

INSPECTION REPORT

ALTRINCHAM GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Altrincham, Cheshire

LEA area: Trafford

Unique reference number: 106362

Headteacher: Mrs D Ross-Wawrzynski

Reporting inspector: Mrs Helen Silverstone
1258

Dates of inspection: 10th – 12th October 2000

Inspection number: 224006

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Grammar (Selective) Girls

School category: Foundation

Age range of pupils: 11 - 18

Gender of pupils: Girls

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Cheshire

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Maureen Clancy

Date of previous inspection: January 1995

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school is a sixth form entry 11-18 Girls' Grammar School with 1094 pupils on role including a sixth form of 238. Entry to the school is through the borough of Trafford 11+ examination which admits between 35 and 40 per cent of pupils to grammar schools. The school also admits this range of ability, mainly from the immediate neighbourhood where it enjoys an excellent reputation. At post-16 some students from other schools are admitted to the sixth form on the basis of GCSE results and an interview. Parental support is good and parents have high expectations of what their daughters will achieve. At the end of Year 11 98 per cent of pupils continue their studies, many at the school but some at other post-16 institutions in the area. At the end of Year 13 92 per cent of students proceed to higher education whilst others go into further education or take up employment. There are 17 pupils on the register of Special Educational Needs but no pupils have a statement of Special Educational Need. Although there are a few pupils for whom English is an additional language, these pupils have a very good command of English.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an extremely effective school that sets very high standards and achieves these through high quality teaching and excellent management and leadership. The school gives very good value for money. It monitors its costs and its outcomes very effectively in order to ensure best value.

What the school does well

- The leadership and management of the headteacher and key staff are outstanding.
- Teaching and learning in the school are very good.
- The standards of work seen and the levels achieved by pupils are very good indeed.
- The standards achieved and the personal development of students in the 6th form are very good.
- The school makes excellent provision for the care, support and guidance of all its pupils.
- The ethos of the school, as evidenced in the behaviour and attitudes of the pupils, is very good indeed.

What could be improved

- The implementation of planning for the provision of information and communications technology (ICT) is at an early stage. Its impact on the skills of pupils is limited.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in February 1995.

- Standards have risen since the last inspection.
- The quality of teaching has risen with teaching being good or better in almost 90 per cent of lessons seen in the main school and in over 80 per cent seen in the 6th form.
- The two health and safety issues have been addressed with the aid of the Local Authority.
- The senior and middle managers now have well considered systems in place for monitoring the work of departments and pastoral teams, as well as the progress of pupils. Through this, good practice is shared and problems addressed.
- Although the accommodation in the school is currently still unsatisfactory, the school now has an extensive and imaginative building programme, has obtained sufficient finance to meet the requirements of the first phase and is actively raising finance for those elements not yet funded. The building programme is due to commence in the spring of 2001.
- Progress on provision for ICT is still inadequate. However, there is now more secure strategic planning of ICT that is linked to staff development and the monitoring of ICT experiences. The school is planning the next phase of development linked to its successful NGfL bid.

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
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	B
A-levels/AS-levels	A*	A*	A*	

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

The standards consistently attained by pupils in GCSE and A-level place the school in the top five per cent of schools in the country and they have risen since the last inspection. In comparison with other grammar schools the results are above average, which is consonant with the wide range of ability of the pupils it admits compared with most other grammar schools. Pupils exceeded the target set of 98 per cent to achieve five or more GCSE subjects at grades A* - C in 1999 and they also achieved a higher point score than targeted. On entry to the school all pupils are achieving at the level of national expectations and a high proportion is achieving Level 5. Very few are achieving beyond Level 5 in any subject. At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is above average compared with other grammar schools and is very high compared with the national average. Standards of work seen in exercise books and in lessons range from good to excellent. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds complete work diligently and achieve high standards both of content and presentation.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils want to do well. They are very conscientious and enthusiastic in their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Girls are sensible and mature. They are able to express their views clearly whilst respecting the views of others. They get on well with each other and with staff whose support they clearly value.
Attendance	Attendance is good.

