

INSPECTION REPORT

**BRENTWOOD URSULINE CONVENT HIGH
SCHOOL**

Brentwood

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115377

Headteacher: Miss Helen Penny

Reporting inspector: Mrs Sylvia Richardson
[1038]

Dates of inspection: 9th to 13th October 2000

Inspection number: 223797

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

© Crown copyright 2000

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary Aided

Age range of pupils: 11-18

Gender of pupils: Girls

School address: Queen's Road,
Brentwood,
Essex

Postcode: CM14 4EX

Telephone number: 01277 227156

Fax number: 01277 229454

Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr Colin Hardy

Date of previous inspection: 30th October 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
Mrs Sylvia Richardson	Registered inspector
Mr Husain Akhtar	Lay inspector
Ms Jennifer Bray	Team inspector
Mrs Maggie Holling	Team Inspector
Mr George Knights	Team inspector

The inspection contractor was:

The Cambridgeshire Partnership

The Business Centre
St John's Court
East Street
St Ives
Cambridgeshire PE25 5PD

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Registrar
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
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	10-15
The school's leadership and high expectations of pupils	
Standards of work	
Good teaching and good progress	
Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and commitment	
The arts college and information communications technology	
Quality and range of the curriculum	
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	15-16
The role of heads of department	
Some aspects of teaching	
Resistant materials and pneumatics	
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	16-17
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	18-22

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School has grown considerably over the last five years, and there are now 981 girls on roll, whose families have chosen this school because of its Catholic nature. Pupils come from a wide geographic area and over 40 feeder primary schools. They represent a range of ethnic minorities; almost all are fluent in English, even though it may be an additional language. About 10% of the pupils are of broad Christian affiliation but not Catholic. Up to 10% of places are reserved for girls with particular musical aptitude. A small but significant minority of pupils has special educational needs. Overall, girls' attainment when they enter the school is above average, but there are few girls who would be considered to be in the highest ability range, as there is a local system of selection at the age of 11. There is a further loss of some of the highest attaining pupils at the age of 16 when they transfer to local grammar schools.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Brentwood Ursuline Convent High School is a very good and effective school with standards well above the national average and well above standards in schools with a similar intake. Teaching is good overall with examples of very good teaching. The leadership provided by the headteacher is excellent; management is very good. The value for money is very good.

What the school does well

- Outstanding leadership from the headteacher sets the tone of the school and its high aspirations for all pupils' achievements. Teachers expect pupils to do well and to contribute to the life of the school.
- Standards of work in class are good and test and examination results very good.
- Generally good teaching results in pupils learning effectively and making good progress, especially in Years 10 and 11, where progress is often very good.
- Pupils' attitudes to school, behaviour and commitment are exceptional and serve to enhance their learning at all times. Relationships, too, are excellent.
- The arts college programme is providing cultural stimulation and further personal development opportunities for pupils. Improvements in the provision of information and communication technology are adding a new dimension to pupils' learning.
- The quality and range of learning opportunities are very good, especially in the excellent extra-curricular programme to which girls and staff give much time, commitment and energy.

What could be improved

- The responsibility taken by heads of departments for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning in their subjects, although greater than at the time of the last inspection, needs further development in some subjects.
- Aspects of teaching, including feedback to pupils in Key Stage 3 to assist them to improve their work, and the development of more of the flair seen in the very best teaching, would further raise standards.
- The provision of courses in resistant materials and pneumatics within the design and technology programme is currently insufficient.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since the school was last inspected in 1995, there have been many improvements, for example, in the provision and standards of information and communication technology and the performing arts, and the school has been successfully designated a specialist arts college. Examination and test results have continued to improve steadily. Teaching, especially for pupils in Years 10 and 11, has improved, with good provision for pupils with special educational needs. Pupils' personal development is now outstanding. Management has been successfully restructured, giving the school a coherent sense of direction. Financial decision-making and planning are much more secure, being closely tied into school development priorities in the short, medium and long-term. The extent to which heads of department take on responsibility for monitoring teaching and learning has improved somewhat, but there is still room for further development. School self-review has been introduced to support heads of department

more fully and involve them in managing change effectively. School accommodation has benefited from major refurbishment, although, here too, there is still room for further improvements.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key	
	all schools			similar schools		
	1997	1998	1999	1999	Well above average	A B C D E
Key Stage 3	A	A	A	A	Above average	
GCSE examinations	A*	A	A	A	Average	
A-levels/AS-levels	D	D	B	N/a	Below average	
					Well below average	

