

INSPECTION REPORT

DENBIGH SCHOOL

Milton Keynes

LEA area: Milton Keynes

Unique reference number: 110498

Headteacher: Mr Roger Conibear

Reporting inspector: Mr R. Palmer
31198

Dates of inspection: 27th – 29th November 2000

Inspection number: 223928

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	12 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	1 Burchard Crescent Shenley Church End Milton Keynes
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr John Roberts
Date of previous inspection:	5 th December 1994

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Denbigh School became a specialist technology college in September 1997. It is a co-educational, foundation comprehensive school for pupils aged 12 to 18 years. located in the western part of the town of Milton Keynes. The attainment of pupils on entry at age 12 is average overall but contains a below average number of pupils of the highest levels of prior attainment. The school is bigger than other secondary schools nationally and is well over-subscribed. Numbers on roll have increased from 1187 at the time of the previous inspection in 1994 to 1340 currently. The number of students in the sixth form has increased from 154 at the time of the last inspection in 1994 to 297 currently and includes around 15 per cent of entrants from other schools. The overall level of attainment of students on entry to the sixth form is above average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals (7 per cent) is below the national average. A high percentage (10 per cent) of pupils speak English as an additional language, including two pupils at an early stage of learning English. An above average number (12 per cent) come from ethnic minority backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs (17.5 per cent) is average. The number of pupils with statements of special educational needs is also average. One class in Year 8 consists of high attaining pupils of Year 7 age.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Denbigh School is a good school and is close to becoming a very good school. It has made very good progress since its last inspection in 1994. The excellent leadership of the headteacher and the very good leadership and support provided by the senior staff and governing body and are the most significant factors in the school's improvement. Results in external examinations have improved significantly and, in particular, GCSE results have risen to well above the national average in 1999 and 2000. Pupils make very good progress throughout Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Standards in the sixth form have improved and are in line with the national average; students' progress is satisfactory. Within a caring and positive environment, pupils respond well to the high expectations set for them, work hard, achieve well and enjoy their learning. The quality of teaching and learning has improved and is good overall. The school has considerably more strengths than weaknesses, manages its resources very well and provides good value for money. The sixth form is cost effective.

What the school does well

- The outstanding leadership and management of the headteacher, with very effective support from senior staff and the governors, set a very clear direction for the school and have achieved considerable improvements.
- Pupils make good progress throughout Key Stage 3 and very good progress throughout Key Stage 4. Their overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is well above average.
- Very good systems for monitoring the school's performance and for staff training result in good teaching and learning.
- The school makes excellent use of assessment to ensure pupils do not underachieve and to set very challenging targets for improvement for pupils and departments.
- Pupils and sixth form students have very positive attitudes to work and are justifiably proud of their school.

What could be improved

- Standards in the sixth form have improved considerably and A level results are now at the national average. They can be higher.
- Standards in science are satisfactory overall but the quality of teaching is not consistently good enough.
- Performance in National Curriculum tests in English at the age of fourteen is average and can be further improved.
- Provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language is inadequate to ensure that pupils are taught at the appropriate level in all subjects.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good progress since its last inspection in 1994. It rigorously and continually reviews all aspects of its performance and takes effective action to improve. Pupils' achievements have risen substantially. Results in external examinations have improved significantly at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 and the sixth form. The quality of teaching and learning has improved considerably and is now good. A good proportion of teaching is very good. Excellent procedures for monitoring pupils' academic progress and for monitoring the quality of teaching have been developed and contribute positively to pupils' improved standards. Leadership and management remain as strengths. Parents continue to hold the school in high regard. Progress in dealing with the seven key issues identified in the last report, which were mainly concerned with teaching, learning, timetabling and curricular developments, is good overall. Work is now well matched to pupils' differing needs, a suitable range of teaching strategies has been developed, time allocations for subjects are appropriate, pupils in Key Stage 4 can take a wide range of subjects, sixth form class sizes are viable and progress to develop the spiritual aspects of the curriculum is at least satisfactory.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	D	D	C	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

Results in the national tests for 14 year olds over the last four years have improved faster than the national trend. In 2000, results were above average in mathematics and science and average in English. Girls achieved better results than boys in English and mathematics but boys achieved better results than girls in science, broadly in line with the situation nationally. In 1999, results overall were closely matched with those of similar schools.

GCSE results have improved faster than the national trend and over the last three years have been consistently well above the national average. Comparing pupils' GCSE results with their prior attainments in Key Stage 3 national tests, achievements in each of the last two years have been in the top five per cent of schools with similar levels of prior attainment. GCSE

results in 2000 were above expectations in most subjects, but were below expectations in double award science and English literature. Girls achieve higher results than boys as they do nationally. GCSE results in 2000, compared with pupils' prior attainment in the Key Stage 2 national tests taken when they were 11, indicate good progress in English, very good progress in mathematics, satisfactory progress in science and excellent progress in respect of the overall average total GCSE points scores per pupil. Results in A level examinations improved significantly in 2000 and were broadly in line with national averages. Taking into account pupils' prior attainment in GCSE examinations these results represent satisfactory progress.

