

INSPECTION REPORT

IDSALL SCHOOL

Shifnal, Telford

LEA area: Shropshire

Unique reference number: 123568

Headteacher: Mr D C Gibbons

Reporting inspector: Dr Kenneth C Thomas
3390

Dates of inspection: 13 – 16 November 2000

Inspection number: 223763

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Coppice Green Lane Shifnal Telford Shropshire
Postcode:	WV16 4LZ
Telephone number:	01952 460213
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs M Higson
Date of previous inspection:	28 November 1994

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6-10
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	11-19
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	19-21
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	21
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	22-26

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Idsall is a mixed comprehensive school for students aged 11-18. There are 1217 students on roll making it bigger than other comprehensive schools with a sixth form. About two thirds of the student intake in Year 7 is drawn from Shifnal and Albrighton, with most of the remaining students coming from South and East Telford. The school is popular and is oversubscribed. Because the admissions area includes RAF Cosford, about three per cent of students entered the school other than at the usual time of first admission. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. A very small number of students, 11 only, speak English as an additional language. The overall attainment of students on entry, although wide ranging, is above average. The proportion of students with special educational needs, at 13.5 per cent, is below the national average, while the proportion with Statements of Special Educational Needs, at 2.3 per cent, is about average. The school provides community education courses in the evenings.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Idsall is a very good school. Standards are well above average and rising because good teaching with high expectations is bringing the best out of students. There is a strong sense of a learning community, in which relationships are excellent. The headteacher and senior management team provide excellent leadership, which is well supported by the governors. Resources are well managed and the school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Students make good progress and achieve well above average standards at Key Stage 3 and in GCSE examinations.
- Highly effective leadership from the headteacher, senior management team and governors promotes good teamwork and enables students to achieve very good standards.
- Teachers have high expectations and succeed in motivating students.
- Students' attitudes are excellent, contributing well to learning and to the sense of community in the school.
- Rigorous monitoring of students' academic and personal development supports learning.
- Personal, social and cultural development is enhanced by an excellent range of extra-curricular activities and a high quality personal, social and health education programme.
- Students with special educational needs are very well supported and make very good progress.

What could be improved

- Standards of attainment in design and technology.
- Curriculum time and the provision of religious education at Key Stage 4.

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 November 1994 and has made very good progress since that time. Standards of attainment in the National Curriculum tests, taken at the end of Year 9, and in the GCSE examination, taken at the end of Year 11, have risen consistent with the national trends. The quality of teaching has improved considerably and no unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection. The school has successfully implemented strategies to raise the performance of underachieving students in general and boys in particular. The progress made by students is now carefully monitored and reported to parents in detail. Curriculum provision at each key stage is well managed and attention is paid to continuity and progression. In addition, the school has introduced strategies to ensure progression in literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology. The curriculum for the sixth form has been broadened to include vocational qualifications. Improvement has been made in the provision of religious education at Key Stage 4 but the option choice arrangement does not allow all students to receive their full entitlement at this key stage. The school does not meet the requirement for a daily act of collective worship. School management has been strengthened and middle managers are

now more fully involved in school management issues. Appropriate targets are set and the school has the capacity for further improvement.

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	1999
GCSE examinations	B	A	A	B
A-levels/AS-levels	C	C	C	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

Students achieve well at Idsall School and results in the National Curriculum tests taken at the age of 14 have been improving at the same rate as the national trend. Overall results have been consistently well above average in comparison with all schools and above average in comparison with similar schools. In 2000 results were well above average in science and mathematics and above average in English both in comparison with all schools and also with similar schools. These results represent good progress from the age of 11.

GCSE results show, overall, steady improvement since 1995. The 2000 results were above those achieved in 1999 and, as in most years, well above average in national terms and above average in comparison with similar schools. Students' results for five subjects at the higher A*-C grades were well above the national average and above average relative to similar schools. These results represent good progress from the end of Year 9. Students did well in mathematics and science, where results were well above average. Results in English were above average. Girls outperformed boys in all three subjects. GCSE results in all subjects, other than design and technology, were above average and were better than those achieved in 1999, particularly in French, German, geography, history, information and communications technology and religious education. Overall results in design and technology in 2000 were below average because of the well below average performance of boys. Overall results at A level were close to the national average and represent satisfactory achievement and progress from GCSE. Results of all national tests and examinations are monitored carefully and challenging targets are set for individual subjects and for the school overall.

In lessons and work seen, standards at the ages of 14 and 16 are well above national expectations. Very little work of below average standard was seen. In the sixth form, standards are at least in line with course expectations.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Students enjoy coming to school. They are very committed to their learning and keen to succeed.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Almost all students are considerate, respectful and friendly.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Students respond very well to the many opportunities to show initiative and to take responsibility. Participation rates in school activities are high.

Attendance	Consistently very good. The school makes strenuous efforts to maintain good levels of attendance.
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The climate for learning is excellent and based upon excellent relationships throughout the school. The school behaviour code is clearly understood. Incidents of bullying are few and they are dealt with firmly. Excellent attitudes in lessons help students to learn well. Students are supportive of each other.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	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.