Most pupils at this school show a commitment and appetite for learning which is outstanding. Their attendance is good and the majority of pupils are punctual for school and for lessons. However, the distance between sites means that a small number of pupils are late when travelling between sites. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, settle to work quickly and provide work in quantity, which is of a high standard. They relate well to each other and to their teachers, which provides an atmosphere which is conducive to very good learning. This situation has been maintained since the last inspection.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching is very good overall as a consequence of teachers' very good subject knowledge, high expectations and their clear focus on high academic standards in lessons and in pupils' work. This produces very good motivation in pupils, a lively interest in the tasks set for them and a good response to the challenges provided. Teaching in English, science and in mathematics is very good. On entry to the school almost all pupils have achieved high levels of literacy. These are developed and built on during pupils' time at the school. The teaching of numeracy is good and has developed well through the implementation of the draft National Numeracy Strategy. This provides support for all, as well as the means to extend the most able. Across all subjects the quality of

teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 was very good or excellent in 44 per cent of lessons, good in 44 per cent and satisfactory in 10 per cent. Teaching in one lesson only was unsatisfactory. In the sixth form the quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in all lessons, in 18 per cent it was good and in 63 per cent it was very good or excellent. Through its system of setting and the individual support offered to all the school meets the needs of all pupils. The very able pupils' initiative currently offers extension to 40 pupils identified by the school as especially gifted or talented.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school does not meet the statutory requirements to provide a daily Act of Collective worship. In all other respects the school has a good curriculum which encourages high achievement and academic standards in its pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The provision for the few pupils who are on the Special Educational Needs register is excellent. Pupils are well supported according to individual need.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Those pupils for whom English is an additional language are very proficient in English. They are well supported by staff as and when the need arises.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The provision for pupils' moral and social development is very good. The school makes satisfactory provision for pupils' spiritual development and the arrangements for cultural development are good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The excellent care, support and guidance of pupils are strengths of the school.

The school offers a well thought out curriculum which is designed to meet the needs of its pupils. The school teaches the National Curriculum and Religious Education with a wide range of choice of subject as pupils prepare for public examinations. The sixth form curriculum is stimulating and pertinent although there is insufficient access to ICT in the sixth form centre for all students to develop their skills in this area. The focus of all the school's activities is on fostering pupils' personal development and high standards. This is achieved through many opportunities for pupils to assume responsibility, to show initiative, to demonstrate independence and to play a full part in the life of the school and the community. Lessons have challenge and direction. The school creates a climate for pupils to discuss moral and social issues, to know the difference between right and wrong and for pupils to accept making a mistake. There is room for further development in the preparation of pupils for life in a multi-cultural society.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school benefits from excellent leadership and management. It is a very well run and orderly community. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school. Thorough structures provide opportunities for consultation and communication with staff, governors, parents and pupils.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is well-informed, proactive and fulfils its responsibilities well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school monitors thoroughly all aspects of its provision and performance. There are effective systems and structures in place that provide information that is acted upon very well.
The strategic use of resources	Within the constraints of current accommodation the school makes very good use of the teaching areas and resources available to support the curriculum. Grants for specific purposes are well used.

The headteacher and senior staff are visionary, dynamic and hard-working. They have clear systems that communicate requirements and monitor both provision and outcome. Much emphasis is placed

on enabling pupils to give of their best and to develop as caring and happy individuals. Middle managers, too, are instrumental in the very good management of the curriculum, resources and pastoral provision. Some building and some rationalisation of resources have already taken place. With the new building programme the school intends to take the opportunity to improve further its use of resources. Governors are involved in planning for the development of the school and in monitoring and reviewing progress. They understand well the strengths of the school and its areas for development.

The school effectively applies the principles of best value. It compares its outcomes and challenges itself and pupils to do even better. It consults staff, parents and pupils and takes views expressed into account although this is an area that could be improved. The school strives to make the best provision possible.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

These views are based on the consensus of views from the 415 questionnaires returned and those expressed by the 44 parents who attended the parents' meeting.

