

INSPECTION REPORT

RIDGEWOOD SCHOOL

Scawsby, Doncaster

LEA area: Doncaster

Unique reference number: 106789

Headteacher: Mrs J F Sharpe

Reporting inspector: Clare Gillies
20597

Dates of inspection: 11 - 14 December 2000

Inspection number: 223764

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: 11-16 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Barnsley Road
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Doncaster

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs C H Nicklin

Date of previous inspection: January 1996

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Ridgewood is an 11 to 16 mixed comprehensive school with 1276 pupils on roll. There are more girls than boys in Years 7 and 8 but the opposite in the other years (especially in Year 10). The school has become increasingly popular; it is heavily over-subscribed. Pupils' attainment on entry and socio-economic background are average. Just fewer than 6 per cent of pupils is eligible for free school meals (below average). Over 98 per cent of pupils are white, so numbers from ethnic minority groups are very small. The school has a unit for hearing and visually impaired pupils. Almost one in five pupils are on the register of special educational needs and 45 have statements; both percentages are above average. Eleven pupils speak English as an additional language but none is at an early stage of learning the language.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Ridgewood is a very good school, which most effectively prepares pupils for the next stage of their education. Standards are above the national average at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations; the trend in results is upward. Teaching is at least very good in 40 per cent of lessons. Leadership and management is very good and the headteacher's contribution is outstanding. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils' attitudes to school life are excellent. Their behaviour and relationships with one another and with teachers are very good. They work hard and learn very well.
- Pupils receive exceptionally good care, sensitive support and guidance. In all years, pupils with special educational needs receive the best possible support.
- Teaching is very good in 40 per cent of lessons. Teachers frequently use encouragement, praise, humour and interesting ideas to make lessons enjoyable.
- Leadership and management, financial planning and the use of resources are very good, as are methods of monitoring and evaluating what is happening.
- Test results at the end of Year 9, and the percentage of pupils attaining five GCSE grades A*-C, are both above the national average. Progress and achievement in Years 7 to 9 is very good.
- The range of subjects offered in Years 10 and 11, and the number and range of extra-curricular activities in all years is very good.

What could be improved

- Progress and achievement in Years 10 and 11 are good, but, in a few subjects, the momentum achieved in Years 7 to 9 is not sustained. Boys achieve lower standards than girls in most subjects.
- Work in the new discrete information technology lessons does not yet match the most effective use of computers seen in some subjects.
- The organisation of parents' evenings, how often parents are informed about pupils' progress, particularly in Year 7, and the fact that a minority of parents feel the school does not work closely with them.

The features that the school does well strongly outweigh the areas for improvement. The latter will form the basis of the governors' action plan. Aspects of the improvement issues are already included in the School Development Plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION (January 1996)

The four issues raised in the last report have been fully dealt with. Four teachers were given responsibility to respond to them and they have carried out their responsibilities with great determination and success. Health and safety is now monitored extremely thoroughly and there is a medical room. Assessment procedures have become much sharper and the information generated has helped to raise

standards by, for example, identifying underachieving pupils so that they can be given extra help. Religious education is now covered properly in Years 10 and 11. Reports have improved, although they will continue to develop as teachers strive to find the best possible style. In almost five years the school has developed and continued to raise standards, overall. Computers are used effectively in many lessons. Discrete information technology lessons have been introduced in Years 7 and 8 this term. The school has made good progress since the last inspection and its present thrust to become a "self-evaluating school" is likely to ensure that such progress continues.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds, based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			Similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	A	A	B	C	well above average A above average B C below average D well below average E

Similar schools are those that have approximately the same percentage uptake of free school meals.

In the national tests, at the end of Year 9 in 2000, the percentage of pupils reaching the expected and higher levels (Levels 5 and 6) in English, mathematics and science was well above the national average and at least above the average for similar schools. Results in mathematics in 2000 were the best yet. Over the last three years girls did better than boys in English, reached similar standards in mathematics but lower ones in science. Standards in work seen during the inspection were well above average and progress was very good.

At GCSE, in 2000, the percentage of pupils attaining five grades A*-C (54.4 per cent) and the average points score was above the national average and was average for similar schools. Pupils achieved particularly good results in 2000 in English, art and design, drama, French, geography, German, history, music and design and technology. Results were below average in science, information systems, physical education (boys particularly) and religious education. Girls perform better than boys. Standards seen during the inspection were above average and progress was good.