Teaching is good overall. In 77 per cent of lessons teaching is good or better and in 23 per cent of lessons it is very good or excellent. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Teaching in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is good. Particular strengths of teaching are the effective use of teachers' subject knowledge to give clear explanations and guide students' progress. Expectations are high and teachers are good role models. Students are very well managed. Teachers' planning is mostly good and this, together with the effective use of assessment, helps students to learn systematically. Good use is made of opportunities to improve students' literacy and numeracy skills in many subjects. Planning for information and communications technology lessons is very good, which helps students to progress well. The use of information and communications technology in other subjects is increasing and involving more staff. There are weaknesses in teaching in design and technology resistant materials. Planning for students with special educational needs is very good; they learn well across the full curriculum and into the sixth form. Extra activities are provided for higher-attaining students. Students' work is regularly checked and marked according to the school policy. Satisfactory use is made of homework.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Broad and balanced with well-planned schemes of work. Extra-curricular activities are excellent and a strength of the school.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Attention is given to individual needs and students participate well. Emphasis on reading is effective and helps students to cope with work in all their subjects.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The very few students with English as an additional language have no language difficulties that require additional support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good, overall. Opportunities for moral, social and cultural development are very good. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. The requirement for collective worship is not met.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school is caring; individual students are known well. Progress is monitored systematically and targets are set to help students improve. Health and safety procedures are good. A supportive environment in which to learn.

The curriculum is broad and balanced from Years 7 to 11 and builds upon very good links with the primary schools. Most students have the opportunity to study a second language. The school provides a good range of A/S and A-level subjects as well as courses leading to vocational qualifications. Sixth form students are well supported. Requirements of the National Curriculum are met, except for the provision of religious education for all students at Key Stage 4. The weekly teaching time in Years 9 to 11 is 50 minutes below the recommended 25 hours. Provision for sport is very good and the school has very recently been granted Sports College status. A very good programme of support and guidance, related to students' personal, careers and academic development, helps them to make very good progress in all aspects of school life.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. Energetic leadership with a sense of vision is committed to raising achievement and helping students to make the most of their opportunities.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	They provide very good support and fulfil most of their statutory responsibilities. Governors are effective in questioning and supporting the work of departments to which they are attached.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent: there is rigorous monitoring and evaluation at all levels of teaching and of students' progress.
The strategic use of resources	The development plan provides a clear framework for spending priorities. Efficient use is made of the school's resources. Valuable support is given by non-teaching staff.

Leadership of the school is highly effective and staff at all levels have a strong commitment to improving standards. Rigorous monitoring of the school's work has brought about sustained improvement since the last inspection. The school is a self-evaluating organisation. It has a good grasp of its strengths and weaknesses. Financial planning is excellent and the principles of best value are applied in all spending. External grants and other resources are used efficiently.

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 school expects students to work hard and achieve their best. The progress their children are making. The school is helping their children become mature and responsible. The extensive range of extra-curricular activities Children like school and behaviour is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The information the school provides. The closeness with which the school works with parents. The amount of homework students are given.

Parents are very supportive of the school and inspectors endorse their positive views. Some parents had mixed feelings about the closeness with which the school works with them and the information it provides. Inspectors found that the school strives hard to involve parents: through very good annual reports they receive comprehensive information on the progress their children are making. However, there is inconsistency in the clarity with which the detail in some of the reports is summarised in order that parents can clearly grasp what their children know, understand and can do, and what they must do in order to improve. Homework is set regularly in most subjects and homework tasks are generally used to consolidate and extend pupils' learning.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Students make good progress and achieve well above average standards at Key Stage 3 and in GCSE examinations.

1. Students achieve well at Idsall School and results in national tests and examinations taken at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are improving at the same rate as the national trends. National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 6 show that students enter Idsall School with standards of attainment that, although wide-ranging, are, overall, above average. By the end of Year 9, standards of attainment in English, mathematics and science are well above average. In the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 1999, students were about one and a half terms ahead of students in other schools in English, about two terms ahead in mathematics and over two and a half terms ahead in science. The results have continued to improve and in 2000 the results in all three subject were above those achieved in 1999. These results represent good levels of progress from the time students entered the school. There are differences in the performance of boys and girls, with girls outperforming boys, overall. Although the performance of both boys and girls is above national averages, the performance of girls is above the national average for girls by a greater margin than the performance of boys is above the national average for boys. The 2000 Teacher Assessments in other subjects show above average attainment by the end of Year 9 in all subjects other than physical education, where it is about average.
2. Progress across Years 10 and 11 is good and students achieve good standards relative to their attainment at the end of Year 9. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, 67 per cent of students achieved five or more A* - C grades compared with the national average of 49 per cent, and 94 per cent of students achieved five or more A* - G grades compared to 89 per cent nationally. The average GCSE point score per student was well above average in comparison with all schools and above average in comparison with similar schools. The 2000 results continue the rising trend in the school's results at the end of Year 11, with ten per cent more students achieving 5 or more A*-C grades than in the previous year. Almost all of the Year 11 students are entered for GCSE and in most years virtually all students entered are successful in achieving certificates. This reflects very well on the progress of students with special educational needs and those who join the school late. The school has been working hard to improve the standards of boys, who are consistently outperformed by girls in the GCSE examination. Boys have responded well to the various initiatives the school has taken and the increase in the proportion of students achieving 5 or more A*-C grades in 2000 is largely because of a substantial improvement in the performance of boys.
3. Results in the 2000 GCSE English and English literature examinations are well above the national average. In 2000, all of the students entered for English literature achieved grades in the A*-C range. These high standards were reflected in the work seen during the inspection. The standards reached by students in mathematics in the 2000 GCSE examination were above those reached in 1999 when the results were significantly above the national average. Overall results in science are very good. Results in physics, chemistry and biology in 1999 were significantly above the national averages with virtually all of the students entered in each of the three sciences achieving grades A*-C. In 2000, all of the students entered for each of the three science subjects achieved A*-C grades. Results in the double award science examination, although below those achieved in 1999, were average. Results in the single award science examination in 2000 were much higher than those achieved in 1999 and well above average. Boys have responded well to initiatives to raise their performance and in English literature in 2000, boys' results matched those of girls, while the gap between the results of boys and girls in English narrowed slightly. The performance of boys and girls is broadly similar in science while girls outperform boys in mathematics. Results in other GCSE subjects in 1999 were above the national average in all subjects other than design and technology. Results in design and technology were below average in 1999 because of the significantly below average performance of boys. Although the performance of boys improved slightly in 2000 the performance of girls declined, so that the overall 2000 results in design and technology are below those achieved in 1999. Results in most other subjects in 2000 show a rise