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The high expectations of pupils. • The high quality of teaching. • The progress pupils make at school. • The behaviour of pupils at the school. • The way in which the school helps pupils to mature and to take responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information available about their own child's progress. • The closeness with which the school works with parents.

The inspectors found that the school does indeed have high expectations of pupils and that they behave well in and out of lessons. Teaching is also of high quality.

They found that pupils make very good progress in the school and they are helped to develop an impressive level of maturity and confidence. There are many ways in which the pupils are helped to learn how to take responsibility and to develop into caring and civic minded young women.

The inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the level of information to parents is inadequate. The quality of reports sent to parents is satisfactory and the school is currently reviewing the content, frequency and timing of reports. Similarly, the perception of a small minority of parents that the school does not work closely with parents is not substantiated in the observations made.

At the parents' meeting, which was attended by 44 parents, a small minority felt that the focus of the school had slipped from academic concerns to more trivial matters such as uniform. It is the view of the inspectors that the focus of senior managers and all staff remains firmly on the achievement of pupils and that the systems effectively support and encourage the girls to give of their best and to develop into well balanced individuals. A few parents expressed a concern about bullying. The inspectors found that the school has effective procedures for dealing with the very small number of cases of bullying brought to its attention. Some parents felt that there were too few computers in the school whilst others were happy with the situation. The inspectors found that the implementation of planning for ICT was at an early stage.

Written comments were included with 36 (nine per cent) of the questionnaires returned. Parents demonstrated a range of views with a number expressing very strong support for the school and some identifying specific issues. Where support was strong, parents expressed appreciation of the way new pupils were helped to settle in, the willingness of the school to listen to problems, the thoroughness of marking, the management of the school and the range of extra-curricular opportunities. Where parents raised some concerns, it was about accommodation, school uniform, the choice of second foreign language, too much homework, management of the school, extra-curricular activities and the number of reports on progress available. A tiny number of parents' comments related to the way individual cases of theft or damage to property had not, in their view, been followed up thoroughly enough.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The leadership and management of the headteacher and key staff are outstanding

1. The new headteacher and her senior staff are visionary, dynamic and hard-working. They are a cohesive group of staff who possess complementary strengths. They meet as a management group and each has a clear remit which she pursues individually, reporting back to the main group for affirmation, support and suggestions. The group is extended regularly by the presence of the bursar, site manager and office manager who bring the practical and administrative dimension to discussions and help to ensure that vision, resources and practical requirements are always in harmony. This strong working partnership enabled the school to progress from already high standards and to improve on and consolidate these.
2. Office staff use new technologies effectively. As part of the Information and Communication Technology development programme the school has provided training for them. The school has a web site and encourages parents to communicate with them through electronic mail. The telephone system allows parents to leave messages about pupils' absence. Following the suggestion of a parent the school is now planning to send out newsletters and other communications on electronic mail.
3. The school monitors pupils' progress very effectively. Much emphasis is placed on enabling pupils to give of their best and to develop as caring and happy individuals. The school aims to provide a working atmosphere in which all girls develop to the maximum of their potential. Links with the community and with primary schools are important. The school also aims to provide staff with the opportunities to achieve a rewarding and fulfilling career.
4. The school has very effective systems to monitor the curriculum and teaching and learning and it monitors schemes of work and classroom delivery. Departmental files are centrally held. The emphasis of classroom observations is on sharing good practice and on development. As a result of observations teachers each have a focused action plan which is later reviewed. This practice is excellent preparation for performance management. As a result of this the quality of teaching and curriculum provision has a direct effect on the high standards achieved by pupils.
5. The school has a good development plan which contains a rolling programme of specific audits. It is well supported by departmental plans which are reviewed and renewed annually. The school has identified five clear areas for development, several of which extend over several years with different targets within them. Funding is allocated against these detailed areas of development and staff have a real involvement in the process. The development plans are evaluated each year against success criteria determined at the outset. Middle managers are well informed and very effective in monitoring pupils and supporting their development. A range of support opportunities is available throughout the curriculum. Middle managers now take much more responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the curriculum and teaching and learning in their areas. The school provides effective induction for newly qualified teachers.
6. Financial planning and control are very good and the bursar is an asset to the school. The principles of best value are well applied. The headteacher forms part of a national group of girls' grammar schools which compares costs and outcomes as well as a range of problems and solutions. The school reviews its costs on a regular basis and