Standards of work seen in classes were above average in Key Stages 3 and 4 and average in the sixth form. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress throughout the school. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make satisfactory and often better progress. Other pupils of all levels of prior attainment make good progress in Key Stage 3, very good progress in Key Stage 4 and satisfactory progress in the sixth form. The school sets suitably challenging targets for improvements in external examinations and exceeded its targets in 2000.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Throughout the school, pupils have very positive attitudes to work and are eager to learn.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Pupils respect each other and take their learning seriously.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between teachers and pupils and among pupils are good. Pupils are keen to exercise initiative and to take responsibility. They work well together in group and class activities.
Attendance	Attendance is good. Unauthorised absence is low.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is good overall throughout the school. The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 97 per cent of lessons seen; it was good or better in 67 per cent, very good or better in 23 per cent and unsatisfactory in three per cent. Most teachers have very high expectations and make very effective use of assessment to help pupils to improve their learning. For the large majority of pupils the quantity and quality of homework they receive are appropriate and very effective in enhancing their achievement. For a few pupils the amount of homework is too much and discourages them. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is good. The overall quality of teaching seen in Key Stages 3 and 4 was good in English and mathematics and satisfactory in science. Pupils acquire good skills, knowledge and understanding in most subjects and have a very good awareness of their own learning. They usually work at a good pace, concentrate well and are willing to learn. Pupils with special

educational needs are well taught. Pupils who speak English as an additional language receive satisfactory teaching overall but their needs are not always assessed effectively.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	A broad and balanced curriculum in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 meets statutory requirements. The sixth form provision is good overall. The range and quality of extra-curricular activities are good. Very good links with the community significantly enhance pupils' learning experiences.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	These pupils receive good support and make good progress overall throughout the school. Provision for gifted pupils is very good.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Most of these pupils make at least satisfactory progress. The assessment of their levels of competence in speaking, reading and writing in English is not carried out systematically to ensure appropriate support is provided.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision is good overall. Pupils readily accept responsibility and support charitable causes. They respect differing viewpoints.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Through its excellent and effective assessment procedures and the good pastoral system the school carefully and very effectively monitors every pupil's academic and personal development. Procedures for monitoring attendance are good. Procedures for encouraging good behaviour are effective.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and is very well supported by other senior managers. Together, they plan very thoroughly and successfully manage improvements, particularly in raising pupils' levels of achievement.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are very effective and supportive, carry out their duties responsibly, have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, monitor progress rigorously and set very demanding targets for improvement.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Monitoring and evaluation procedures are very effective in raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching. Senior staff take appropriate action to eradicate the small amount of unsatisfactory teaching, through a very good programme of in-service training, support and guidance
The strategic use of resources	Resources are well managed in line with the school's educational priorities. Principles of best value are well applied to provide good value for money overall.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards are high and teaching is good The school is well led and managed. Very high expectations for all pupils. Pupils are proud to belong to the school. Behaviour is good. The school helps pupils to mature and to become responsible and caring. Concerns are dealt with effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few say that there is too much homework. Reports on pupils' progress could be made clearer. The partnership between parents and school could be closer. A few think that the focus on academic achievement is too intense and that pupils enter too many GCSE examinations.

Parents are justifiably very pleased with most aspects of the school's performance. Inspectors' findings strongly support parents' positive views. In respect of parents' views about possible improvements, inspectors confirm that pupils receive large amounts of homework and that for a small minority of pupils this is too much. However, many of the pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they enjoyed having plenty of homework (a few pupils in Year 9 would not agree). Inspectors agree with parents that the information on school reports, though detailed and helpful could be made easier to understand. Inspectors do not agree with those parents who say the partnership with parents is not sufficiently close and find, for example, that the pupils' homework planner is a very effective means of communication about pupils' all round progress, that the quality of information provided for parents is of generally high quality, that a suitable number of consultation evenings for parents is arranged and that parents are encouraged to raise any concerns directly with the school. Inspectors find that the school's focus on academic achievement is appropriate and has led to considerable improvements in external examination results. However, they agree that the large number of GCSE courses followed by some pupils in Key Stage 4 is not always appropriate and that the breadth provided is at the expense of depth in a few subjects.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The outstanding leadership and management of the headteacher, with very effective support from senior staff and the governors, set a very clear direction for the school and have achieved considerable improvements.

1. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, who is very well supported by the senior managers and governors, is a significant factor in the school's continued success and improvements. Pupils, parents, governors and teachers all commented very favourably on the positive impact of the headteacher on the school's improved standards and its deservedly very good reputation locally. The school has made very good progress since its last inspection in 1994.

2. The headteacher sets out a very clear educational direction for the school and has very high expectations of staff and pupils. He is a very visible presence around the school and has a good knowledge of the pupils. He leads by example. A few years ago, the very good results achieved by students in his A level class proved to teachers in other classes that it was possible for students in the sixth form to achieve such high standards and have helped lead to improved overall A level results since. Under his forceful but sensitive guidance, the school continually strives to achieve a very high quality of performance in all aspects of its work.