above those achieved in 1999, particularly in French, German, geography, history, information and communications technology and religious education.

4. Results at Advanced level in the General Certificate of Education have generally been close to the national average. Progress across Years 12 and 13 is satisfactory and the levels of achievement are consistent with standards of attainment at the end of Year 11. The standards of attainment and levels of achievement of students following General National Vocational Qualification courses are satisfactory.
5. In lessons and other work seen, standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are above national expectations in most subjects. As a result of the National Literacy Strategy, students enter the school in Year 7 with a sound basic knowledge of language and this is developed through the school's own literacy strategy. The strategy is implemented effectively in most departments and by the end of Year 9 standards of literacy are above average. This contributes to the good progress that students are making in almost all subjects. Students are good listeners and listen well to teachers and to one another. They have a good command of standard spoken English and express their viewpoints fluently. They understand and use specialist vocabulary in, for example, mathematics and science. The use of technical language is underpinned by reference to subject key words, which are displayed in most classrooms, for example, in modern languages, religious education and English. However, this practice is inconsistent in design and technology. In Years 10 and 11, students articulate their responses to questions clearly and use language precisely when speaking. They show above average comprehension skills and offer good analysis and response to literature. Sixth form students engage in high quality spontaneous discussions and use sophisticated vocabulary when exploring their work. Reading and comprehension standards are above average throughout the school. This enables students, including those with special educational needs, to meet all curricular demands. Through such activities as the book week and other book-related events, good use of the library and silent reading in English, the school provides effective support for personal reading. Many students write fluently and attain above average standards, producing good creative writing in all years. A wide range of writing skills is developed as students write for a range of purposes and audiences. The English department collaborates effectively with the primary schools to ensure continuity of writing skills and this helps to improve attainment. The few students with English as an additional language are at an advanced stage of language development and are able to access the full curriculum.
6. Students' number skills are above average and they have quick mental recall. The school has implemented a numeracy strategy, which is led by the mathematics department. This is helping to develop students' numeracy skills as they progress through Years 7 to 9. A high proportion of mathematics lessons start with the practice of mental arithmetic skills. Normally these practices are concentrated on one particular operation, for example, finding two fifths of several quantities. This helpfully avoids the confusion that the practising of too many different mental arithmetic skills in a brief warm-up session at the start of lessons can cause. Key words are displayed in mathematics classrooms. Teachers refer to these words during lessons and this helps to consolidate the words as part of students' developing mathematical vocabularies. Students' attitudes to developing their numeracy skills are good and they are applied well in other subjects. They are keen to make progress and see the advantages of being able to apply numerical skills in all subjects. In science students manipulate whole numbers and decimals for their scientific tasks and make use of tables and graphs to present results. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, bar charts were used effectively to demonstrate the composition of crude oil. Students are also able to calculate results to a required degree of accuracy and understand estimation and errors. Numerical skills are also used effectively in geography and business studies, where good use is made of tables and graphs to present and interpret information accurately. In art, students are able to make good judgements about the size and proportion of objects. In Years 10 and 11, students show a lively interest in their investigative work, recognise patterns and produce neat diagrams which aid their thinking. Algebraic skills are strong and students' understanding of shape and space is good. Higher-attaining students are able to move from written conclusions to proposing mathematical rules, making good use of algebra. Most students make appropriate use of calculators and information and communications technology. Higher-attaining students use calculators efficiently to handle complex calculations. However, some students tend to use calculators when carrying out basic calculations that could be performed more quickly mentally.

Students in all years are keen to discuss methods and answers to problems in order to improve their work.

7. Above average standards were observed in creative subjects, including art, drama and music. Students do well in projects and coursework, for example, in their portfolios for art. They benefit from working alongside practising artists, playing in musical ensembles and participating in drama productions and in the exceptionally wide range of extra-curricular activities offered at the school. Both individuals and teams achieve highly in sports, some at regional and national levels, for example, in trampolining and netball. About three quarters of students progress from the sixth form into higher education.

Highly effective leadership from the headteacher, senior management team and governors promotes good teamwork and enables students to achieve very good standards.

