competent at solving mathematical problems expressed as word problems, the school has identified this as an area for development and teachers are emphasising this aspect of work in their planning. There is evidence that Year 6 pupils are beginning to make good gains in their ability to work out more complex problems. In a lesson focusing on number problems, for example, many Year 6 pupils were able to devise strategies to tackle a two step calculation within one problem. The high quality of the teaching of the national numeracy strategy across the school is supporting pupils' progress in mathematics effectively.
7. Attainment in science is also high. Pupils have a good grasp of scientific principles as was demonstrated in a Year 5/6 lesson about gravity and in a Year 1/2 lesson about materials and their properties. Teachers effectively use a range of teaching strategies to help pupils to learn. A particularly good example of group work in Year 5/6 used house captains to co-ordinate the work of the group and ensured that everyone participated.

Teaching is well planned and predominantly good. This is a significant factor in helping pupils to learn at a good rate.

8. Teaching is good across the school and there are many examples of very good and excellent teaching. Teachers plan work carefully and provide interesting and challenging activities for pupils at all levels of attainment. Pupils with special educational needs and those who are high attaining are supported with good quality resources to meet their particular needs. This sometimes involves the use of a lap-top computer. Lessons always build on previous learning which means that pupils quickly understand what they are meant to do. In this way the pace is kept brisk and purposeful and pupils' motivation and interest are maintained. A good example was observed in a Year 1/2 science lesson when pupils were reminded of work previously done on the differences between transparent, opaque and translucent before moving on to investigate, in groups, other properties that materials have.
9. Teachers have very good relationships with pupils. They have high expectations of them and regularly give them good levels of responsibility to work independently. For example, in a very good Year 3/4 numeracy lesson one group was able to work intensively on problem-solving tasks while the teacher worked with a large group learning strategies for addition. This was possible because the task was carefully explained and supported by well-prepared resources. Pupils understood that they were required to be independent and were supported in this by a very well organised learning environment and easy access to a range of resources.
10. The very good and excellent teaching is characterised by a thorough knowledge of the subject and a bright and engaging style of delivery. This was seen in the plenary session of a literacy lesson when the teacher had worked with a group developing a poem. Her enthusiasm and thorough understanding of language development enabled her to inspire the group to make a very powerful performance of their work.

11. Across the school the focus of the teaching is on helping pupils to achieve. Careful use of assessment, regular marking of work and carefully planned and relevant homework all contribute to the good progress that children are making in the school.

The school provides very well for pupils' personal, spiritual, moral and social development, helping them to develop very positive relationships, attitudes and to behave very well.

12. The school places considerable emphasis on developing pupils' personal skills. From their first days in the school pupils are provided with a range of opportunities to help them develop positive relationships with others. A good example was observed when children in the reception class were involved in acting out together the launch of a rocket by counting down from ten to "blast off". Teachers know their pupils well and provide very good role-models for them by showing respect for all members of the school community. There is a good quality programme for teaching elements of personal and social education within the religious education curriculum. This includes good opportunities for pupils to think about their personal responses to aspects of life as future citizens. For example, in a Key Stage 2 assembly, pupils faced with the dilemma of choosing how they would deal with a situation where they see a friend stealing sweets from a shop. They are aware of the danger of losing a friend but choose to take the responsible option as future good citizens.
13. Teachers regularly praise good work and reward effort and good behaviour. The celebration assembly held each week helps to show pupils that their efforts are valued. Throughout the school there is a sense of care and support for one another. On entering the school children are paired with older pupils and these relationships are often maintained for several years. The quality of their relationships and the care and support they are prepared to give one another was observed in a shared reading session when Year 6 pupils supported Year 1 pupils in their reading. Wider opportunities to help others are provided by fund-raising for charities and a group of older children run a shop for the whole school each morning break. Two pupils from Year Groups 3 to 6 ably represent the views of their peers on the school council. As a result of their discussion magazines have been provided at lunch time for pupils to read while they are waiting to leave the dining room.
14. Pupils have very good attitudes to school. They work very hard in lessons and enjoy opportunities to learn. They always want to do their best and willingly take on responsibilities offered to them.
15. Their behaviour is very good. The positive climate for learning which is created results in pupils making good progress and achieving high standards in their work.

The school benefits from strong leadership that encourages effective team work and promotes high standards

16. The head teacher provides good leadership to the school. She has a clear vision for the school and an informed view of its strengths and areas for development. She has detailed plans for how it can continue to improve and is keen to involve the governing body in playing an active part in this improvement. She values her staff and encourages very effective team work by making sure that responsibilities are fairly allocated and that everyone understands their role in the school. The deputy head teacher and other staff support her effectively by ensuring that initiatives are carefully planned and rigorously implemented. Good examples are the positive way in which the literacy and numeracy strategies have been introduced into the school and the impact they are having on teaching and standards.
17. There have been a number of staff changes since the previous inspection. The head teacher has ensured that new staff have been supported and helped to settle into the staff team. She gives time and opportunity for all staff to develop their skills. Good examples are the extensive staff development that is underway to improve the teaching of ICT and the effective way in which the literacy and numeracy co-ordinators have used their training to help the whole staff team to develop their skills and knowledge in these areas. High standards are maintained because staff are encouraged to work to their strengths and to support one another to improve.
18. The staff all work very hard, many of them carrying responsibility for the co-ordination of several subjects. All are clear about their roles. There are good systems in place for monitoring planning, teaching and standards. Systems are being developed for monitoring other aspects of the school. The head teacher recognises that the next stage is to use the full range of this information to refine the process of agreeing priorities for the development plan.
19. Finances are well managed and the governors and the head teacher have worked hard to secure additional funding to improve aspects of the school. The building improvements, for example, have had a positive impact on the learning environment. The school runs very smoothly as a result of the very able administrative and support staff working well as part of the whole school team.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good and as a result they make good progress