3. The central aim of raising the attainment of all pupils to the highest possible level is evident throughout the school and is achieving much success. This is indicated in the very good GCSE results gained in 2000, that were considerably higher than expected when measured against pupils' previous attainments at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3. Pupils know that they are expected to work hard and they respond very positively to try to achieve well. Teachers are committed to further improving the quality of teaching and learning and they benefit from the very good programme of staff development.

4. The school has a positive and friendly ethos within which staff and pupils display a strong commitment to achieve high standards of work and behaviour. Many parents, justifiably, commented positively on the very enthusiastic commitment of the large majority of teachers, the good team spirit within the school and the benefits their children gained from the good provision of a very wide range of learning opportunities, including extra curricular activities.

5. Procedures for evaluating the school's performance and planning for improvement are very good and the outcomes of these procedures are good overall. The headteacher, senior managers and governors regularly and rigorously monitor data relating to the school's performance and have a realistic, if rather demanding, appraisal of the school's current strengths and areas for improvement. Very challenging targets for pupils' and all departments' performances in external examinations are determined by the governors' curriculum committee, following a close and rigorous study of pupils' prior attainment and of other relevant assessment data. In 2000, the school met its targets for performance in the national tests for 14 year olds and for GCSE results, and met most of the targets set for it as a specialist technology school. Performance targets set for the next two years are very challenging.

6. Governors are well informed about the performances of all subjects in the school and they monitor developments closely and effectively. They robustly call the school's senior management team to account and have the interests of all pupils at heart. The work of the governing body is a strength of the school and is an important factor in the school's very good progress.

7. Senior managers and governors rigorously and continually review all aspects of the school's performance and take effective action to improve. As a result of these reviews pupils' achievement has risen substantially, results in external examinations have improved significantly and the quality of teaching and learning continues to improve. Excellent procedures for monitoring pupils' academic progress and for monitoring the quality of teaching have been developed and contribute positively to pupils' improved standards. Progress in dealing with the seven key issues identified in the last report, which were mainly concerned with teaching, learning, timetabling and curricular developments, is good overall. Work is now generally well matched to pupils' differing needs, a suitable range of teaching strategies has been developed, time allocations for subjects are appropriate, pupils in Key Stage 4 can take a wide range of subjects, sixth form class sizes are viable and progress to develop the spiritual aspects of the curriculum is good.

Pupils make good progress throughout Key Stage 3 and very good progress throughout Key Stage 4. Their overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is well above average.

8. Pupils' attainment when they enter the school in Year 8 is average overall. By the end of Year 9, results in National Curriculum tests are above average and by the end of Year 11 pupils' results in GCSE examinations are well above the national average. This represents very good progress.

9. GCSE results have improved faster than the national trend and in all of the last three years have been well above the national average. Comparing pupils' GCSE results with their prior attainments in Key Stage 3 national tests, achievements in each of the last two years have been in the top five per cent of schools with similar levels of prior attainment. Girls achieve higher results than boys, as they do nationally. GCSE results in 2000, compared to pupils' prior attainment in the Key Stage 2 national tests taken when they were 11 year olds, indicate good progress in English, very good progress in mathematics, satisfactory progress in science and excellent progress in respect of the overall average total GCSE points scores per pupil.

10. In 2000, the average total points scored per pupil in GCSE examinations was 47.7, which is 9 points and well above the national average and 15 points above the expected performance, based on pupils' prior attainment at the age of 11, one year before they entered the school.

11. Based on their earlier attainment at the age of 11, pupils' GCSE results in 2000 were, on average, half a grade higher than expected in English, about one and a quarter grades higher in mathematics and just above expectations in science. This represents very good overall progress.

12. Progress throughout Key Stage 4, as measured by pupils' GCSE results and compared with their prior attainment in the Key Stage 3 national tests for 14 year olds, is very good. In 2000, pupils' average total GCSE points scores were much higher than expected from their earlier results. This is partly explained by the larger than usual number of GCSE examinations taken by a minority of pupils, but also by the large number of high grades achieved in many subjects. The proportion of pupils achieving GCSE grades A*-C was above

the national average in English and mathematics and average in science. Based on previous attainment in the Key Stage 3 tests, GCSE results in 2000 were well above average in English and mathematics and above average in science.

13. The best GCSE results were achieved in design and technology in which a well-above-average number, 74 per cent, of all pupils of Year 11 age achieved at least one grade at A*-C level and 52 per cent obtained two such grades in the subject. This was a very good achievement because pupils completed both the courses studied in the amount of curriculum time provided for one subject.

14. In nearly all subjects, pupils achieve grades at least in line with predictions based on prior attainment and often above this. The exceptions in 2000 were English literature and double-award science, where the results in these subjects were below expectations.

15. Pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds achieve well. Most of the 31 pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds obtained GCSE results above expectations in 2000, based on prior attainment. Their results overall were above the school's average and well above national averages. The proportion of these pupils gaining A*-C grades was very high in English (77 per cent), mathematics (83 per cent) and in science (86 per cent).