8. The overall leadership and management of the school are excellent. The head and senior management team provide a clear educational direction for the school. The school has a strong positive ethos and provides a well-ordered learning environment in which there is a strong commitment to continuous improvement and the raising of standards in all areas. Central to the realisation of this commitment are the processes of school development planning and self-evaluation, which are exemplary and are having a clear impact on the raising of standards in the school. This is evident in standards of attainment, attitudes, behaviour, personal development and relationships, all of which are very good. School development planning reflects the school aims, identifies relevant priorities and covers both medium and long-term goals. Plans are costed effectively and have clearly defined targets, tasks, success criteria, staff responsibilities and timescales. All school plans serve as working documents and are directly linked to action to improve the quality of education the school provides. The school is very well placed to continue its improvement.
9. Commitment to improvement is underpinned by the rigour with which the school monitors and evaluates its work. The leadership team carries out reviews of all subjects on a three year cycle. These reviews include a three day full review carried out by members of the senior management team, with evidence gathered from observations of lessons, discussions with students, examination of samples of students' work, reviews of schemes of work and performance data together with interviews with each member of the subject teaching team. In addition, external consultants are engaged to focus on specific aspects of teaching and learning. One recent example of the effective use of external consultants has been in the development of strategies to improve the performance of boys. These review procedures are firmly embedded in the school's self-evaluation processes and provide the senior management team, and others, with leadership responsibilities, with a very clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This approach is having a direct impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The overall quality of management provided by heads of department is very good and having a positive effect on the raising of standards. A strong sense of teamwork is evident in most departments and this, too, helps to raise standards and, in particular, improve the achievement of students with special educational needs.
10. Governors have high expectations and are conscientious in carrying out their responsibilities. They are keen to ensure that the principles of best value are applied in all spending and this is reflected in their approach to financial management and planning. Statutory requirements are met, except for the provision of a daily act of collective worship and religious education for all students in Years 10 and 11. Governors take a keen interest in the work of the school and provide a substantial amount of specialist help and advice. Positive relationships exist between the governing body and the senior management team. Governors have a good awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses: they receive regular detailed reports from the head and other senior members of staff and are linked to subject departments. Governors are committed to helping the school to do its best for students and the local community.

11. Through its systematic approach to improvement, the school has made very good progress in overcoming weaknesses reported at the last inspection. Good progress has been made, for example, on improving the performance of boys in the GCSE examination. New strategies have been introduced to identify and support underachieving students and these are having positive effects, as evidenced by the improving standards in the GCSE examination. Curriculum provision at each key stage is well managed and attention is paid to continuity and progression. In addition, the school has introduced strategies to ensure progression in literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology. The curriculum for the sixth form has been broadened to include vocational qualifications. At the time of the last inspection, procedures for the assessment and monitoring of students' progress were not systematic but they are now. Rigorous systems have been developed which enable the school to closely monitor students' achievement and progress and provide additional support or challenge as necessary. Challenging targets are set for results overall and in subjects. The quality of teaching has improved considerably and no unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection. Improvement has been made in the provision of religious education at Key Stage 4 but the option choice arrangement does not allow all students to receive their full entitlement at this key stage. Due to the lack of a suitable space to accommodate the whole school, it has not been possible for the school to meet the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship. School management has been strengthened and middle managers are now more fully involved in school management issues. The excellent leadership and management of the school are making significant contributions to the standards being achieved and the quality of education the school provides.

Teachers have high expectations and succeed in motivating students.

12. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have high expectations and make a substantial contribution to the success of students. They have worked hard since the last inspection to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Effective strategies have been developed to improve teaching and learning in all subjects and the initiatives taken to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning, and to identify and share good practice, are having a positive effect. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Teaching is good in all key stages. It was good or better in 77 per cent of lessons seen. In these lessons varied and challenging teaching captured students' interest and stimulated thoughtful responses. In the 23 per cent of very good or excellent lessons, teaching was imaginative, well paced, lively and productive, enabling students to quickly gain new knowledge and understanding and to acquire appropriate skills.
13. The foundation of this good teaching is uniformly very good relationships. Teachers have good control and management skills and very good relationships with students, who benefit from the purposeful and effective atmosphere for learning. Lessons are very well planned to build systematically on students' knowledge, understanding and skills. In mathematics in Year 7, for example, repetition using entertaining approaches, such as the use of cards which contain families of equivalent fractions, helps students to remember basic rules. They are well challenged and interested and, by Year 11, students become active and mature learners, who are able to work independently for long periods of time. In science, Year 11 students responded well to challenging work about radioactivity. They learned that half-life is constant to a given element and that this produces an exponential curve if radioactivity is plotted against time. In history, students learn well in lessons because teachers draw on their knowledge to give clear explanations and ask well-focused questions to emphasise main points, as observed, for example, in a Year 7 lesson about the Norman conquest.
14. Teachers involve students skilfully in their own learning, which helps them to progress well and raises their self-esteem. In a Year 7 English lesson, for example, keen but excitable students were calmed by a short period of personal silent reading followed by the writing of a log of what they had read. Activities such as this not only help to develop students' reading skills but also their abilities to concentrate on the task. In physical education, students learn to show consideration for others in the use of equipment and space. Students' learning in personal, social and health education is promoted through teacher-led discussions, which are skilfully managed to engage all students. This was seen, for example, in a Year 9 lesson on young people and crime where students were able to express their views clearly and listened intently to the views of

others. Skilful questioning to probe and develop students' understanding is a feature of much of the teaching in the sixth form. Often this leads to mature and well-informed discussion, as in a Year 13 business studies lesson where the strengths and weaknesses of several theories of motivation were compared.