The progress made by the year group who took tests in Year 9 in 1998 and GCSEs in 2000 was sound, overall, but relatively less so in mathematics and science. The trend in national test results at the end of Year 9 (1997 to 2000), and in GCSEs until 1999, was above that seen nationally. Realistic but challenging targets have been set for the next two years.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils work hard and they are co-operative in the great majority of lessons. Almost all are happy with their school life and join in activities with enthusiasm.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Exclusions have declined and incidents of thoughtless behaviour are rare. Pupils move about the school grounds sensibly and concentrate well in lessons.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils get on well together and with their teachers. They are thoughtful and kind. They are welcoming to visitors and happily discuss things with them. The personal and social education and careers

	programmes contribute significantly towards pupils' maturity and confidence.
Attendance	Consistently above the average and monitored rigorously.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years
Lessons seen, overall	Very good	Very good

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

Teaching was good in 80 per cent of lessons, including 40 per cent when it was very good. Excellent teaching was observed in six lessons. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection. It is not possible to single out any subjects where teaching is more effective than in others because in all departments there is a mixture of very good to sound teaching. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, learn very well in all years. Literacy and numeracy are taught well.

Many teachers have very good subject knowledge, and in the great majority of lessons seen during the inspection they had planned the tasks well, made it clear they expected pupils to work hard, got the lesson underway quickly and kept up a fine pace. It is the extra qualities in addition to these that make so much teaching very good: encouragement, praise and humour used effectively, and regular use of computers and interesting materials and ideas.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The choice of subjects in Years 10 and 11 is well thought out, particularly for those pupils who do not want to study GCSEs only. The number and range of extra-curricular activities are very good, especially in music, sport and design and technology. Many teachers give up much time to run these activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Excellent. In all years, pupils with special educational needs receive the best possible support. They make at least as good progress as other pupils. The teaching and guidance provided by outside specialists, teachers and learning support assistants is most effective.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Most effective personal and social education and good religious education is complemented by strong support and guidance. Pupils are quite clear about the standards expected and have well-developed social and moral awareness. They discuss important issues, such as bullying and racial awareness, with sensitivity and maturity.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well. The care, support and guidance provided are very well managed and sensitive to the needs of all pupils. Health, safety and welfare are monitored to a very high standard and pupils feel that the staff really care about them.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher is astute, determined and realistic; her leadership is outstanding. The recently restructured senior team is evolving into an effective layer of management. The senior team and the headteacher, are major contributors to the cheerful atmosphere generated and appreciated by all who work in the school. Middle managers, some of whom have been appointed recently, work very hard to organise the successful departments and the very effective pastoral support.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. The governors bring much expertise and common sense to their support of the school and are fully aware of its strengths and areas for improvement. They keep an alert eye on how the school is progressing by receiving detailed information and visiting lessons and other activities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. This has developed well since the last inspection. The senior management team provides helpful and detailed analysis of results, identifies pupils who require extra support and monitors teaching and learning well. Many senior and middle managers have received training in self-evaluation, which contributes to the school's lack of complacency – it is always considering ways of raising standards.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The use of resources and finances is planned very carefully, for example, by seeking out the best quality external support, campaigning for extra funds and budgeting wisely for major expenditure on computers.

Although the site has drainage problems and the buildings are uninspiring on the outside, the rooms inside are well-maintained, comfortable and attractive, with lively and encouraging displays and many good facilities and resources. These contribute to the good quality of learning. Pupils unanimously want more asphalt space outside, more areas where they can sit inside during lunchtime, and drinking fountains. The school and the inspection team agree with their observations.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That children make good progress and the school expects them to work hard and achieve their best The great majority of children like school The school helps children to become mature and responsible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The organisation of parents' evenings and how often they are told about pupils' progress, particularly in Year 7. A minority feel that the school does not work closely with them There is sometimes too much homework

The inspection confirmed all the parents' positive observations. Their descriptions of parents' evenings suggest that the school should review how they are organised. It is understandable that parents would appreciate more information about pupils' progress, especially in Year 7. The time between Year 7 and Year 8 parents' evenings is sixteen months. The school does at least as much as most secondary schools to maintain contact and strong links with home. The school does set a considerable amount of homework, but pupils are not expected to spend longer than the time allocated if they cannot complete it.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Pupils' attitudes to school life, their behaviour and relationships with one another and with teachers are all very good. They work hard and learn very well.