16. Results in the national tests for 14 year olds over the last four years have improved faster than the national trend. In 2000, results were above average in mathematics and science and average in English. Girls achieved better results than boys in English and mathematics but boys achieved better results than girls in science, broadly in line with the situation nationally. In 1999, results were closely matched with those of similar schools.

17. Standards of work seen in classes were above average in Key Stages 3 and 4. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress throughout the school. Other pupils of all levels of prior attainment make good progress in Key Stage 3 and very good progress in Key Stage 4. The school sets challenging targets for improvements in external examinations and exceeded its targets in 2000.

18. Standards in literacy are good and assist pupils' learning in all subjects. Standards in numeracy and in information and communication technology (ICT) are good and help pupils develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in many subjects. Pupils enhance their work through good access to ICT facilities of high quality.

19. Many pupils benefit from the 'fast track' approach such as early entry to GCSE examinations, particularly when they go on to do more advanced work in Year 11, as they do in mathematics. A class in Year 8 consisting of pupils of Year 7 age is making very good progress and is achieving well above the average levels of attainment expected of pupils of the same age.

Very good systems for monitoring the school's performance and for staff training result in good teaching and learning.

20. Links between the senior management team and subject staff are very effective in promoting improvements in work. The monitoring of pupils' learning and of the quality of teaching are well-established features. The homework planner is very well used and is effective in keeping parents informed about pupils' personal and academic progress. There is much sharing of good practice that enables teachers to try different methods of teaching and to engage pupils actively in their own learning. The departmental reviews carried out by senior staff, for example, those for modern foreign languages and design and technology are very thorough and very effective in improving further the quality of teaching and learning. The

evaluations are systematically carried out and include many lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work, analyses of external examination performances of pupils and of classes taken by different teachers. There is very good feedback to the departments who then devise appropriate action plans for improvement. The reviews show that teachers use most of the time in departmental meetings discussing ways of improving teaching and learning. In modern foreign languages, for example, where examination results have shown good improvement, teachers have found that pupils learn better when lessons begin by displaying aims on the board and teachers make use of a stimulating and wide range of learning activities. By ending the lessons with a review of progress made and pointers for the next piece of learning, teachers reinforce pupils' knowledge and understanding. Results in external examinations have improved in modern foreign languages as a result of improved teaching, whereby teachers are not afraid to try out new ideas, have a good knowledge of examination requirements and help each other.

21. The effectiveness of the school's monitoring procedures is evident in an increasingly consistent pattern of good teaching. Teachers plan their lessons well, give clear introductions to the work, set challenging work including homework, use a wide range of activities, often setting short-timed targets, and end with a comprehensive review of progress made in the lesson. The teaching of literacy is effective. Pupils practise reading and writing regularly in English. In other subjects they receive consistent advice on how to avoid common errors in spelling and grammar, and guidance on how to improve their writing skills. The teaching of numeracy skills is also good, and pupils' mathematical skills are appropriately developed in subjects such as science and design and technology.

22. These strategies are applied successfully in many departments. In a very good lesson in English in Year 9, for example, high-attaining pupils made progress at a fast rate during a lesson when they eagerly discussed many aspects of the play Macbeth, before carrying out suitably challenging creative writing tasks. They achieved very well because the teacher made the aims of the lesson very clear, used a good variety of activities to keep pupils' motivation and interest very high, constantly challenged the pupils to think deeply. The lesson ended with a rigorous questioning of pupils, requiring them to explain what they had learned during this lesson. Pupils responded with considerable enthusiasm, and the articulacy of their answers indicated the level of understanding and knowledge expected from Year 11 GCSE classes.

23. In a food technology lesson for a Year 8 class containing pupils of a wide range of attainment, pupils made very good progress. They were well aware of the safety and operative procedures to be followed when working in pairs in kitchen areas and had a very good understanding of the work to be done. Through the teacher's skilful questioning, they gave good reasons for their choice of fruits to make a fruit salad, referring to colour, texture and flavour. The tight time constraints imposed by the teacher ensured that pupils worked productively and at a good pace. The teacher's careful monitoring of activities and assessment of pupils' skills by observation and through questioning enabled pupils to achieve their individual targets for the lesson. Pupils thoughtfully completed a well-prepared evaluation sheet at the end of the lesson and made suitable suggestions about how to improve their work.

24. Pupils with special educational needs in a class of widely different attainment received good support and made good progress in a humanities lesson in Year 9 when writing on the topic of slavery. Good planning and the use of well designed writing frames ensured that work for all pupils in the class was of an appropriate level of difficulty.

25. Attempts to improve teaching methods in sixth form classes are proving successful. Indications of students making good progress because they were actively involved were evident in a few lessons where students made their own presentations. One lesson was based on 'research' and was critically assessed under a number of headings by the other students. In another lesson, students took responsibility for part of a topic and the result was passed to the others ensuring an appropriate division of labour and a good pace of learning. In a third lesson, there was good group work in which each student had a different piece of evidence and the group had to use all four in order to complete the task.

26. The school has made considerable progress in dealing with two key issues from the last inspection that identified the need to improve the quality of both teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are now good overall because the school's procedures for monitoring and evaluating the performances of teachers and pupils and its programmes for INSET are very effective in promoting good work.