Examination and test results are generally very good, and well above those of schools with a similar intake. In particular, results have been consistently good in classical studies and music. Performance has been less good, relative to the rest of the subjects in this school, in physics and combined science. The trend in results in the school's average National Curriculum points score has risen at broadly the same rate as nationally at the age of 14. The rise has been faster between the ages of 14 and 16, reflecting acceleration in the value the school adds to pupils' prior attainment, which was also evident in work seen. In the sixth form, despite the fact that some of its most able pupils leave the school at the end of Year 11 to transfer to local grammar schools, the trend of performance has been upwards. A significant minority of pupils attains better standards than their GCSE results would have indicated. In addition to measures of success in public examinations and tests, girls achieve very well in music, the arts and sport. They give considerable service to the community, both locally and abroad.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils' attitudes and commitment to the school are a major source of strength.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is very good in all contexts.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Pupils take good advantage of the various opportunities to contribute to the well-being of the whole community and show great maturity in their relationships.
Attendance	Very good. There is virtually no unauthorised absence.

The attitudes of the pupils towards the school and their own learning are impressive. They take on high levels of responsibility within the school, are courteous and hardworking. There is much mutual support.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Very 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 generally good across the age and ability range. Of the fifty-eight lessons seen, twelve lessons (21%) were very good or excellent, twenty-two good (38%) and twenty-one (36%) satisfactory. Only three lessons were unsatisfactory (5%) and two of these were in the sixth form, offering too little challenge to the pupils. All lessons in Key Stage 4 were satisfactory or better and there was a close correlation in this phase between very good teaching and the accelerated pace of learning and progress. There is consistently good or very good teaching in English. In mathematics and science, whilst much is good or very good, there are occasional lapses due to the high degree of teacher direction and over-cautious approaches to teaching. There is some very good and even outstanding teaching in music and drama.

The best teaching owes much to the high quality of relationships within the classroom, which enhance pupils' learning. The teaching of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy is good, and goes well beyond the English and mathematics classrooms, and this also contributes to the very good standards in work seen. Recent investment in information and communication technology, particularly in music and modern languages, is now beneficially influencing teaching and learning in most subjects. Teachers plan well to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs, and there is a concerted effort to meet the needs of the highest attaining pupils, who generally do very well.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is appropriately broad and balanced, and is meeting the needs of pupils of all abilities. The extra opportunities for curriculum enrichment are excellent.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good support is given, with early identification of needs. Teachers know pupils' needs well and plan to meet them.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good in all categories, although access to a broad ranging multi-cultural education is more limited. Pupils have very good opportunities to develop interests and skills for adult life. Moral, social and cultural values and a sense of community responsibility are very well promoted.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The pastoral system is very good. The caring ethos that pervades the school is a source of great strength. More could be done to ensure an up-to-date overview of pupils' individual progress.

Parents are generally pleased with the good contact they have with the school and they express great loyalty and support for its spiritual, moral and social values. Links with the school's sponsors are very good, and contact with the primary schools who send pupils are strong at both the pastoral and curriculum levels. The curriculum, with sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of all pupils, also encourages international links. The extra-curricular programme is outstanding. The only deficiency in the curriculum relates to the lack of provision for courses in resistant materials and pneumatics in Key Stages 3 and 4. The pastoral system is very good, providing high levels of support, easy access to guidance and a consistent practical application of the school's values and mission.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. She is well supported by a restructured management team. The school culture of centralised management is changing, with higher levels of delegation to heads of department and heads of year, resulting in their greater commitment to the school's development priorities.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	A thoughtful, but not uncritical, governing body gives very good support to the school and has given valuable support in a period of transition and development.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Self-review is now beginning in the school and has the potential to provide a good foundation for raising standards and improving the school in the future. Heads of department must now become more heavily involved in monitoring teaching and learning.
The strategic use of resources	The school has made very good progress in refurbishing its accommodation and establishing a technological context for learning in the 21 st century. Investment through the arts college programme is having a very significant impact on standards and the range and quality of provision.