20. The school has a thorough and carefully planned system for identifying pupils with special educational needs at an early stage in their schooling. Parents are involved from the beginning of the process. The needs of individual pupils are carefully analysed and a programme is planned to help meet those needs. The school is very good at providing for the range of problems children have. Class teachers and learning support staff work effectively together to make sure that all children with special educational needs are helped to make as much progress as possible. Parents are encouraged to contribute to the process. Resources are well used, for example very good use is made of ICT to help children to understand and make progress in English.

21. Pupils with language difficulties receive intensive support out of class. Their learning is effectively reinforced in the classroom by class teachers. Teachers plan class work very carefully to make sure that pupils of different abilities are working at an appropriate level. As a results of the good provision many reach levels beyond expectation.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Improve provision for ICT so that pupils have better access on a more regular basis to activities using the computer.

22. The school has made considerable progress since the previous inspection in updating the computers available within the school. Those available are now of good quality. However, each class group has access to only one computer on a regular basis, with a further three available in a small room to be used by small groups. This gives a ratio of computers to pupils of about 1:14 which is still insufficient to meet the needs of the developing curriculum.
23. The subject co-ordinator has worked hard to improve teachers' ICT skills and to plan a whole-school scheme to cover the National Curriculum. Teachers ensure that pupils are covering the work and have a clear action plan to improve pupils' attainment. While standards are now in line with expectations for age, pupils are still achieving below the levels they achieve in other subjects. This is a direct result of insufficient opportunities for pupils to practise the skills that they are taught in groups or as a whole class by teachers demonstrating the use of programs. Many pupils wait several days before reaching their turn to use the computer. For example, when Year 1 and 2 pupils had been shown how to use the "creating pictures" program, they were frustrated that their plans had to wait to be realised.
24. Older pupils more often have the opportunity to work in small groups in the small central ICT room. However, these computers are insufficiently used, especially during the morning sessions when literacy and numeracy lessons are taking place. The school needs to plan carefully how it can make more efficient use of this facility to help pupils develop those skills which would help them to use ICT independently.

Develop further the role of governors in the management of the school so that they play a more active part in determining and monitoring major school developments.

25. The governing body is very supportive of the head teacher and is interested in what is happening in the school. Many governors visit the school informally as well as attending governing body meetings. Committees to monitor the curriculum, finance and health and safety have recently been established. Some governors help in classrooms on a regular basis. Governors are aware of their statutory responsibilities and have received recent training to help them carry out their role in performance management. The head teacher keeps governors up-to-date on budgetary matters and on the standards pupils achieve in national tests through regular reports at governors' meetings. They also receive reports about progress towards the development plan tasks.

26. Governors are therefore well informed about the day-to-day work of the school. However, at present the process for deciding what should be the main developments in each year is left mainly to the teaching staff and the head teacher. The governing body now needs to be in a position to evaluate whether or not the priorities chosen are the right ones for the school. The new committee structure gives it the potential for being more involved in the development planning process and for monitoring the implementation of its plans.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

27. In order to continue the development of this good school, the head teacher, staff and governors should:
- Improve provision for ICT so that pupils have better access on a more regular basis to activities using the computer.
 - Develop further the role of governors in the management of the school so that they play a more active part in deciding and monitoring major priorities for development.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	20
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	3

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3	21	16	13	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	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	0	99
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	0	17

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	0	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	3
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	3

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	0.8
National comparative data	5.2

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
	2000	8	5	13

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Total	12	13	13
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	92 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	84 (82)	85 (83)	90 (87)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Total	12	13	13
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	92 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	84 (82)	88 (86)	88 (87)

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
	2000	8	6	14

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Total	14	11	14
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	100 (63)	79 (63)	100 (84)
	National	75 (70)	72 (69)	85 (78)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Total	14	11	14
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	100 (74)	79 (63)	100 (95)
	National	70 (68)	72 (69)	80 (75)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
White	99
Any other minority ethnic group	

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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)	5.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	23.6:1
Average class size	24.8

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	6

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	0

Total number of education support staff	0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	0

Number of pupils per FTE adult	23.6:1
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	188,501.00
Total expenditure	198,494.00
Expenditure per pupil	2,068.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	11,814.00
Balance carried forward to next year	1,821.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	99
Number of questionnaires returned	30

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	60	40	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	53	47	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	67	33	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	50	40	7	0	3
The teaching is good.	70	30	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	57	33	10	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	83	17	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	77	23	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	53	37	10	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	70	27	0	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	77	23	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	23	50	17	7	3