27. The quality of pupils' learning has improved because teachers provide work that is well matched to pupils' needs and the curriculum provides a wide range of opportunities. Many pupils benefit from the 'fast track' approach such as early entry to GCSE examinations. A class in Year 8 consisting of pupils of Year 7 age is making very good progress. Teachers make good use of the individual education plans to ensure that pupils with special educational needs make good progress in subjects throughout the school. The school makes good use of the additional funding received for its status as a specialist technology school to provide favourable class sizes in science, design and technology, mathematics and ICT and to provide additional support staff to ensure that ICT is readily available to assist pupils' learning.

28. Pupils extend the range of their learning opportunities because most attend lessons for 27.5 hours per week, compared with the more usual 25 hours. This enables pupils to take a wider range of subjects, resulting in many of them studying a large number of GCSE courses in Key Stage 4. Although the large majority of pupils enjoy the challenge of taking so many subjects and many parents also strongly approve of this approach, in some subjects breadth occurs at the expense of depth. For example, pupils who achieve good GCSE grades in mathematics in Year 10 suitably deepen their understanding of the subject by following A level modules in Year 11, whereas those who achieve such grades in English proceed to study a GCSE level course in media studies rather than work at a more demanding level. Expectations are high, however.

29. Pupils receive large amounts of homework, which are of good quality, to enhance their learning. The school makes effective use of its electronic reporting facilities to produce regular half-termly reports on homework completion and progress made. This has resulted in teachers being more consistent in setting appropriate homework and pupils being more careful in completing it.

30. Pupils in Year 11 receive special help of various kinds when preparing for GCSE examinations. This is suited to their individual needs as identified from the regular monitoring of their progress. This help is an important factor in helping many pupils achieve their potential in GCSE examinations. A revision course is arranged during the Easter holiday for borderline and other candidates; networked CD-ROMs are provided to aid revision in many subjects; pupils can borrow school video programmes to assist their learning at home; pupils have easy access to the Internet for revision purposes; targeted pupils are mentored by staff

from local businesses; workshops to assist pupils with their GCSE coursework are run outside normal lesson time; extra lessons are taught in some subject areas and a well organised study leave revision programme is arranged. Throughout Year 11 pupils prepare well for their examinations through the use of a well-planned revision skills booklet and an effective tutorial programme.

31. Arrangements for staff development and for improving the overall quality of teaching are effective in raising standards. The rigorous reviews of subject and whole-school performances identify areas needing improvement and staff training is provided. Teachers attend appropriate courses and several undertake research projects to consider how to improve teaching methods. Suitably, a current focus of the action research group of teachers is to improve teaching and results in A level classes. This is already meeting success, as shown by the very good improvements in A level results in 2000, although the school recognises that further developments are needed to ensure that A level results improve sufficiently. Strategies that are seen to work well in some subjects are shared in the action research group's meetings and disseminated through departmental and year team meetings and through cross-curricular management meetings. The INSET programme has been successful in enabling teachers to make good use of new technology, both to increase the range of learning activities for pupils and to use assessment and target-setting data effectively.

32. The few teachers who experience difficulties with some classes receive good support and encouragement from senior staff, who go into lessons to observe and help. However, if sufficient improvement does not occur within a reasonable period, the leadership is ready to confront unsatisfactory teaching in an appropriate manner. The induction programme for new teachers is effective. The large number of new teachers who joined the school at the start of the current school year have settled in well and are well acquainted with the school's methods, aims and procedures.

The school makes excellent use of assessment to ensure pupils do not underachieve and to set very challenging targets for improvement for pupils and departments.

33. The school's very effective use and monitoring of target-setting successfully promotes a culture of high expectations. All pupils and departments have challenging but achievable targets, based on pupils' prior attainment and cognitive ability tests, that are regularly reviewed. Pupils and parents are actively involved in setting and agreeing these targets. Form and subject teachers carefully monitor progress so that underachievement is detected at an early stage and is followed by appropriate remedial action. Senior managers oversee progress on targets and monitor closely and regularly how effectively the assessment procedures are used to promote pupils' learning.

34. One of the reasons pupils achieve well is that they are often challenged by their teachers to explain what their individual targets for attainment are, how well their current performance actually matches up to these targets and what they have to do to improve. Teachers often set targets for pupils to achieve within lessons, and by the end of a series of lessons, which help pupils to retain their concentration and motivation. Teachers' marking, as seen in pupils' modern foreign languages work, for example, indicates the National Curriculum level and how it was arrived at and shows what needs to be done to reach the next level. Pupils acquire a very good knowledge of their own learning because they are frequently involved in helping to assess their own work, and that of others in the class, using National Curriculum levels.

35. The school assiduously analyses the statistical data of pupils' performance to predict

future outcomes and to compare the achievements of pupils and the school against local authority and national performances. Information about pupils' prior attainment in National Curriculum tests taken at the ages of 11 and 14 and their results in cognitive ability and reading tests is used well, in conjunction with teachers' own assessments of pupils' work, to agree suitably demanding, individual learning targets for each pupil and to set challenging targets for subject departments. Pupils make good and often very good progress towards meeting their targets because they have been closely involved in the target-setting process along with their teachers, form tutors, heads of year and parents.