challenges expenditure in all areas. Three tenders are always required and all contracts, large or small are reviewed for value. The school consults well about developments with staff and with older pupils. There are plans to develop the system of committees to include younger pupils. Parents too are consulted about major changes such as the introduction of computerised reports and a useful general consultation was seen between the headteacher and Year 7 parents in an evening meeting. The school wishes to extend this area of consultation. Overall the school applies the principles of best value very well. The use of finance in the school clearly supports the aims with, for example, budget allocated to investigate the viability of video conferencing for staff and pupils.

7. The governors fulfil their statutory obligations very well. They effectively help in shaping the direction of the school. They are well informed and proactive. They have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They have effective committees which meet regularly and which feed back to the main governing body. There is a governor appointed to liaise with managers in each key stage and to take up issues related to these groups of pupils. There is also a governor for special educational needs and for the more able pupils. The governing body monitors the performance of senior staff through the setting of targets and interim reviews. They are involved in evaluating data supplied to them and also take part in staff training in order to obtain a view of initiatives from the start.
8. Within the constraints of current accommodation the school makes very good use of the teaching areas and resources available to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. The limitations in accommodation are particularly evident in their impact on dance, technology and science where there is currently insufficient specialist accommodation. The school has clearly identified these issues and has a sound building programme in place to address the issue in the near future. The headteacher has been successful in raising the necessary finance for this phase of building and is actively seeking finance for the development of further specialist facilities.

Teaching and learning in the school are very good

9. Across all subjects the quality of teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 was very good or excellent in 44 per cent of lessons, good in 44 per cent and satisfactory in 10 per cent. Teaching in one lesson only was unsatisfactory. In the sixth form the quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in all lessons, in 18 per cent it was good and in 63 per cent it was very good or excellent. The tiny percentage of unsatisfactory teaching at Key Stage 4 is as a result of one lesson only. Of the 415 questionnaires returned by parents, 96 per cent felt that teaching at the school was good. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection when 75 per cent was good or very good, as opposed to 88 per cent in the main school and 81 per cent in the sixth form now. In the sixth form 63 per cent of the teaching is very good or excellent this time compared with just over half in 1995.
10. Pupils arrive at the school with good levels of literacy and these are effectively extended and built upon during their lessons. Pupils with specific learning difficulties, of whom there are a very small number, are given a range of extra support to help them to overcome problems. The school has adopted the draft numeracy strategy at Key Stage 3. As well as supporting those pupils whose skills are less well developed than others, this strategy is also effective in extending the more able mathematicians.
11. Teachers plan their lessons well and the work is well targeted to the pupils in the set or group. Expositions are clear and all teachers are clearly in command of their subject. This enables pupils to ask probing questions and to learn from the response. In a Year 7 French class the teacher's very good command of the language and its use to manage

the class gave pupils the skills and confidence to use the language themselves. In a Year 9 music lesson the teacher's own technical competence on the keyboard enabled pupils to perform confidently within the very strong framework provided.

12. A particular strength is the use teachers make of questioning to provoke thought and test out understanding. They expect pupils to recall, examine, extrapolate and conjecture. In a Year 9 maths lesson pupils were asked to explain methods and this caused them to think deeply about the way in which they arrived at answers. All lessons seen were characterised by good relationships and pupils were secure in the support they received. This was very evident in the work done on obituaries in a history lesson where the teacher moved around the class supporting pupils in a pleasant and friendly manner and answered their questions helpfully. Some teachers used ICT to good effect in explaining and demonstrating. In a Year 8 maths lesson this enabled pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of the angles of a polygon. Most of the work presented to pupils is interesting and demanding. Clear links are made to daily life and pupils are encouraged to look beyond the straightforward and to develop skills in thinking about complex issues. This happened in a Year 9 English lesson about advertising where pupils played a game which required them to organise their own tasks and approach to the problem of producing advertisements to appeal to the emotions.
13. Pupils and students at the school learn quickly. Their attitudes and expectations of themselves are such that they strive to understand what is presented to them, they ask questions of their teachers to improve what they know and understand and they consolidate their work in their own time. They routinely ask probing questions and older pupils make useful notes which support them in revising for examinations. They make strenuous efforts to succeed in what they do and their commitment and perseverance helps them to achieve very high standards.
14. The high quality of teaching and learning stems in all instances from excellent subject knowledge and high expectations on the part of the teacher, excellent attitudes on the part of the learner and a real love of the subject on the part of both. There is a genuine partnership between teacher and learner in almost all classrooms.