15. Teachers build well on the interests of students, who respond very well on projects and longer pieces of coursework. Art portfolios and project work in geography, for example, are very well researched and of a good standard. Good technician support facilitates the effective use of resources and lessons are usually conducted at a brisk pace to achieve objectives. Effective use is made of information and communications technology where CD-ROMs and Internet facilities give access to a wide range of good quality information. Teachers generally take good account of the different levels at which students are working and this is facilitated by the allocation of students to teaching groups according to levels of attainment. The valuable support available from learning support assistants and volunteer sixth form students also enables teachers to give greater attention to the individual needs of students. Targets are regularly set by teachers to help individual students understand how to improve in most subjects. Students' work is regularly checked, with marks given according to the school marking policy. This provides students with clear information on the standard of their work in terms of National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades. Marking is less helpful in design and technology resistant materials: it is irregular and does not provide students with clear guidance on what they must do in order to improve. Peer assessment is used effectively in some subjects to improve standards. In physical education, for example, students are encouraged to evaluate one another's performance and to offer suggestions on how it might be improved. Particularly effective use is made of peer assessment in English. For example, in a Year 8 lesson with lower-attaining students, a clear understanding of the criteria for assessing a piece of narrative writing enabled students to assess each other's stories in a way that gave them a deeper understanding of what constitutes effective story writing. In general, homework is used effectively to consolidate and extend students learning.

Students' attitudes are excellent, contributing well to learning and to the sense of community in the school.

16. Idsall students are proud of their school. Their attitudes to work are excellent. Relationships, both among students and with their teachers, are very good. Students are keen to help each other in lessons and are considerate towards those with disabilities. They work well in groups and behave responsibly when working on their own, as observed in a Year 10 mathematics lesson when students showed good levels of concentration and self-discipline when working without direct teacher supervision. Similarly in a Year 7 French lesson, students showed intense concentration and worked very productively when engaged on a writing task under test conditions and so without direct teacher support. The sense of community in the school is enhanced by the numerous displays of students' work in corridors and classrooms. Students show respect for these displays, which remain untouched even though many are uncovered and located on quite narrow corridors. There is no evidence of graffiti on any of the school buildings and public areas remain relatively litter-free after breaks. Sixth formers are keen and enthusiastic about their work. They volunteer to support students in lessons and, during lunch breaks, act as mentors to students in need of additional support. Their mature and responsible behaviour adds considerably to the general ethos of the school. Students use the learning resource centre, art, music and computer rooms, workshops and laboratories very responsibly and are very conscious of safety needs when engaged in practical activities. This is seen, for example, in trampolining lessons where students observe the basic safety rules when 'spotting' for others who are working on the trampoline.
17. The very good climate for learning is due to several factors, and in particular to the way in which students respond to teachers' high expectations. They are courteous, helpful to visitors and show respect to each other and to their teachers. Behaviour around the premises is very good at lesson changeover times. Students queue patiently when waiting to enter the dining hall, make their way to assemblies in a calm manner and respect others in the learning resource centre by working quietly and purposefully. This makes a significant contribution to the sense of community in the school. The school makes strenuous efforts to support those students with behaviour difficulties

and works very hard to avoid the need to exclude them. These efforts, which include mentoring by a member of the sixth form, attachment to a member of the senior management team or referral to the behavioural support unit, are working well. As a consequence, the rate of exclusions has been falling. During the last school year there were 25 fixed-period exclusions and no permanent exclusions. Both of these figures are below the number of exclusions found in secondary schools of similar size. The school has a clear anti-bullying policy and takes a serious view of any such incidents. Students interviewed during the week of the inspection reported that there were few incidents of bullying and when incidents did occur, they were dealt with effectively by the school. They were confident that any future incidents would also be dealt with effectively. Attendance is above average with little unauthorised absence. Because students are punctual at the start of morning and afternoon school, teachers can make the best use of the lesson time available.

Rigorous monitoring of students' academic and personal development supports learning.