36. All concerned parties work together to ensure that the assessment procedures are successful in helping pupils to improve their work. Pupils receive good support and guidance through regular reviews with their teachers and are motivated by the school's very good learning ethos that highlights academic achievement as a common aim. Parents and pupils are kept well informed about pupils' progress through the annual issue of three long and three short reports, at regular intervals, indicating pupils' responses to homework, effort made and progress towards their targets. Reports are suitably detailed but the presentation is unclear and not always easily understood by some parents.

37. The senior management team ensure that teachers receive all pertinent assessment data and make clear their expectations that the data is used well, both to help pupils improve and to help teachers plan lessons of suitable degrees of difficulty for all pupils. During their monitoring of individual departments, senior staff rigorously discuss with teachers whether recent achievements by pupils indicate that sufficient value is added to their earlier attainment.

38. As a result of the analyses of assessment, pupils of all levels of attainment are provided with additional challenges. Pupils with SEN and others who need to improve skills in literacy or numeracy attend extra lessons outside the normal school day, when they improve their skills through effective use of a computerised individual learning system. Some pupils are guided to attend special homework or catch-up clubs. High attainers are placed on fast-track GCSE courses, as in mathematics where they proceed to AS level mathematics courses in Year 11.

39. Underachievers are quickly identified and are given appropriate support through mentors. Pupils with reading problems receive good help from staff and members of the sixth form and Year 11.

40. Pupils receive plenty of encouragement to succeed and are aware of how well they are doing. The close working partnership of subject teachers and pastoral staff, including form teachers, ensures consistency in the implementation of procedures for assessing and evaluating pupils' achievement and has a positive influence on pupils' standards.

Pupils and sixth form students have very positive attitudes to work and are justifiably proud of their school.

41. Pupils and parents express pride in their school because it provides a good quality of education that enables the vast majority of pupils to achieve their potential, within a secure and caring learning environment. They are aware that the school has made very good progress in recent years and that it has a deservedly good reputation locally for seeking high standards of achievement. The school is successful in raising standards well above the national average by the end of Key Stage 4. It is working with equal vigour to provide a sixth form where standards also reach above and eventually well above national averages. Of the 560 parents who returned the pre-inspection questionnaire, the very high proportion of 97 per cent stated that the school expected pupils to work hard and achieve their best.

42. Sixth form students interviewed were all proud of the school and would not wish to be educated elsewhere. They are conscious of the school's good reputation and many say they realise how fortunate they are to experience the good quality of education provided.

43. Pupils show their positive and enthusiastic attitudes to school by good attendance, good and courteous behaviour, a strong commitment to work, tolerance and respect for the views of others, a willingness to cooperate well with each other and their teachers and, in particular, through their continual striving to achieve higher standards of attainment. They participate in a wide range of after-school activities.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Standards in the sixth form have improved considerably and A level results are now at the national average. They can be higher.

44. The school recognises that standards of attainment in the sixth form, although improving, have not been high enough.

45. Standards of attainment in the sixth form as measured by students' A level results at the end of Year 13 have improved from well below the national average in 1997 to the national average in 2000, when the school achieved its best ever results at this level. Results in 2000 were much higher than at the time of the last inspection in 1994. The number of students entering the equivalent of at least two A level examinations rose by more than 50 per cent to 68 and the average points scored by students rose substantially from 10.2 to over 18 and close to the national average. Based on students' prior attainment, the results in 2000 were satisfactory.

46. A level results in 1999 were below average and due largely to an intake which had relatively few higher grades at GCSE. Results in 2000 are much better and show a very slight improvement in the overall grades expected from students' prior attainment in GCSE examinations and from other predictive data used by the school. The very good progress achieved by pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 is not reflected in the sixth form, where progress is now satisfactory.

47. The sixth form has increased rapidly in the last few years and contains nearly 300 students. It attracts around 15 per cent of its intake from other schools, including grammar schools. In the early years, when it was building up, access to the sixth form and entry to one or two A level examinations was easy, and based on modest qualifications. Gradually the school has introduced more realistic levels of prior attainment at GCSE level as a requirement for studying three A levels, although students who do not meet these requirements are sometimes allowed to follow A level courses, according to their individual

circumstances. Students in 2000 were the first for whom the current conditions apply, which in part explain the better A level results.

48. Because of the low unemployment rate in the area, many sixth form students have part-time and sometimes very demanding jobs. Although these opportunities enable students to prepare well for life beyond school, they also restrict the amount of time students can devote to their sixth form studies. This has only a slightly adverse impact on progress because students are mostly very conscientious, and the school's procedures pick up underachievement at an early stage so that corrective action can be swift. The dropout rate from sixth form courses is quite high, as students find it easy to obtain suitable permanent employment, often of good quality.