The standards of work seen and the levels achieved by pupils are very good indeed

15. The standards consistently attained by pupils at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 and in A-level place the school in the top 5 per cent of schools in the country.
16. At the end of Key Stage 3 standards in English, mathematics and science have been very high compared with national averages over the last three years. In each subject the national average was exceeded by an equivalent of at least eight points and in mathematics by 11 points which means that girls at the school are at least two years and two terms ahead in their progress compared with the national picture. Standards have risen again in English in 2000. When compared with other grammar schools, many of whom have a much more selective intake, results were above the average.
17. Attainment in lessons seen across the school at Key Stage 3 was never less than satisfactory, most often good and frequently very good or excellent. Pupils were consistently challenged to give of their best. In a Year 9 English lesson pupils brought together previously acquired skills in order to respond to a challenging text and in a Year 8 mathematics lesson the teacher's questioning made pupils reflect on what they were doing and encouraged them to ask questions to improve their understanding. In a Year 9 science lesson pupils were seen to cope well with GCSE questions. In a Year 9 lesson pupils who had been learning Spanish for only five weeks showed excellent recall and

were very confident in manipulating the language. In a Year 9 design and technology lesson pupils were seen to demonstrate very good recall of previous work and to apply that to interpreting diagrams into reality.

18. At Key Stage 4 all pupils who were entered for GCSE in 1999 attained at least five A* - C grades. This means that attainment was very high compared with all schools. The overall average point score was 62 compared with the national average of 38. Performance at GCSE was above the average for grammar schools.
19. At Key Stage 4 in all lessons seen pupils' attainment was at least of satisfactory standard, most was good and in nearly half the lessons observed it was very good or excellent. In a Year 11 physics lesson the understanding of pupils and their use of data was at a very high level. In a Year 10 English lesson pupils' understanding of the theme of violence in Romeo and Juliet was very good indeed and their ability to use the text to support their view was also very good. In a Year 10 chemistry class pupils were working at the exceptional level in terms of national curriculum, describing and explaining changes to elements. In a Year 11 art class all pupils showed great confidence in handling a range of media and they had high quality drawing skills.
20. At A-level the average point score has risen steadily since 1996. It is very high in comparison with the national average, being more than 10 points above. In 2000 98 per cent of candidates achieved at least two passes at A level.
21. In the lessons seen 87 per cent showed levels of attainment which were above the national average for advanced classes. Students were alert and interested in a biology lesson observed in Year 13 and they showed very good note-taking skills in this and in an English lesson at the same level. In a Year 13 mathematics lesson all students responded well to questions and showed understanding of the balancing of forces. They were on line for the highest A-level grades. In a geography lesson in Year 12 students showed very good skills in the testing of hypotheses and in the collection and use of data.

The standards achieved and the personal development of pupils in the sixth form are very good

22. The school has embraced the implications of curriculum 2000 and is balancing this well with the high expectations of parents and pupils for academic excellence. Currently 19 A-level or AS level subjects are offered which is well beyond that typically expected. The A-level Courses Handbook provides good advice to students choosing courses and this level of advice and guidance continues to be provided throughout the course.
23. The school has an effective personal and social education curriculum whereby Year 12 students are introduced to sixth form life and are encouraged to involve themselves in community service and work experience as well as a range of study skills and health matters. In Year 13 the emphasis is on helping pupils to choose suitable courses at university or college or to make decisions about future employment. Work experience, community service and a curriculum enrichment programme involving a group project are also provided. Students also undertake work in key skills, ICT, physical education and religious studies, while support mathematics is available for science students not undertaking A-level mathematics.
24. As a result of this carefully conceived provision students attain very well indeed with 98 per cent achieving at least two passes at A-level. At the end of Year 13 98 per cent of pupils go on to higher or further education with a number of successful applicants to colleges at Oxford or Cambridge.