18. The school provides very good support for students in a carefully structured and friendly environment. Parents value the support the school provides for their children. An effective pastoral system balances the school's high expectations with sensitivity to each student's individual needs in a way that enhances the standards that students can achieve. Continuity in care is a feature of the school and built on the role of the form tutors. Form tutors are first introduced to the students when they spend two induction days at the school in June before admission to Year 7 in the following September. Parents think that this is a particularly valuable experience for their children. Each form tutor retains responsibility for the same tutor group throughout Years 7 to 11. Students are in contact with their form tutors every morning and afternoon for registration and for their weekly personal, social and health education lessons. This enables tutors to develop a very good knowledge of individual students and their particular social and educational needs. This knowledge underpins the school's provision for students' personal development, which is a strength of the school. Year team leaders play important roles in ensuring continuity in care and provide good support for form tutors. Form tutors liaise with subject teachers and heads of year, all of whom meet regularly to discuss and monitor individual students' academic and social progress. Year leaders also have regular meetings with the senior management team to discuss students' progress. As a result, students are provided with very good support as they move through the school. The quality of this provision makes a significant contribution to their progress and achievement. The school's good links with further and higher education institutions, the careers service and local employers ensure good continuity at the time students leave school.
19. The school has very good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour. Students value the reward system and the school publicly celebrates both effort and achievement. Letters of congratulation are sent to the parents of children who have made particularly good progress and the photographs of students who have made particularly noteworthy efforts are displayed prominently close to the school reception area. Effective support is provided for students with behavioural problems and this helps to ensure that good progress is made in lessons. The school places great emphasis on the need for students to attend regularly and makes strenuous efforts to improve attendance. Parents are contacted immediately a student is absent without notification. Parents are also informed about the attendance rate of their children in school reports and in the Record of Achievement. Good attendance is recognised as part of the school system of merit awards. The school has maintained and enhanced the good standards of care provided for students noted in the previous inspection report and this is having a positive effect on students' learning.
20. A key issue in the previous report referred to the assessment and monitoring of progress made by individual students. This issue has been tackled very successfully and to the extent that procedures for assessing and monitoring students' progress and attainment are very good and a strength of the school. A rigorous system is used to collect a range of assessment information about students' attainment on entry to the school, including Key Stage 2 National Curriculum test results and the results of cognitive ability tests. All assessment information is collected, analysed and shared with all subject departments. There are careful procedures for assessing and for monitoring students' progress and very good arrangements for year and subject heads to meet to consider students' progress and for form tutors to check regularly with students how well they are doing and whether they are doing well enough. The value of this is that pastoral and curriculum

teams work very closely together to support students' progress. On two occasions each year all subject teachers provide a monitoring grade that indicates the effort that each student has made in that subject. These grades are entered directly into the computer based monitoring system and form tutors are provided with a summary sheet, which places current grades alongside those previously recorded. This enables tutors to identify any changes at a glance. An individual record is also printed for each student to take home to parents. Similarly, all teachers record an assessment of each student's level of attainment twice a year. This information is passed to the subject leader and is used to monitor academic progress, to review placements in teaching groups and to guide curriculum planning. Systems for collating current and projected grades for comparison with target grades set using prior attainment data are well established for all students in Years 10 and 11. This information is made available to subject teachers and form tutors. Time is provided for form tutors to hold a personal review meeting with each student in their group. Parents are invited to attend this meeting and many take advantage of this opportunity to discuss aspirations and progress. Information and communications technology has been used effectively to extend this practice to include English, mathematics and science in Years 7 to 9 and it is intended that it will be further extended to include all National Curriculum subjects by the end of the current school year. The progress of sixth form students is carefully monitored through reviews carried out once every half term. The student collects grades and comments from each teacher and has a formal review meeting with the form tutor. A copy of the review statement is sent to parents.

21. Parents are well informed by the school through reports, newsletters, parents' evenings and curriculum support evenings. Staff and parents have, over many years, developed a constructive partnership, which is used effectively for the benefit of students. For example, the school has held well supported meetings with parents to discuss issues surrounding the underachievement of boys and parents are working with the school to raise the achievement levels of boys. Parents are very supportive of the school and gave evidence of this in their responses to the inspection questionnaire and at the pre-inspection meeting with parents. Parents support their children's work at home through encouragement and providing access to information; some would welcome more challenging homework assignments for higher-attaining students. Students' annual reports are, overall, very good. They are detailed and most give good information on students' strengths, progress and areas for improvement. However, there is inconsistency in the clarity with which the detail contained in some of the reports is summarised in order that parents can clearly grasp what their children know, understand and can do, and what they must do in order to improve.

Personal, social and cultural development is enhanced by an excellent range of extra-curricular activities and a high quality personal, social and health education programme.

22. Provision for students' social development is very good and a strength of the school. Students are provided with many opportunities to develop self-confidence and self-esteem and to show initiative. These opportunities feature regularly in lessons and include not only such things as collaborative work in English, drama, dance, music and physical education but also service on the School Council and participation in a variety of charitable activities. A well-structured and well-taught personal, social and health education programme helps to develop students' awareness of social issues such as teen-age pregnancy, drug taking and alcoholism. The programme includes careers and work-related education, which is very good and benefits from the school's well-established links with careers advisers, local colleges, training providers and employers. This makes a significant contribution to students' social development. Many other issues of social consequence are covered across the curriculum. For example, the impact of environmental issues on people's lives is tackled in science and geography. The social consequences of decision-making in business and industry are considered in business education and economics and the importance of emotional attachments for healthy social development are considered in psychology.
23. Students are offered numerous opportunities for social development through community work, work placements and the excellent range of extra-curricular activities provided by the school. Outdoor and residential activities, together with an unusually large number of summer schools,

make a strong contribution to students' academic and social development. The school has won national awards for the excellence and quality of the range of the curricular and extra-curricular activities it provides and was one of thirteen schools to be awarded a Charter Mark for excellence in public service in 1995. The quality and range of the school's extra-curricular activities were highlighted in the second award, made in 1998. In recognition of the quality of provision in sport and physical education, the school has held the prestigious Sportsmark Award for high standards since 1998 and achieved the Sportsmark Gold Award earlier this year. Students are given every opportunity to relate positively to one another and to teachers and visitors to the school. A particularly strong feature of social development is the consideration that students show towards each other and the very good quality of relationships that exist amongst all groups in the school.