1. Year 7 pupils state that "teachers make a special effort to make the school friendly, and so do older pupils". Despite saying that the school is too strict, Year 8 pupils agree it is a friendly place. Year 11 pupils describe the "very caring and committed staff". Many pupils feel confident that any problems, such as rare instances of bullying, are dealt with immediately. These comments explain why pupils have such positive attitudes to school life, because they are respected and valued as members of the school community.
2. Pupils with special educational needs are well-integrated into school life. Those who were met during the inspection appeared happy and confident working in the unit or in lessons. Their peers treat them as equals and are sympathetic if anyone has difficulty in expressing a view or joining in an activity. Relationships between pupils are a strength of the school and no inconsiderate or thoughtless behaviour was observed during the inspection.
3. As many lessons are interesting and generally well taught (see paragraphs 14-19) pupils mostly work hard and concentrate well. During the inspection, they displayed determination to show support for teachers, particularly for a few who perhaps found the experience daunting. In three-quarters of the lessons seen pupils' behaviour and attitudes to work were very good and in well over a quarter of lessons they were excellent.
4. It is striking how confident and articulate pupils are in lessons. They contribute happily to discussions and answer questions willingly; in some lessons a forest of hands went up in response. They work well together in groups and pairs and help each other to understand things, particularly in subjects where they work together at computers. Pupils show considerable interest in undertaking practical work in science and develop understanding through experience.
5. Pupils readily offer their opinions and emotional reactions and they use imagination well, for example, when interpreting poetry or discussing sensitive issues in personal and social education. They concentrate well when watching each other's drama presentations and generate constructive debate in religious education. They pursue written tasks diligently and take considerable care over the presentation of their work. They mark their own mathematical answers honestly and understand more in the process. Some pupils have enquiring minds and are keen to see what will come next, for example, in a mathematics lesson one pupil asked, "How do we go on from here to calculate volume?"
6. The school is well respected in the community and pupils' good behaviour is commented on by many who meet them. Organisations and businesses who take pupils for work experience describe the "diligent, smart pupils" who possess "good social skills." When they make presentations on their experiences these are delivered with "initiative, enthusiasm and commitment." Visitors to the school mention that they "have always been impressed by the behaviour of the pupils" and that they are "impressed by the ways in which students take on responsibility to organise themselves."

Pupils receive exceptionally good care, sensitive support and guidance. In all years pupils with special educational needs receive the best possible support.

7. Underpinning the care that pupils receive is the school's successful determination that "all pastoral staff are teachers and all teachers are pastoral staff." Arrangements for pupils' transfer from primary school are excellent. Primary school pupils spend a day at Ridgewood in the summer term before they transfer and several members of Ridgewood staff visit these feeder

schools to discuss pupils' individual needs in detail with their primary teachers. The headteacher of Ridgewood is a familiar figure in the primary schools, and is "always welcomed by pupils with a wave."

8. When pupils are settled in Year 7 the special educational needs co-ordinator checks carefully that they are receiving all the support they need. Any problems, for example, with reading, are addressed as soon as possible. Reading improves rapidly and pupils who enter the school with reading at a level two years below their age catch up quickly. From Year 8 upwards, heads of year stay with the pupils, so they know them extremely well. Pupils are confident that there is someone they could talk to if they had any problems.
9. All aspects of pupils' life at school are monitored carefully, for example, attendance, progress (so that action can be taken if a pupil is underachieving), participation in extra-curricular activities and behaviour. Thus, problems are addressed early and many external specialists, such as the educational Welfare Officer, provide much effective help and advice. Exclusions, which have declined since the last inspection, have dropped dramatically in the last two terms as the Education Welfare Officer now spends more time working with the school.
10. The special educational needs unit is extremely well organised and the atmosphere is happy and productive. Pupils with learning or behavioural difficulties express their appreciation of this. Many just spend a couple of lessons once or twice a week, catching up on work and having extra help to understand difficult topics. This time boosts their confidence.
11. Hearing and visually impaired pupils receive well-focused support and professional guidance and have access to helpful equipment. Their success, however, is reflected in the significant amount of time they work in mainstream lessons and in the fact that they are totally integrated as members of the school community. The special educational needs co-ordinator tracks pupils after they have left Ridgewood and feeds back success stories to all members of staff: a most positive action. In 2000, a visually impaired pupil who had made striking progress in Years 10 and 11 attained ten GCSE grades A*-C.
12. The quality of teaching, guidance, support and record-keeping provided by the large number of well-respected outside specialists and learning support assistants is very high. Their professional development is addressed so effectively that they have acquired a wealth of expertise, and several have left the school to follow teacher training successfully. A weekly meeting chaired by the special educational needs co-ordinator, with many contributions from learning support assistants, keeps everyone in touch with pupils' needs and progress.
13. Meticulous preparation for Year 11's mock examinations (such as arrangements for lip readers, extra time or separate rooms), means that pupils will experience as nearly as possible the real examination conditions. A computer program is used effectively to help pupils who have reading or number problems and the unit is always considering new equipment or software to help pupils. Another strength of the unit and the school's approach to special needs is that pupils from a local special school occasionally join classes at Ridgewood. This develops the Ridgewood pupils' social understanding and skills of tolerance and support.