25. Students are encouraged to form interest groups and the Christian Union and the Muslim society are strong foci for a number of girls. The students involve themselves in a number of clubs and activities where they support and help younger pupils. They feel that this is a valuable and enjoyable experience for them. Sixth form students act as mentors for pupils when they come into the school in Year 7 and this support continues to be offered in Year 8.
26. Parents interviewed were pleased with the way in which the sixth form operates and believed that the school was not just academic but supports the students in all ways.
27. Throughout the time pupils spend at the school there is an emphasis on developing them as independent learners and capable and confident young women. This reaches fruition in the sixth form where students are able, confident and articulate and present themselves as civic-minded young women, able and willing to play a key role in society.

The school makes excellent provision for the care, support and guidance of all its pupils

28. Care of the pupils at the school is excellent. There is a named person for child protection and the school does not hesitate to involve outside agencies when they perceive a problem. The governing body has a named governor for health and safety issues and the comprehensive health and safety policy is reviewed regularly. The school has a visiting nurse, several qualified first-aiders and a suitable medical room. All required fire and electrical checks take place. The school's personal and social development curriculum includes an element on healthy and safe living.
29. Useful steps have been taken to ensure, as far as possible, pupils' safety when travelling around the site. This was an issue at the time of the last inspection. Pupils are reminded to use the crossings and traffic refuge provided and observations during the week bears out the fact that they use these aids to safety in a mature and responsible way. The school also encourages pupils to bring mobile telephones to school for use in an emergency, if necessary, whilst going to and from school. The parents are particularly appreciative of the fact that the school normally contacts parents during the morning of the first day's absence if there has been no call from home to say the pupil will not be in. This is to ensure that no pupil has left home but not arrived at school.
30. The school provides very well for pupils with special educational needs. There are 17 pupils on the school's special needs register. Some of these pupils have physical or sensory impairment and a number have specific learning difficulties. Provision is made for the latter group in a variety of ways. Visiting teachers from the local education authority's service come to the school and one of these sessions with a Year 8 pupil was observed and was of very good quality. Pupils have extra time in both school and external examinations and tests so that their specific difficulties do not detract from what they can achieve. In some instances laptop computers have been provided. Provision for all pupils with special educational needs is proactive, parents are kept informed and involved and the situation is held constantly under review. There is also a governor with responsibility for special educational needs.
31. One of the aims of the school is to provide an environment in which pupils can give of their best. Pupils who become ill and are likely to be away from school for lengthy periods, have work provided so that they do not have large amounts to make up when they return. Parents report that teachers communicate effectively and treat each situation on its merits. Pupils are clear that the help and support offered to all by

teachers is outstanding and they recognise how fortunate they are. They also find the careers guidance through talks and interviews to be of high quality.

32. The school has identified a group of 40 pupils who are judged to be particularly gifted or talented in a certain area and suitable provision is made to meet their needs and to extend their learning. It is expected that this number will shortly be expanded and that eventually there will be between 50 and 100 pupils on the register. There is a recent policy, which is also carried out in practice, and the co-ordinator is well informed, energetic and committed. The local education authority is interested in what is taking place and is eager to involve the school in its initiatives. Members of staff are kept informed and all departments provide extension work for pupils with particular talents in their area. An audit of provision has taken place and particular initiatives such as "Cognitive Acceleration in Science Education" are encouraged. Outside agencies, too, are involved in providing opportunities for pupils in this category. The school keeps pupils and parents informed about opportunities in the area provided by such organisations as the "Youth Agency for Gifted Children". Pupils on the register have individual action plans which are discussed with the co-ordinator and these may identify certain activities, challenges or specific intervention. As yet this process does not directly involve parents but this is an element the school is beginning to address. The success of a wider group of pupils is also recognised through a system of recording cards so that success in or out of school can be publicly recognised. The initiative is a new one and its effects have yet to be measured by the school but it is firmly grounded and structured and has wide currency so that its success is likely to be assured.