49. One of the school's priorities, suitably, is to raise attainment in the sixth form to above the national average and eventually to well above. To achieve this aim the school is using a range of appropriate strategies, which are beginning to prove effective in raising standards. The entry requirements to A level courses are now more realistic. It expects the success of its policy of focusing firmly on academic attainment in Years 8 to 11 to prepare students well for the rigours of A level and other sixth form courses. Students have challenging targets, based on prior attainment and ALIS (A level Information Systems) predictive scores, which are reviewed frequently. There has been action research to try to improve teaching methods. Teaching in the sixth form has improved. Teachers are beginning to use more imaginative teaching methods and some are becoming less reliant on dictated notes. Students are taking more responsibility for their own learning. Many are competent users of ICT and use it to assist their work in many subjects.

50. Students follow a sixth form curriculum that is broad and relevant. Class sizes are reasonable and sometimes large. The school is responsive to perceived demand and to local business, as a result of which it appropriately replaced the GNVQ course in health and social care with courses in business studies and ICT. Students enhance their personal development and learning through an examination course in general studies and through an appropriate programme of personal, social and health education in the tutor period. Key skills are taught effectively through subjects.

51. Opportunities for sixth formers to exercise responsibility are relatively few. When given the chance, students respond positively and accept assignments enthusiastically. Representatives on the school council carry out their work conscientiously and students on the common room and functions ad hoc committees enjoy their work and gain useful experience. The younger pupils value students' work as mentors to Year 8. Students acquire a good insight into the learning development of younger pupils as they stay with a form for two years. They develop their social awareness through their work and support in organising charity appeals.

Standards in science are satisfactory overall but the quality of teaching is not consistently good enough.

52. In the national tests in science for 14 year olds, in 2000, results were above the national average. These results were slightly higher than those achieved in English and similar to those achieved in mathematics. However, the number of pupils reaching level 6 and above is the same as those in English and lower than those in mathematics. The science course (which has now been replaced with a more suitable one) in Key Stage 3 did not provide sufficient challenge for the higher attainers.

53. The proportion of the 35 pupils of ethnic minority background who achieved the national expectation of level 5 in the national tests in 2000 was 74 per cent in English, 86 per cent in mathematics and 66 per cent in science. The proportion of pupils reaching level 5 was above the national average in all three subjects, but whereas it was above the school's average in English and well above in mathematics, it was well below in science.

54. In 2000, pupils' GCSE results in science overall were slightly below the national average for pupils gaining grades A*-C and above average for those gaining grades A*-G. Although these results represented at least satisfactory progress in science, they compare unfavourably with results obtained in English and mathematics which were both above the national averages for pupils achieving grades A*-C and A*-G in those subjects. Results in the double award science examinations were below expectations.

55. Comparing pupils' GCSE results in 2000 with their prior attainment in the national tests taken at the end of Key Stage 2 pupils' progress throughout Key Stages 3 and 4 was satisfactory in science, good in English and very good in mathematics.

56. The proportion of the 31 pupils of minority ethnic background achieving at least one A*-C grade in science at GCSE level was well above the school and national averages for science and was just above the proportion gaining such grades in mathematics and well above that for English.

57. Pupils' progress in science is good in Key Stage 3 but is no better than satisfactory in Key Stage 4. Pupils' progress in science varies according to the quality of teaching, which ranges from very good to unsatisfactory. The school carefully measures the value added to pupils' performances in all classes. In science, as in a few other subjects, the progress of pupils of different levels of attainment depends greatly upon which teacher takes the class. Much of the teaching seen was satisfactory although dull at times, contrasting sharply with some of the exciting teaching pupils receive in many other subjects and in some other science classes where they make fast progress. A small amount of unsatisfactory teaching hinders the learning of a minority of pupils. In these lessons, the teacher is unable to explain the work clearly, tends to dominate the lesson, pace is slow and pupils become bored, learn very little and lose concentration, even though they have a generally positive attitude to their work. The school's senior managers are aware of the unsatisfactory teaching in the department and are taking vigorous and appropriate action to support and try to improve it.

58. The appointment of separate coordinators for science at each key stage has improved the department's efficiency and allows closer monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning within the department. The improved links with the middle and combined feeder schools assist the continuity of learning in science. The department is seeking to incorporate the teaching and use of ICT, which is currently adequate, more effectively into its schemes of work in an attempt to raise standards.

59. A level results in 2000 for biology, physics and chemistry were above national averages in terms of average points scored and were above expectations in terms of students' prior attainments at GCSE examinations. The drop out rate of students over the two year period was high in biology with 12 of the 21 who began the A level course completing it, all achieving a grade in the range A-D. In chemistry and physics, the retention of students on the A level courses was high with 13 out of 15 and 18 out of 19 respectively completing the courses and all achieving grades A-D.

Performance in National Curriculum tests in English at the age of fourteen is average and can be further improved.

60. Although pupils' results in national tests at the age of 14 are around the national average in English they are not as high as they are in mathematics and science.