Recent restructuring of management is providing the head with appropriate support and senior managers are working well as a team, developing clear areas of specialism within a co-operative environment. Most heads of department have accepted the delegation of responsibility and are learning to exercise it efficiently, but there is still room for further training and development to take best advantage of these opportunities. The school is well staffed and resourced but not well accommodated, despite recent improvements. Accommodation for physical education is particularly limited, and some of the corridors and stairways are extremely crowded. The fact that the school has managed to budget to refurbish so much of its accommodation is evidence of the high quality budget management of recent years, contributing to the overall judgement that the school uses its funding very well.

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's ethos and approach to the whole student Good academic standards High expectations by teachers of the pupils The school's leadership and management Pupils like coming to school and they become more mature and responsible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A small number of parents would like more reports on pupils' progress A small number of parents would like the school to work more closely with them

The inspection team agrees wholeheartedly with the parents' views about the very good school ethos and high expectations of pupils. Reporting on pupils' progress is more thorough and more frequent than is often the case, so inspectors do not agree with this concern. They also believe that there are systems in place which enable parents to have a close working relationship with the school if they so wish. Information to parents about school activities is good.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Outstanding leadership from the headteacher sets the tone of the school and its high aspirations for all pupils' achievements. Teachers expect pupils to do well and to contribute to the life of the school

1. The headteacher gives the school excellent leadership. She has a clear vision for the school's medium and long term development and has been very successful in conveying that vision to staff, pupils and parents. She has extended the range of the school's activities with the development of the performing arts, thus building upon strengths identified at the time of the last inspection. She receives very good support from the governing body, whose expertise, especially in financial management, is another source of strength for the school. The headteacher pays careful attention to working closely with governors on curriculum and staffing proposals and to communicating those proposals for change to parents. This approach has ensured that the community of the school remains united, sharing clear common goals and aspirations.
2. During this period of change, which has included radical restructuring of senior management and a large expansion in pupil numbers, the school has reinforced its commitment to individual achievement and participation in learning. Parents and governors were very keen to inform inspectors that they appreciate the broad view of personal progress and development taken by the school and want the school to continue to value achievement in the spheres of music and the arts, sport and personal maturity, as much as it values examination success. This objective is successfully met by a combination of good teaching which features high expectations of pupils' hard work and academic success, very good levels of care, support and guidance and a stimulating programme of activities in which all pupils can participate and achieve personal satisfaction. A good example of this is pupils' early involvement in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, such as a Year 7 choir, attended routinely by over one third of the year group, binding them together and providing them with a real sense of shared achievement from the outset.
3. Minor weaknesses in departmental management with regard to monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are recognised by senior managers and by many heads of department, and school development planning takes these into account. The pace of development of such quality assurance systems has been slower than the headteacher might have wished, but by moving at a pace with which staff can cope and which earns their commitment, much progress has been made. For example, at the time of the last inspection, the quality of departmental planning was criticised, but it is now of at least a satisfactory standard, with much which is good. However, further development is dependent upon a more systematic approach to departmental self-review and a commitment by all departments to action planning, with defined timescales, as part of this process.

Standards of work in class are good and test and examination results very good.

4. The school's academic performance is well above the national average and there is clear evidence of acceleration between the ages of 14 and 16. Pupils' work in class is well presented, as it was at the time of the last inspection; great care is taken with homework and pupils are both willing and able to undertake considerable personal research to enhance and extend coursework and projects.
5. Part of the continuing success in maintaining high standards is the result of consistent teacher reinforcement of the teaching of literacy and numeracy. A Year 8 geography lesson, for example, spent time to focus on the vocabulary of world ecosystems, before moving on to develop this theme further. Sixth formers and other older pupils use the library and information and communication technology (ICT) facilities well, so their out-of-class time is very productive. General teaching of ICT is contributing well to pupils' learning and its spread into specialist subject areas such as music and languages gives pupils a good basis for extended application of skills.
6. Sixth formers provide excellent role models of high aspiration, hard work and dedication to younger

pupils. As prefects, they encourage younger pupils' commitment to the values of the school and to an ethos of mutual care and respect, which in turn has an impact on standards. A very good example of this occurred in a special meeting of the school council, chaired by the head girl, supported by senior prefects, where a range of problems was dealt with in an atmosphere of concern and consideration.