Teaching is very good in 40 per cent of lessons. Teachers frequently use encouragement, praise, humour, and interesting ideas to make lessons enjoyable.

14. Teaching was good in 80 per cent of lessons, including 40 per cent when it was very good. Excellent teaching was observed in six lessons: two in design and technology, two in science, one in history and one in personal and social education. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection. It is not possible to single out any subject where teaching is more effective than in others, because in all departments there is a mixture of very good to sound teaching. The headteacher and senior management team are knowledgeable about teachers' strengths and minor weaknesses and they work hard to nurture the former and offer advice about how to change

the latter.

15. Many teachers have very good subject knowledge and use this to offer clear explanations and helpful demonstrations in practical subjects such as art, science, design and technology, food studies and music. Some assess understanding by well-chosen questions and repeat new ideas skilfully in different ways until all pupils understand well. In the great majority of lessons seen during the inspection teachers had planned the tasks well, made it clear that they expected pupils to work hard, got the lesson underway quickly and kept up a fine pace. Lessons are unlikely to be successful without these features but it is the extra qualities in addition that make so much teaching very good.
16. Encouragement and praise are used to enthuse and motivate pupils. Phrases such as "Good point", "I agree with you", "There are no right answers; it is your opinion", "Your judgements are very sensible", or "Can you remind me about your definition?" stimulate pupils to become involved. Pupils are treated as knowledgeable professionals when discussing the interpretation of musical extracts and as young adults when discussing health-related fitness in physical education. In geography, pupils have to extend their answers when the teacher repeats "Good, but then what?" until all points have been considered. Teachers provide effective guidance by encouraging individuals to improve their skills in physical education. Pupils' work is praised before they have to describe necessary improvements in design and technology.
17. Humour is another significant ingredient in the very good teaching, for example; there are light-hearted references to unusual mathematical shapes drawn by pupils on computers, laughing during a French discussion about pupils' subject likes and dislikes, exaggerated gestures and articulation to reinforce points in history; amusement about falling parachutists and helicopters in science; or asking pupils to be Martians considering how Earth people celebrate Christmas in religious education. Light-hearted discussion in English about male and female role models in the eighteenth century also included well-balanced consideration of present-day gender issues.
18. Many teachers use computers most effectively, and examples of some very good practice were observed during the inspection (see paragraphs 43-45). GCSE information technology coursework is linked to practical issues, such as databases for milkmen, or medical data. Interesting materials and ideas, often using the Internet, make many lessons fun. In business studies coursework pupils developed a new Christmas chocolate bar by interviewing Year 6 visiting parents and testing products! GCSE art pupils use a wide and stimulating range of materials from different cultures to make three-dimensional objects.
19. In modern foreign languages, pupils enjoy studying Christmas terms in writing and speech and responding to visual prompts. The English department uses carefully selected extracts from videos. In community studies, pupils debate topics relevant to their experiences, for example, the possible closure of a youth club. In history, they use fascinating resources to develop work based on a museum visit. Describing personal and social education lessons one pupil observed "One thing that's good is that you never know what's coming."

Leadership and management, financial planning and use of resources are very good, as is monitoring and evaluating what is happening.

20. The School Development Plan, a rather thick document, describes an extremely well-organised and thoughtful school. Large sections of it serve as a useful reference manual for how the school is organised and operates. A simplified and reduced version of the development plan itself would be useful for teachers and parents to refer to. Nevertheless, the contents of this document are evident in practice. Pupils are very positive about the school: they describe it as "a well organised place where we know what is happening and teachers will teach us everything we need to know."
21. The headteacher and deputy heads must take much of the credit for this praise from pupils. They have been in post for over fifteen years and this continuity has contributed to the rising standards

over the last decade. Several other teachers have been at the school for a long time, indeed several find it such a supportive place to work that they see no reason to change. Middle managers, some of whom have been appointed recently, work very hard to organise the successful subject, and the very effective pastoral support. Problems with staffing in the previous year, for example long-term ill health, were unusual and were coped with as well as possible in the circumstances.