24. Provision for students' cultural development is very good. The school strives to develop in students an appreciation of their own cultural traditions in many subjects of the curriculum and most obviously through English literature, drama, music, art, history and geography, personal, social and health education, and social science. This work is well supported by school productions and numerous educational visits to places of diverse cultural and historical interest. Students also learn about some of the diversity and richness of other cultures and this is particularly important in a school where there are very few ethnic minority students. For example, the work of authors from different cultural backgrounds is studied in English. In history, students gain insights into Islamic civilisation. In art, effective use is made of a wide range of artistic traditions to stimulate students' creative thinking. In religious education both Christian beliefs and traditions and those of other cultures and faiths are explored in a sensitive way. The school's provision for students' cultural development is well advanced and makes a significant contribution to the preparation of students to live in a culturally diverse society.

Students with special educational needs are very well supported and make very good progress.

25. Idsall School provides very well for students with special educational needs. The proportion of students with special educational needs is below the national average, while the proportion with Statements of Special Educational Need is about average. Most students on the school's register of special educational needs have moderate learning difficulties. Also on the register are small numbers of students with dyslexia, hearing or visual impairments, and emotional or behavioural difficulties. Students with special educational needs are fully included in the school community and relationships are very good. They participate equally in the life of the school.
26. Provision is well organised. Through very good liaison with the primary schools, the school has a good knowledge of students' needs before they enter the school in Year 7. Individual Education Plans show that the support students receive matches need. Learning support assistants are well deployed and provide good support. Additional support is also provided by volunteer sixth form students, both in lessons where they support students' reading and also at lunchtimes when they act as mentors for students who exhibit challenging behaviour. The emphasis on reading development at an early stage helps students to learn effectively in all their subjects. As a consequence students make good progress in all years. By the end of Year 9, their reading skills have improved significantly and they are able to read with meaning in the majority of lessons. Students' listening skills are well promoted and in subjects such as English, history and religious education they learn to work co-operatively when developing ideas through discussion. These skills are well used in Years 10 and 11 when students engage in their examination courses. By the end of Year 11, almost all students on the special educational needs register achieve five or more A*-G grades in the GCSE examination and some achieve five or more A*-C grades.
27. Students with special educational needs have access to a broad and balanced curriculum in each of the key stages and they participate fully in the wide range of extra-curricular activities the school offers. Curriculum provision is enhanced in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form by the offering of vocational courses, which extend the range of achievement opportunities for students with special educational needs. Each department has a teacher with responsibility for special educational needs, who links with the co-ordinator to ensure that departments are kept fully informed on all matters relating to the needs of individual students. Similarly, each subject has a

nominated teacher who takes a special interest in the development of higher-attaining students. Through the 'Odyssey' club, which is provided as an extra-curricular activity, higher-attaining students are provided with opportunities to get together with others, not necessarily from the same age group, and work on special projects. Parents are invited to meet together once a term and take part in the programme. Support for students with behavioural difficulties has been strengthened by the formation of a behaviour support team, which is able to provide both in-class support and short-term withdrawal support for individual students. Teachers and support assistants are very caring. All support assistants have benefited from special training. Visiting specialists give extra help when needed.

28. The management and co-ordination of special educational needs provision are very good. Appropriate policy documents provide effective frameworks for learning and behavioural support. The arrangements for assessing and monitoring students' progress across all subjects are very good and provide those immediately concerned with the teaching and learning of students with special educational needs with accurate information on the progress they are making. Communication between the governors, headteacher, senior management team and special educational needs co-ordinator is very good and so all are kept well informed on special educational needs matters. The school values close partnership with parents and parents are fully involved in the annual reviews. The funding received by the school for special educational needs is fully used for the purposes intended. Provision for special educational needs is a strength of the school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Standards of attainment in design and technology.

29. The school has made strenuous efforts to raise standards in design and technology. These efforts have included systematic reviews of the department by the senior management team and external consultants and the implementation of action plans to raise standards. There are indications that progress is being made. Teacher Assessments show that the proportion of students achieving the expected Level 5 at the end of Year 9 rose from about average in 1999 to above average in 2000. However, the overall proportion of students achieving A*-C GCSE grades in design and technology in 1999 was below the national average and well below the school's averages in other subjects. This below average level of performance was due to the significantly below average results of boys, only 20 per cent of whom achieved A*-C grades compared to 41 per cent of boys nationally. Girls' results were above average, with 61 per cent achieving A*-C grades compared to 58 per cent nationally. Although boys results in 2000 show an eight per cent improvement in the proportion achieving A*-C grades, they remain well below average. Because the proportion of girls achieving A*-C grades dropped in 2000 the overall results show no improvement on the 1999 results. Results in resistant materials are well below those in other areas of design and technology.
30. The overall quality of teaching in design and technology is good. In the best lessons teaching is marked by an enthusiasm which motivates and arouses the interest of students. This enthusiasm, allied to good class management and control with clear lesson objectives, was seen in a Year 9 textiles lesson, for example, and led to students achieving above average standards. Similarly, in a Year 7 textiles lesson, the teacher carefully built up a list of key words, such as 'soft', 'comfortable', 'settee' and 'fabric', for students to use in completing a worksheet. This enabled students to give precise answers to the questions on the worksheet and made a good contribution to the development of students' literacy skills. Teaching of this quality was also observed in food, where teachers in a Year 9 and a Year 10 lesson carefully monitored students' work so that individual support and guidance could be given at the most appropriate times. This contributed to the students' achieving above average standards and making good progress in both lessons.
31. Teaching in resistant materials, although satisfactory, does not reach these standards. Teachers have good subject knowledge and exercise good class management and control. Relationships are good and students work well together, sharing tools and equipment when necessary.