7. The results of National Curriculum tests at the age of 14, and GCSE results at the age of 16 show that pupils make good progress as they move up through the school. Subject knowledge increases exponentially, and pupils use questioning well, often creating circumstances in which they can take control of their own learning. This is particularly a feature of work seen in the sixth form, where good research skills combined with good questioning contribute well to the quality of examination results; this is notable, for example, in classical studies and in history. In some cases, in these subjects and in some others, pupils' active approach to their work is sometimes the main reason for the quality of their progress, rather than the teaching being mainly responsible for the momentum of learning.
8. Between 1995 and the present, examination and test results have steadily improved at 14, 16 and 18. The proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more GCSE passes with grades A*-C has increased and the school came within a whisker of meeting ambitious targets which are over 30% above the national average. Performance is also impressive in comparison with schools with a similar intake. The results also compare very well with those of all-girls schools nationally.
9. In the sixth form, the appearance of weaker examination results reported at the time of the last inspection is the result of the assumption that pupils who did very well in GCSE examinations move into the sixth form and should continue to do very well. In fact, this appearance is deceptive, since a significant minority of the pupils with very good GCSE results transfer to the local grammar schools, to which they had unsuccessfully applied at the age of 11. The reality therefore is that the value added for pupils who move into this sixth form from its Year 11 is very high indeed, with a significant minority of them gaining better grades at A level than their GCSE grades would have suggested. Results in 1999 were above the national average at A and AS levels and above those of schools with similar intakes. Although comparisons for the 2000 results with national averages are not yet available, it is likely that the same outcome will emerge.

Generally good teaching results in pupils learning effectively and making good progress, especially in Years 10 and 11, where progress is often very good.

10. The headteacher, senior staff and governors see the quality of teaching as a crucial pre-requisite for the school's continuing success. Teaching overall is good in Years 7 to 9 and in the sixth form; it is very good overall in Years 10 and 11, where pupils generally make very good gains. Encouragement to examine the reasons why some lessons are better than others, resulting in pupils making greater gains, has come in the form of the self-evaluation programme, introduced by the headteacher. However, the extent to which all heads of department see themselves as having a real role in self-evaluation, for example by monitoring teaching and encouraging its constant improvement, varies. The overall good quality of teaching is adduced by some as being sufficient proof of the school's effectiveness and the professional approach of its teachers. This reluctance to draw out the best features of the most effective teaching does not impinge on the standards pupils reach by the age of 16, but agreement on such key features would ensure that the faster pace of progress evident in Years 10 and 11 was also occurring in Years 7 to 9 and in the sixth form.
11. Departmental schemes of work are generally sound and often very detailed and thorough, and followed up by appropriate lesson planning, which takes account of pupils' learning needs, the development of the key skills of literacy and numeracy, and, increasingly, their access to information and communication technology. In the best lessons, it is clear that teachers use their planning to form the basis of continuous review and assessment of pupils' progress, and adapt as required in the light of pupils' responses. There were several examples seen when teachers took the opportunity to wind up lessons particularly thoroughly, so that pupils could take stock of learning, plan homework and ask final questions for clarification.

12. As increased awareness of the requirements of examinations and coursework spreads, pupils and teachers work together very effectively to reinforce this acceleration, so that progress is often very good in Years 10 and 11. A Year 11 English class on 'Educating Rita' gave pupils considerable responsibility for preparing work to make a case before the whole class. All pupils' learning benefited greatly from the enthusiastic presentation of the characters portrayed, showing how well pupils can motivate each other when the tasks are as well defined as this one. In Year 10, a science class exemplified the very good progress often seen during the inspection, in relation, in this case, to their understanding of periodic tables. This progress was helped by features such as those listed below;
- a variety in the teaching strategies used to further knowledge (in this case, of atoms and molecules, the properties of metals and non-metals)
 - good use of board work systematically to develop understanding (of atomic elements and melting points);

Also seen in many other good and very good lessons were:

- very good question and answer,
 - high expectations of the continuing quality of pupils' work,
 - very good pace in the lesson, with a lot of ground covered.
13. Challenge occurs in all the best lessons, especially in Years 10 and 11. In music, for example, unaccompanied singing was followed by an analysis of harmonisation using primary and secondary chords. Teaching builds up pupils' confidence and then develops their skills and knowledge of the theme. In drama, in Year 11, detailed, high quality planning helped the teacher to keep the focus on the learning throughout the lesson. The result was that pupils benefited from the teacher's own authoritative subject knowledge and sense of purpose and made very good progress in undertaking measured and convincing role-play. They were effectively encouraged to respond with their own ideas, assume complementary roles and develop a strong story line. In a Year 12 dance lesson, the teacher's suggestions about creative approaches to the theme were well received and used but phrased in such a way as to ensure that the pupils' own creativity was respected and encouraged. In sociology in Year 12, pupils were well challenged by the need to develop their topics further and debate produced a good cross-fire of exchanges, well-informed by expected private reading and allowing pupils to reinforce a sociological vocabulary.
14. Pupils with special educational needs are particularly well catered for in Years 10 and 11, further enhancing the progress in learning evident in this key stage. Lively and interesting exposition by the teacher in withdrawal lessons encourages pupils to improve their writing by drafting and redrafting their work. Skilful questioning expands the range of pupils' writing and gives them the confidence to be more experimental as well as becoming more accurate in their work.
15. In all relevant lessons, there was good teacher and pupil awareness of safety issues. This was evident in many subjects including science, design and technology and in sports. For example, a Year 12 recreational session reinforced issues of safety in the sport throughout the lesson. In a Year 7 dance lesson, when a risk was found, immediate teacher action resulted to ensure that all were aware and that safety was paramount.
16. Where progress is less strong in the sixth form, and is satisfactory or good rather than very good, this is sometimes the result of inaccurate estimation of what is an appropriate degree of challenge. In an AS level geography lesson, for example, the task set could not be completed in the time available, and pupils missed out on the accompanying sense of achievement which would have occurred if the task had been better timed. In a Year 13 business studies lesson, heavy reliance on the use of sheets of notes precluded challenging use of questions, with the result that the depth of analysis was shallow. Inadequately planned teacher input into a Year 13 history lesson left some pupils unsure how to develop their essays, although, as a result of their own research, the work produced was at least of the standard required by this course.

Pupils' attitudes to school, behaviour and commitment are exceptional and serve to enhance their learning at all times. Relationships are excellent.

17. Learning and achievement are enhanced throughout the school by the girls' attitudes to their work and to the life of the school. Attitudes in particular are excellent, behaviour very good, relationships excellent and attendance very good. These factors combine to ensure that each pupil does as well as she could in lessons. All pupils respond very well to the demands of an exacting curriculum, co-operating with their teachers to use time efficiently. Pupils are confident and press the pace of their learning by asking good questions for clarification. They further deepen their knowledge and understanding in a wide range of contexts. They help each other unselfishly and often unobtrusively.
18. The role of the sixth form, and the senior prefects in particular, is impressive in promoting with younger pupils these excellent attitudes and relationships. As well as arranging, directing and taking responsibility for a wide range of activities in the school, prefects take responsibility for engendering and continuing the pride in the school, which underpins much which occurs.
19. Pupils listen well to each other and appreciate other pupils' views. A particularly good example of this was seen in an impromptu discussion amongst Year 8 pupils about the value of the public speaking activities, which are a feature of the school. Pupils were very complimentary and appreciative of the potential value of being able to address large groups and especially complimentary about a speech on racial harassment and bullying given by a black pupil. Discussion on the issues she had raised was lively and mature, and showed a high level of awareness of the importance of respect for the feelings of others and sensitivity to those feelings. In another case, high attaining Year 12 pupils studying law led others in a debate about positive discrimination, bringing source materials into their arguments cogently and with understanding.
20. In many subjects, lessons were seen which took good advantage of these circumstances. A Year 10 information technology (IT - GCSE) class received very helpful encouragement and feedback on group presentations to the class as a whole. This enabled them to deepen their knowledge of the impact of new technologies on work methods in current business practice, an area of knowledge often not tackled until the sixth form. They considered the social and ethical issues in some depth and responded well to each other's contribution to the debate, which despite this breadth, succeeded in meeting the lesson's learning objectives well.
21. Applying their learning to a wider context is one of the benefits of pupils' excellent attitudes. They are frequently required to make decisions for themselves about the best way to apply a new piece of learning, for example, in a very good mathematics lesson in Year 10. The class had to decide how best to present examination results data in the context of several subjects and to justify their choices, even when it turned out that a particular choice was not the most appropriate, and present their ideas in graphical form. The teacher knew that an ambitious project such as this would work with this class and was able to communicate fully the objectives for the lesson in terms of what pupils would get out of it. The pupils themselves undertook effective time management when working in groups, releasing the teacher to spend some of this time monitoring progress and guide pupils' learning. Very good gains in understanding were made in a relaxed, though purposeful, atmosphere within which all relationships were very good.
22. Very high levels of achievement in a Year 9 mathematics lesson also resulted from similar good planning where the teacher could base learning objectives on a secure knowledge of how positively the class would react to a challenge. Good time management by individual pupils and good levels of concentration by the whole class enabled high attaining pupils to make fast progress in absorbing the methods for finding the circumference and area of a circle. Pupils as well as the teacher paid close attention to detail and all had high expectations of success in a taxing context.
23. Pupils are prepared to take risks in their learning. A good example of this was seen in the Year 11 French class making their first ever visit to the brand new interactive languages technology suite.