61. The main reason that results in Key Stage 3 national tests in English have not been as high as in mathematics and science is that, until recently, the monitoring procedures and the management of the English department have been less effective at Key Stage 3. The school recognises the need for further improvement and has restructured the English department to provide a co-ordinator for the subject at each key stage, in order to ensure that in all classes teaching and learning are consistently good or better. To assist the further improvement in pupils' attainment in English in Key Stage 3, a deputy head now monitors the department's work closely and provides good support. In classes observed in Key Stage 3, the teaching ranged from excellent to satisfactory. The school's own data demonstrates that the amount of value added to pupils' prior attainment varies significantly according to which teacher takes the class. Departmental meetings now focus more effectively on the sharing of good practice to help improve the quality of teaching and learning. Standards seen in classes indicate that the strategies to improve attainment are effective.

62. Results in the Key Stage 3 national tests in English have risen from below average in 1996 to average in 1999 and 2000. Results have been partly affected by discrepancies in the external marking and grading of these tests. In 2000, of the 16 candidates whose English tests were remarked, 15 were awarded one level higher and the other gained two levels higher.

Provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language is inadequate to ensure that all of these pupils are taught at the appropriate level in all subjects.

63. Although most of the 120 pupils who speak English as an additional language make satisfactory and sometimes good or very good progress, there is insufficient assessment of their language competency and inadequate provision overall of specialist assistance to ensure that pupils, particularly those at a very early stage of learning English, make the maximum possible progress. The assessment of their levels of competence in speaking, reading and writing in English is not carried out systematically, either on entry to the school or before this. Procedures for the assessment of the language learning needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language are not as well developed as the rest of the school's assessment systems.

64. Many teachers do not have a clear understanding of the particular stage of English language acquisition of the bilingual pupils in the school and accordingly do not always present the National Curriculum in ways that help these pupils to understand the work fully. A few pupils do not have the self-confidence to tell teachers when their English knowledge is insufficient to understand new ideas. Where particularly gifted additional-language learners are succeeding well, in areas such as mathematics, they still experience occasional frustration through being unable to comprehend and communicate quickly. The school is aware of the lack of specialist help available for individual or small group tuition for most of these pupils and has supported the training of one of the learning support assistants to work with bilingual learners.

65. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are often inappropriately placed on the register of pupils with special educational needs, which sometimes conveys misleading impressions about the nature and extent of these pupils' learning needs. There is no separate register indicating pupils' stages of language acquisition, their first language (and any other languages used), the amount of time the pupil has been learning English, or supporting notes containing names of teachers or other pupils who can communicate with early stage learners.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

66. In order to build further on its very good progress since the last inspection, the school should:

- (1) continue to develop strategies to raise standards in the sixth form particularly in A level examinations and increase the proportions of sixth form teaching that are good and very good;
- (2) improve the overall quality of teaching and learning in science, through the use of a wider range of teaching methods and an interesting range of learning activities, so that GCSE results reflect at least good progress when compared with pupils' attainment on entry;
- (3) further improve results in National Curriculum tests in English at the age of fourteen, so that they exceed the national average, by sharing the good and very good practice in teaching across the department;
- (4) make appropriate provision for, and introduce effective assessment and monitoring procedures to meet the language learning needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language and provide guidance to teachers on how best to teach these pupils.

The school's development plan already includes provision for dealing with the first three of the four points for action listed above.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	66
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	42

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	22	44	30	3	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	Y8 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1043	297
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	44	0

Special educational needs	Y8 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	22	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	218	11

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	120

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	16
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	79

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.2
National comparative data	7.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.0

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	137	118	255

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	89	99	105
	Girls	87	91	85
	Total	176	190	190
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	69 (69)	75 (74)	75 (70)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	29 (30)	47 (50)	31 (37)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	99	98	106
	Girls	101	90	98
	Total	200	188	204
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (75)	74 (74)	80 (83)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	15 (30)	47 (49)	35 (30)
	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

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	130	119	249

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	68	120	126
	Girls	78	118	118
	Total	146	238	244
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	59 (54)	96 (96)	98 (99)
	National	49 (47)	89 (91)	94 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	47.7 (46)
	National	38.7 (38)

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	26	81
	National		N/A

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2000	40	32

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	19.9	16.0	18.1 (12.9)	3.8	2.9	3.3 (2.9)
National	N/A	N/A	18.5 (17.9)	N/A	N/A	3.0 (2.8)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	9
Black – African heritage	8
Black – other	18
Indian	43
Pakistani	15
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	24
White	1029
Any other minority ethnic group	29

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	2	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	44	2
Other minority ethnic groups	1	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: Y8 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	81
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y8 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	22
Total aggregate hours worked per week	658

Deployment of teachers: Y8 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75
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Average teaching group size: Y8 – Y13

Key Stage 3	26.2
Key Stage 4	24.5

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	3 731 086
Total expenditure	3 831 100
Expenditure per pupil	2 936
Balance brought forward from previous year	502 890
Balance carried forward to next year	402 876

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1340
Number of questionnaires returned	560

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	34	57	8	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	40	49	4	0	7
Behaviour in the school is good.	26	62	5	0	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21	62	11	3	3
The teaching is good.	26	61	4	1	8
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	29	47	12	4	8
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	44	45	6	2	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	65	32	1	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	25	54	12	2	7
The school is well led and managed.	35	54	3	1	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	33	56	4	0	7
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	30	51	8	1	10