22. The headteacher is astute, determined and realistic; her leadership is outstanding. She has her finger on the pulse of the school and knows exactly what improvements she wishes to develop. Progress since the last inspection has been good. Several teachers have already attended “self-evaluating school” courses and this should ensure that progress continues. In fact, the single characteristic that contributes most to the success of the school is that nothing stands still; evaluation, development and improvement dominate the culture of management. In addition, the headteacher and senior management team are major contributors to the cheerful atmosphere generated, and appreciated, by all who work in the school.
23. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities very well. Governors bring much expertise and common sense to their support of the school, and they are fully aware of its strengths and the areas for improvement. They keep an alert eye on how the school is progressing by receiving detailed information and visiting lessons and other activities. The recently restructured senior team is evolving into an effective layer of management. Senior managers monitor effectively what is happening in the classrooms and take action if necessary. They provide detailed and helpful analyses of data, which teachers then use to set targets and to monitor progress.
24. The governors and headteacher are fully aware of the fact that most of the senior management team teach only a few lessons a week. The school has decided that experienced teachers carry out roles such as site management, control of finance and pastoral care best, by seeing things “through pupils’ eyes”. There is no evidence to suggest that this is not a very good arrangement. Nevertheless, as members of the senior management team become established in their roles, the headteacher has made the wise decision to review the balance between their teaching and administration work.
25. Recently, the governors decided to spend money earmarked for social inclusion on providing an office, and more time in school, for the Educational Welfare Officer, who is very much a member of the school community. Exclusions have dropped dramatically and attendance continues to creep up, so this was money well spent. The senior management team and governors are extremely careful about how they spend money, for example, by seeking the best quality of courses, training, advice and professional guidance for teachers and staff.
26. Wise spending on the layout, heating, and furnishing and fabric of classrooms has contributed to staff and pupil morale. For example, each department has a base so that teams can meet together during the day, and in many cases another small room so teachers can easily meet pupils individually. The headteacher and deputy heads worked hard to secure funding for two new computer rooms and to refurbish a room for drama and music. This was backed by strong financial planning by the governing body, which involved using reserves and budgeting for a realistic overspend. Indeed, as far as possible, the budget is carefully planned for the next four years.
27. In recent years any surplus money has been used wisely to maintain the site. Seating outside is better than at the time of the last inspection, but generally the buildings are uninspiring and pupils understandably want more asphalt space outside, more areas where they can sit inside during lunchtime, and drinking fountains. The majority of classrooms are carpeted, which makes them welcoming and quiet. Carpet in half of the design and technology rooms is a good idea. One half serves well as a form base and as a clean area for writing up practical work, whilst the other is suitable for practical work. The majority of classrooms are large and spacious but a few, particularly where worktops are covered by computers, are rather cramped.
28. Pupils use mainly attractive and up-to-date textbooks and in several subjects the quality of

equipment is impressive, particularly for music, design and technology and food studies. Displays are eye-catching, lively and cheerful in practically all areas of the school and many show pupils' work and celebrate their achievements. The library and the design and technology, food studies and music rooms are welcoming, and buzz with activity in the lunch hour. Teachers and senior management have succeeded in creating such a positive atmosphere, which undoubtedly contributes to pupils' enjoyment and appreciation of the school and helps them to learn and make progress.

Test results at the end of Year 9 and the percentage of pupils attaining five GCSE grades A*-C are both above the national average.

29. In the national tests, at the end of Year 9 in 2000, the percentage of pupils reaching the expected and higher levels (Levels 5 and 6) in English, mathematics and science was well above the national average and at least above the average for similar schools. The average points attained in mathematics in 2000 were the best yet. Over the last three years improvement has been particularly strong in English. Girls do better than boys in English and reach similar standards in mathematics but lower ones in science.
30. At GCSE, in 2000, both the percentage of pupils attaining five grades A*-C (54.4 per cent) and the average points score were above the national average; they were average compared with similar schools. Girls did better than boys. In 2000, the percentage of GCSE grade passes at A*-C was the highest the school has attained, with more A* and A grades, too. The percentage of pupils attaining five grades A*-C was just above average.
31. Subjects which achieved particularly good results in 2000 (over 15 per cent A* and A grades and well above average, overall) were English, art and design, drama, French, geography, German, history, music and design and technology. Boys attained double the boys' national average for A*-C grades in design and technology and 20 per cent above it in art. In history and music, boys and girls both performed significantly above the average for their gender. Results were below average in science, information systems, physical education and religious education.
32. Related to nationally standardised school tests taken early in Year 7, pupils' achievement in GCSE has gone up every year since 1996, but significantly so for girls. The trend in results in national tests at the end of Year 9, and in GCSEs until 1999, is above that seen nationally. Targets set by the school for Year 9 test results and for the percentage of five grades A*-C were exceeded in 2000. Realistic, but challenging targets have been set for the next two years.