Despite the teacher and the class having had no familiarisation time with these new facilities, they worked together to iron out any technical problems and acquire confidence in using the facility. The outcomes were impressive: the teacher was able to give individual attention to all, knowing that no girl would waste time. She could offer relevant back-up material to sustain the momentum of the learning and the effect on speaking, listening and reading was very good. As the lesson progressed, confidence grew and after approximately twenty-five minutes, pupils could take full advantage of recording and self-correction facilities. In a similar circumstance, a Year 8 Spanish class concentrated well enough to overcome initial difficulties with the software, help each other to make good progress. Pupils' enjoyment of self-testing was very evident and increased their motivation to make progress to higher levels of difficulty.

24. Pupils in Year 7 are willing to be guided into good learning habits and develop concentration and sense of purpose. A mixed ability English class reading a Rumer Godden novel took on group work with zest. This class, only in the school for some six weeks at the time of the inspection, reflected together with maturity on the social and cultural issues the novel raised. They answered questions openly, coming up with well-formulated ideas to which the whole class listened with evident respect. Mutual respect, help for others and self-help were key features of pupils' attitudes, which the teacher was able to channel into a sense of achievement and high attainment for all, including for the lower attaining pupils. In this atmosphere, lower attainers could participate as fully as others and make gains in self-expression and understanding, whilst increasing their own active vocabulary.
25. Apart from the beneficial impact on learning which comes from pupils' attitudes, behaviour and relationships, there is also an impact on the life of the school. Pupils take responsibility within the school council and are effective in influencing policy and solving problems. In assemblies, classes take responsibility for choosing and developing themes, planning presentations, hymns and readings and reinforcing the best features of the school's ethos. Pupils work in the community and support a mission in Kenya, which requires a sustained effort throughout the year from those involved. Choirs, orchestras and teams of all sort again receive sustained support and pupils put a great deal of effort to make all their activities worthwhile. A rehearsal of the Senior Choir, involving about 80 pupils was a good example of this, when they prepared for public performance, and girls of all ages took part to produce a polished and sophisticated outcome. There is a very wide range of clubs and activities at lunchtimes and after school, many of which are run by pupils for pupils without staff intervention. Staff respect pupils' efforts and encourage pupils' creativity, maturity and commitment to the community of the school.

The arts college programme is providing cultural stimulation and further personal development opportunities for pupils. Improvements in the provision of information and communication technology are adding a new dimension to pupils' learning.

26. The school is making very good use of the additional staff and resources it receives as an arts college. Major changes in the ways in which accommodation is used and wise decisions about how to focus investment in information and communication technology (ICT) have taken place over the last three years. The school has been successful in obtaining external sponsorship and senior staff work well with sponsors to ensure maximum benefit from the investment.
27. The quality of curriculum provision, extra-curricular opportunities and overall access to the arts has improved greatly as a result of the designation as an arts college. Music, drama and dance feature prominently in the opportunities available. The conversion of a redundant swimming pool into an excellent dance studio has encouraged many girls to participate in this activity and to excel. Similarly, the wide range of musical and dramatic activities is impressive. In the week of the inspection, rehearsals, planning and practice continued in the normal way, with a very high proportion of pupils participating in an activity every day of the week. The enlargement of the drama studio provides an excellent facility, although the impact of it is lessened by the lack of smaller class spaces and the continuing need to use part of the dining hall for drama.
28. Numbers of pupils opting for arts subjects have increased in the last two years and the reputation of the arts subjects is considerable amongst pupils.