Students engage well with lesson tasks and show that they are able to work safely and with a degree of independence. However, planning does not take account of the range of attainment levels in lessons with the consequence that some students find the work insufficiently challenging. Expectations are low and there is a lack of urgency in lessons. Although lesson objectives are made clear at the start, they are not reviewed at the end of lessons to consolidate the learning that has taken place. Little reference is made to the key words displayed in workshops and, when key terms are introduced, insufficient attention is paid to ensure that students have gained a clear understanding of the term. For example, in a Year 7 lesson the term 'flux' was introduced to students as an essential part of the soldering process but this was not followed by questions to confirm their understanding. There are weaknesses in assessment and project work; homework is not marked on a regular basis and, when work is marked, spelling mistakes remain uncorrected.

The curriculum time and the provision of religious education for all students at Key Stage 4.

32. The school has a strong commitment to teaching and learning and to raising students' attainment in all subjects. The planned curriculum aims to provide students with a wide variety of opportunities to learn and to experience success but there are some deficiencies in the way in which a few aspects are organised. The teaching time of 24 hours 10 minutes in Years 9 to 11, as at the time of the last report, is below the recommended 25 hours.
33. Overall provision for students' spiritual development is satisfactory. There is a theme for the week, to which are linked thoughts for the day. These are intended to guide a short period of reflection in assemblies and in the morning tutor group meetings. However, although some tutors include a brief period of reflection in the morning tutor period, this is not consistent in all tutor groups. In subjects such as art, religious education and English, students are provided with a range of opportunities for considering the spiritual dimension. Religious education makes a major contribution to students' spiritual development. Here, there are substantial opportunities to consider underlying meaning and significance of, for example, stories from major faiths and how faith impacts on actions. Students reflect on their own beliefs and how these are formed. There is a clear emphasis in religious education on personal reflection and searching for meaning and the atmosphere is one in which students feel at ease when discussing personal and religious issues. However, because of the option choice arrangement in Years 10 and 11, about 20 per cent of students who choose to take GCSE courses in the three separate sciences do not receive their full entitlement to religious education. This is a breach of statutory requirements. More generally, there is a need for a greater awareness of opportunities to explore both religious and non-religious aspects of spirituality, such as human achievement and the mystery and wonder of the natural world.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

34. To further raise the standards of work and attainment of students, the governors, headteacher, senior management team and staff should now:
- raise expectations and improve planning, assessment and teaching in design and technology resistant materials;
(Paragraphs: 3,5,15,29,31)
 - ensure that all students receive their full curriculum entitlement to religious education in Years 10 and 11.
(Paragraphs: 11,33)
 - review the curriculum in relation to:
 - the length of the teaching week;
 - the frequency of opportunities for reflection.
(Paragraphs: 11,32,33)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	89
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	30

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	21	54	22	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1052	165
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	46	1

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	25	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	164	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	11

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	41
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	50

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	5.5	School data	0.6
National comparative data	7.9	National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2000	109	111	220

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	67	90	95
	Girls	91	92	90
	Total	158	182	185
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	72 (57)	83 (74)	84 (75)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	30 (35)	59 (47)	50 (41)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	68	86	95
	Girls	88	89	91
	Total	156	175	186
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	71 (71)	80 (72)	85 (75)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	40 (30)	54 (48)	47 (48)
	National	30 (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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	2000	92	112	204

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	54 (45)	84 (93)	91 (103)
	Girls	82 (82)	108 (103)	110 (105)
	Total	136 (127)	192 (206)	201 (218)
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	67 (57)	94 (93)	99 (99)
	National	49 (47)	89 (91)	94 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score	School	46 (45)

per pupil	National	38 (38)
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Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	14	n/a
	National		n/a

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	77	98	175

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	12.3	19	16.1(14.8)	2.4	3	2.7 (1.8)
National	16.9	17.7	17.4 (17.9)	2.5	2.8	2.6 (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 pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	10	71
	National		82.5

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	1
Indian	23
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	7
White	1171
Any other minority ethnic group	9

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	25	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	72
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	7
Total aggregate hours worked per week	206

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.6
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	26
Key Stage 4	21.3

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	2,854,364
Total expenditure	2,910,234
Expenditure per pupil	2,392
Balance brought forward from previous year	181,034
Balance carried forward to next year	125,164

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1217
Number of questionnaires returned	213

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	51	6	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	44	49	3	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	32	59	3	0	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	55	14	5	1
The teaching is good.	35	54	4	0	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	34	37	18	4	7
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	51	35	8	2	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	58	38	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	32	47	14	3	4
The school is well led and managed.	38	48	6	2	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	44	49	3	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	47	45	3	1	3

Other issues raised by parents

The parents' meeting was attended by 38 parents and they were very supportive of the school. They acknowledged the attempts that have been made to raise standards of boys and the improvements that have been made to the accommodation. Problems relating to the carrying of books around the school were raised and later discussed with the headteacher. Parents thought that the quality of school reports has improved and that the overall impression is that everyone is expected to do their best.