The range of subjects offered in Years 10 and 11 is very good. The number and range of extra-curricular activities in all years is also very good.

33. In addition to the basic GCSE courses pupils can select three further options from a wide list of subjects. The timetable is flexible so that practically all pupils can take the subjects they want. Some pupils, for whom a reduced number of GCSEs is best, are invited to follow a community studies course. This is most successful and develops their confidence and maturity by much group work, debates and a residential trip. These pupils organise a Christmas party for senior citizens. Another option, sometimes combined with community studies, is for pupils to spend time each week in the support unit. Here they have time to reflect on the work done during the week and to receive help with basic skills and difficult subjects. This, too, works very well.
34. The personal and social education programme is extremely worthwhile in all years. It is combined with focused tasks done during form time at the beginning of the afternoon. The time is not wasted (a criticism in the last inspection report). Pupils describe how the programme covers important issues such as tolerance, racial discrimination and bullying, and how these topics are also addressed carefully through drama and several other subjects. Despite the school having only a few pupils from minority ethnic groups, pupils are sensitive to other cultures, religions and life styles.

35. The careers programme is particularly effective in Years 10 and 11 and pupils' work experience is well-organised before, during and after the two weeks they spend on it. Pupils are given excellent advice about where to study in the future, and the different options are explained thoroughly. The percentage of pupils who move on to a school sixth form or college is increasing. New careers websites and computer programs have been introduced this year. The Duke of Edinburgh Award is a popular extra course for GCSE pupils.
36. A group of teachers meet regularly to discuss cross-curricular issues and particularly to organise a week for Year 9 in the summer term, when normal lessons stop and a range of interesting programmes is followed. This does not stay the same from year to year but evolves as the school develops. For the health day in 2001, diet analysis using computers will be an interesting addition. On a practical front, the committee gives teachers helpful information about how to include important areas in all their work; for example, citizenship, environmental issues, equal opportunities and economic and industrial understanding.
37. The extra-curricular programme is rich. For the size and age range of the school the number of musical groups is impressive: twenty ensembles rehearse on a regular basis ranging from the senior band with about sixty pupils to brass quintets and flute trios. Tapes of performances reflect the versatility of the pupils' instrumental skills and the enthusiasm generated by the director of music. Drama and dance groups rehearse regularly and give impressive performances. Sporting activities during the inspection included basketball, netball, hockey, badminton, volleyball and football, and different ones are offered at other times of the year. The design and technology department is active in the lunch hour, and numerous teachers provide a wide spectrum of interesting clubs and helpful revision sessions when needed.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Progress and achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good, but in a few subjects the momentum achieved in Years 7 to 9 is not sustained. Boys achieve lower standards than girls in most subjects.

38. Comparing pupils' progress in Years 10 and 11 with national statistics, by relating their Year 9 points to their GCSE points, shows that progress was sound, overall, in 1999 and 2000, but relatively less so in mathematics and science in 2000. Progress, compared with similar schools, was well below average in science and mathematics in 2000. Considerable staffing problems, now resolved, contributed to this, and to the low results, overall, in business studies and information technology. The school has already taken effective action to support Year 11 pupils with their information technology coursework.
39. In lessons seen during the inspection, standards were higher than last year's GCSE results would suggest, showing that staffing changes, and stability in some areas, have already had a positive impact. As the school steadily improves the average points score at the end of Year 9, it becomes increasingly challenging for it to record better than good progress, overall, in Years 10 and 11. In 2000, 47 per cent of boys (national average 44 per cent) attained five grades A*-C compared with 61 per cent of girls (national average 54 per cent). As in the previous year, the national average for girls was exceeded by a greater margin than that for boys.
40. Analysis of boys' performance compared with girls is not straightforward as relative positions change each year. Nevertheless, examination of grades A*-C over the last three years shows that the considerable gap between girls' and boys' performance in French and physical education is because boys attained significantly lower percentages than those nationally for boys. (Significantly, the school enters practically all boys who study French). The gender gap is much narrower in business studies, information technology and religious education, but both boys and girls attained results below the national figures for their gender. With impressive results in the percentage of grades A*-C in several subjects (see paragraph 31), sharing of good practice between departments is likely to strengthen standards.