29. The investment in ICT has benefited a wide range of subjects, including music and languages. The music technology suite is much used, both in lessons and in pupils' free time. It is a hive of activity at lunchtimes and after school. Pupils always respect equipment and each other's work, so many sessions can be unsupervised. Unsupervised work in the library, including use of its internet facilities for private research, is another valuable addition to pupils' learning opportunities since the last inspection took place. Pupils use the internet with a great deal of maturity and those with free access in study periods have signed a code of conduct to which they adhere well. At the time of this inspection, work was just being completed to give the school access to broad band technology and its associated internet facilities.

The quality and range of learning opportunities is very good, including the excellent extra-curricular programme to which girls and staff give much time, commitment and energy.

30. The curriculum is broad and meets the needs of all pupils. There is a good balance of academic and personal development opportunities. The introduction of dance, the broadening of the sixth form curriculum with subjects such as business studies, sociology and law have considerably enhanced what is available. This helps to retain some students in this sixth form when their peers decide to leave to join grammar school or co-educational sixth forms. However, there is no vocational element in the sixth form. A key skills course has recently been introduced.

31. There are excellent extra-curricular opportunities, many of which are organised by pupils themselves. Teachers give a great deal of time, thought and commitment to providing activities which reinforce classroom learning but which also provide the skills at the base of lifelong learning interests. A good example of this was seen in a recreational dance lesson in the sixth form when the teacher specifically linked the activity with the development of key skills in self-expression and communication. Recreational sporting activities in the sixth form also encourage pupils to retain an interest in team sports and develop new interests in sports such as golf, dance and skiing. They also serve to provide appropriate relaxation in a busy schedule and recognise the importance of choice as sixth formers prepare for higher education and work.

32. Personal development opportunities occur in class, as for example, with opportunities to participate in public speaking, in assemblies, when classes and individuals take the lead, and in the school council. Frequently, pupils' contributions to assemblies provide strong reinforcement of school values, for example, when Year 13 led an assembly and chose to use an extract from Nelson Mandela's writings as their theme.

33. Although the school does not have a well-developed policy on the teaching of numeracy, much is done which forms a practical realisation of the school's approaches, to pupils' benefit. There is, for example, good evidence of the use of graphical and calculation skills in science, and of analysis of data in business studies, geography and sociology. The literacy policy has been formally adopted. In English, and most subjects with specific technical vocabulary, teachers take great care to revise and reinforce such language. Pupils of all abilities have good access to computers and receive good support for their learning from subject and special educational needs teachers, so that all groups are working effectively. In the sixth form, the development of courses for all in key skills is a useful recent introduction, and opportunities for the development of computing skills, and for their accreditation, are well established.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The responsibility taken by heads of departments for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning in their subjects, although greater than at the time of the last inspection, needs further development.

34. The self-evaluation system is a useful first step towards a fuller role for heads of department in monitoring the teaching of their colleagues. Senior managers and pastoral staff undertake some monitoring, but there is not yet a consistent programme which ensures that teachers are fully

familiar with the characteristics of the best teaching and can learn from each other.

35. Some departments plan carefully to improve the quality of teaching and learning consistently and set themselves informal improvement targets, but most do not have sufficiently clear approaches to improvement in these areas. Some have started to observe each other's lessons, but there is still a significant minority of departments in which classroom observation, monitoring of pupils' progress through reviews of their books and grades and sharing of most successful teaching techniques is not the general practice. Insufficiently tight and well-researched links are made between teacher performance and pupil progress in many departments, as a result of this lack.
36. In some subjects, particularly those associated with the arts college status, targets for development have moved successively from refurbishment and resource led 'wish-lists' to staff development and maximising efficient use of resources for the benefit of the school and the wider community. This type of thinking is not however systematically integrated across the school into a consistent self-evaluation model from which all can benefit.

Aspects of teaching, including feedback to pupils in Key Stage 3 to assist them to improve their work, and the development of more of the flair seen in the very best teaching, would further raise standards.

37. The school has an effective and straightforward policy regarding assessment of pupil progress which is evident through pupils' work in the form of generally constructive and helpful marking. Pupils' work is monitored in many subjects, but there is a lack of overall co-ordination to ensure that pupils quickly receive support for their own improvement. Senior managers are aware of this need and have advanced plans to involve heads of year and group tutors in this process of co-ordination.
38. Feedback to pupils in class and on their work in writing is more effective for pupils in Years 10 and 11 than in Key Stage 3, with the consequence that some opportunities are lost to draw on pupils' own motivation for self-improvement. In the sixth form, the quality of feedback is more variable than in Key Stage 4, but is generally helpful and supportive. In some subjects, more detailed written feedback is needed.
39. In some lessons where teaching is satisfactory and standards of pupils' work are good, this pattern is achieved as a result of the co-operation and excellent approach to work shown by the girls. Teaching is 'safe' and proficient but lacks the flair which characterises the best in the school. In these lessons, whilst planning is adequate, teachers do not approach their preparations with sufficient attention to providing stimulating and creative examples, or to varying the range of activities within a lesson sufficiently. As a result, although standards are good, some opportunities are lost to help the pupils to 'go the extra mile' and extend themselves fully.

The provision of courses in resistant materials and pneumatics within the design and technology programme is currently insufficient.

40. The curriculum is broad and meets National Curriculum requirements in all aspects except in the provision of aspects of the design and technology course. In particular, resistant materials receives scant coverage and pneumatics virtually none.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

41. In order to continue the steady improvement of this very good school, the headteacher, staff and governors should address the following issues:
 - I. Give further training to heads of department so that they can undertake effective classroom observation and other types of monitoring and evaluation within their departments, in order

to:

- ensure that the minority of teaching in which there is a balance of strengths and weaknesses reaches the quality of the good and very good
 - give maximum opportunities for pupils to develop further their learning skills
 - implement school development priorities to the full.
- II. Ensure that feedback to pupils is consistently as good as the best and follows the school's policy fully.
- III. Review urgently the design and technology provision of resistant materials and pneumatics with a view to ensuring that all National Curriculum requirements are met in this subject.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	58
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	26

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2%	19%	38%	36%	5%	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	811	170
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	39	N/a

Special educational needs	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	1	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	82	6

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	42

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	12
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	25

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	7.4
National comparative data	9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0
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	1999	0	149	149

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	143	132	129
	Total	143	132	129
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	96 (84)	89 (81)	87 (77)
	National	63 (65)	62(60)	55(56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	63 (43)	73 (59)	37 (42)
	National	28(35)	38(36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	146	132	134
	Total	146	132	134
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	98 (91)	89 (85)	89 (83)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	87 (63)	74 (50)	47 (51)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	0	145	145

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	0	0	0
	Girls	118	143	144
	Total	118	143	144
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	81 (79)	99 (98)	99 (98)
	National	46.6 (44.6)	90.9 (89.8)	95.8 (95.1)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	54 (51.6)
	National	38 (36.8)

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	0
	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
	1999	0	58	58

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	0	17.7	17.7 (17.1)	0	1	1 (0)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.6)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	19
Black – African heritage	8
Black – other	2
Indian	6
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	4
White	922
Any other minority ethnic group	20

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	8	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)	58
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	322

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.1
---	------

Average teaching group size: Y7– Y11

Key Stage 3	26.6
Key Stage 4	22.8

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
----------------	-----------

	£
Total income	2,565,573
Total expenditure	2,502,785
Expenditure per pupil	2586
Balance brought forward from previous year	-9673
Balance carried forward to next year	53,115

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	981
Number of questionnaires returned	498

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	52	39	4	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	42	38	4	0	8
Behaviour in the school is good.	46	44	1	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	32	44	7	1	9
The teaching is good.	39	47	2	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	42	13	2	9
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48	39	5	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	66	27	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	30	43	13	3	6
The school is well led and managed.	56	33	3	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	51	36	3	0	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	49	34	6	1	6