41. The new head of the geography department is aware of the higher than expected number of pupils attaining grade D last year and has introduced techniques to deal with this. Standards in science are better now than those seen in last year's GCSEs, when the percentage of grade Es was above that expected. Extension material for high attainers, or those who are particularly gifted (who have been identified by the school), is not evident enough in lessons. Work is underway to develop such materials and should be pursued. In some top sets, group sizes are large; this makes it even more important that extension work is provided to challenge higher-attaining pupils.
42. Just as it is not possible to single out departments for particularly effective teaching so the same applies to the quality of marking. The majority of teachers do it well, though a few do not. The school needs to consider how often marking should be done, how regularly it should be monitored, and the quality of the written comments expected. Good practice includes references to standards attained, targets, and how to improve. The consistency of correction of spellings, punctuation and grammar varies considerably. Bearing in mind that technical accuracy can gain marks in GCSE examinations, a decision to be consistent in correcting subject-specific spellings would be wise. A considerable number of exercise books contain uncorrected spellings and missing capital letters.

The new discrete information technology lessons do not yet match the most effective use of computers seen in some subjects.

43. It is to the school's credit that, before this term, the push to introduce computers has been through subjects rather than separate information technology lessons. In several subjects it has been very successful, and examples of excellent practice were observed during the inspection. Many teachers have taken part in training so they are confident users and happily try out new software with pupils. Wise teachers exploit the skills that pupils have, using them to help solve problems and thus generating a stimulating atmosphere in which everyone is learning together.
44. Year 8 pupils use 'Logo' very well to produce mathematical shapes on screen, and in one lesson the teacher guided pupils to consider problems very clearly so that their shapes improved quickly. In design and technology, in addition to writing up and producing impressive title pages using computers, pupils are encouraged to use photographs in their project work and to evaluate the differences in quality between digital and conventional cameras. In music, notation software is used well by GCSE pupils to present scores professionally. In geography, pupils use Internet sites to extract detailed information, for example, about the Lake District when studying National Parks.
45. In science, pupils use computers to predict, calculate and understand the impact of changing variables; for example, those affecting the height a space rocket reaches. In Year 11, the teacher used a well-chosen software system well to explain cell division. In food studies, the teacher used a program on safety to stimulate pupils successfully to think and make decisions on their own. In modern foreign languages, pupils particularly enjoy lessons where they communicate with a French school by e-mail. These examples illustrate the high quality of learning resulting from effective and well-planned use of information technology seen in lessons during the inspection; other evidence confirms that several other subjects incorporate it effectively.
46. As discrete information technology lessons take place in rooms that have, on average, fifteen computers, either pupils sit two to a computer or they wait to have a turn. Neither arrangement is ideal. Sharing computers means that pupils are squashed, often sit at an awkward angle to the keyboard and screen, and one of them does nothing at all. If they wait to have a turn and are given the task of preparing text or a design, one major benefit of using computers – making alterations whilst creating – is lost.
47. In part of a Year 8 lesson, pupils did little more than copy text they had already prepared into a word processing package. The teacher did not encourage them to use more than a few fingers, so progress was slow. Nevertheless, another group of Year 8 pupils described how they had learned

to change fonts and colours, which they had not done before. In a Year 7 double lesson, pupils discussed work for twenty-five minutes before any of them touched a computer. Split in two, the second group only spent 15 minutes at a computer, just before the end of the lesson. This is not a good use of time and resources. In another Year 7, lesson several girls did not work well whilst they were waiting to have their turn on the computers.

48. There is no formal system to record the skills that Years 7 and 8 pupils already possess, and their experience of computers in primary schools, so a few pupils practise techniques (such as drawing and colouring) at too simple a level. A considerable number of pupils have computers at home and are knowledgeable about software applications. Others need help at a very basic level, but there are no simple reference materials beside each computer to encourage them to work on their own. In a few rooms instructions are pinned on the walls – too far away for pupils to read them in front of the screens. This does not matter so much when they are all working through a specific program for a particular subject, but it does hold back progress in the discrete information technology lessons. It is difficult for teachers to demonstrate applications to a whole class without any interactive whiteboards or large computer screens.

The organisation of parents' evenings, how often parents are informed about pupils' progress, particularly in Year 7, and the fact that a minority of parents feel the school does not work closely with them.

49. Several parents wrote comments about the organisation of parents' evenings, including remarks such as, "long queues to see the same teacher", and descriptions of poor organisation of the events. Such thoughts may explain why almost one third of those who completed the questionnaire felt they were not kept well-informed about how their children were getting on. Parents value the calendar of events they receive at the beginning of the year and most of them are satisfied with the quality of reports.
50. Parents acknowledge that letters are sent home if homework is not completed or there are other concerns, but, when reports and a parents' evening both come in the second half of the school year, they worry that issues might not be brought to their attention early enough. The time between Year 7 and Year 8 parents' evenings is sixteen months, although reports are sent home four months before the latter.
51. It is difficult to understand why a minority of parents feel that the school does not work closely with them. The senior management team and the governing body expressed concern at this perception. The school does as much as most secondary schools to maintain contact and strong links with home. Pupils observe that letters home praising good work or effort peter out after the first couple of years and that perhaps more could be written in later years.
52. Parents do not receive a summary of the School Development Plan and find out details about what is taught each year only with the reports. Parents' evenings, concerts and drama productions are well-supported but a few parents would like to attend the school's annual sports day. The headteacher would welcome any who express such an interest. A few parents observe that when they communicate with the school it is not always the headteacher who replies. This merely reflects the school's management structure whereby the person who knows the child best responds. This is a sensible arrangement.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

53. In order to raise standards further and build on the school's many strengths, the governing body should address the following issues:

- **To raise progress and achievement further in Years 10 and 11, especially for boys, and to sustain the momentum achieved in Years 7 to 9:**

- monitor progress carefully and focus on areas where results could be significantly better;
- strengthen the consistency and regularity of marking, especially in terms of how consistently spelling mistakes, particularly subject-specific ones, are corrected;
- reduce the large group sizes in a few subjects;
- use predicted grades to challenge pupils who have attained high standards in Year 9.

(Paragraphs 38 to 42)

- **To raise standards in discrete information technology lessons evaluate the first few months of the new discrete lessons:**

- review arrangements to ensure the effective use of computers;
- maximise hands-on experience of computers;
- provide easily accessible basic instructions about the main generic programmes available;
- establish clear records of the skills pupils already possess;
- exploit the good teaching seen in several other subjects and make sure that teachers who deliver the course are confident and experienced using computers;
- improve pupils' keyboard skills.

(Paragraphs 43 to 48)

- **To address the concerns expressed by parents:**

- review and improve the arrangements for parents' evenings;
- invite Year 7 and Year 10 parents into school earlier than at present;
- consider whether any additional information about progress could be sent home between the annual written reports;
- send parents summary copies of the School Development Plan and, at the beginning of the autumn term, descriptions of what is going to be taught.

(Paragraphs 49 to 52)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	77
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	36

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
8	32	41	19	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	Y7-11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1276	
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	76	

Special educational needs	Y7-11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	45	
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	255	

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	13
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	29

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	6.5	School data	0.3
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	147	117	264

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	113	117	122
	Girls	108	94	92
	Total	221	211	214
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	84 (81)	80 (73)	81 (73)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	41 (44)	60 (45)	42(28)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	97	111	118
	Girls	103	90	92
	Total	200	201	210
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	76 (73)	76 (77)	80 (87)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	43 (41)	54 (37)	35 (48)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	2000	107	132	239

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	50	100	103
	Girls	80	124	129
	Total	130	224	232
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	54.4 (57.4)	93.7 (97.9)	97.1 (99.6)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score	School	42.5 (44.1)

per pupil	National	38.3 (38.0)
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Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	6
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	6
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	7
White	1255
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	1	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	38	2
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 to 11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	70.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 to 11

Total number of education support staff	31
Total aggregate hours worked per week	698

Deployment of teachers: Y7 to 11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 to 11

Key Stage 3	23.5
Key Stage 4	21.6

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	3012196
Total expenditure	3029298
Expenditure per pupil	2391
Balance brought forward from previous year	65671
Balance carried forward to next year	48569

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1276
Number of questionnaires returned	445

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	36	52	9	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	42	49	3	1	6
Behaviour in the school is good.	34	53	4	1	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	26	55	13	4	2
The teaching is good.	32	55	2	1	10
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	40	25	7	5
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	39	46	7	4	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	59	37	1	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	20	43	21	6	9
The school is well led and managed.	36	47	5	1	12
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	35	53	5	1	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	36	44	4	2	15