The ethos of the school, as evidenced in the behaviour and attitudes of the pupils is very good indeed

33. Pupils are keen to come to school and their attitudes to lessons and to the wide range of extra-curricular activities are exemplary. The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities that include a number of sports teams, two orchestras and a number of other clubs. Last year a group of pupils achieved very good grades in a one year GCSE dance course which took place entirely after school and Year 9 and the sixth form have been involved in the national mock trials competitions. Parents report on the dedication of teachers in setting up and running various elements of extra-curricular activity and older pupils organise and involve themselves in certain activities with younger pupils. The sixth form and Year 11 have committees that look after elements of the school's activity such as charities and the environment. A large number of pupils and students are involved in these activities and the most common complaint they have about them is that there is not enough time to extend their individual range of involvement. The school is open until five o'clock every evening and pupils make the most of that additional time in these activities or working in the library.
34. The behaviour of pupils in the school is excellent. There were no instances of bad behaviour observed in lessons or around the school. Pupils and students moved around the school in an orderly manner, going briskly to their next lesson with no delaying strategies. In spite of having to cross a busy road, often several times each day, pupils walked sensibly between sites and used the crossing provided following the guidelines laid down by the school. Pupils are trustworthy and trusted and appreciate privileges such as being able to go straight to their form rooms when they come into school. Behaviour in the dining room was exemplary in spite of pupils having to queue extensively at times. Parents appreciate the good behaviour of pupils at the school.

35. Attendance is good and was almost 96 per cent at the time of the inspection. Pupils are generally punctual for school and for lessons, although a small number of pupils arrive late at lessons when they have to move from one building to another.
36. The school is characterised by very good personal relationships. Pupils open doors for each other when books are being carried and they are courteous and respectful, yet open, towards adults. Teachers, too, are polite and respectful to pupils so that there is an overwhelming sense of a well-mannered, well-ordered and caring community. Although there is a small amount of verbal bullying, mainly within one year group, this is well dealt with when brought to the attention of teachers. However, girls often manage the situation themselves. There have been no instances of exclusions in recent years.
37. In both lessons and extra-curricular activities pupils work well with each other. They listen well to each other, appreciate other points of view and recognise and applaud the achievements of each other. There were no incidences of racial tension observed. Year 7 and 8 pupils are allocated mentors from the sixth form and the younger pupils clearly value the support and friendship they are offered.
38. Attitudes, too, are very good. The pupils and students have very positive attitudes towards their work. They are keen to learn and to do well. Pupils and students are attentive and enthusiastic in lessons and often keen to take charge of their own learning. In most lessons they listen well to expositions and explanations, respond eagerly to teacher's questions and ask sensible and probing questions of their own. They are very willing to ask for help when they are unsure. Pupils and students are almost always attentive and on task. Attitudes and behaviour as observed in lessons were good, very good or excellent in almost all lessons and never less than satisfactory.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The implementation of planning for the provision of information and communications technology (ICT) is at an early stage. Its impact on the skills of pupils is limited

39. Since the last inspection the school has made limited progress in the implementation of ICT provision. At Key Stage 3 the allocation of curriculum time is low with taught lessons once each week in Years 7 and 8 only. Skills taught in Years 7 and 8 are not yet extended in all areas of the curriculum in Year 9.
40. There has been a whole school focus on developing staff skills and confidence with a view to improving the range and use of ICT across the curriculum. There are clear signs in some areas, particularly in mathematics and science, that pupils are introduced to the application of ICT in their lessons. There are also opportunities in design and technology but infrequent opportunities in other areas of the curriculum. Overall, use of ICT across the curriculum is unsatisfactory although pupils and students have experience of the use of other technologies such as audio and video recorders and graphical calculators. A number of departments are now beginning to use interactive white boards to support learning. Many pupils develop their skills through having computers at home but for some this is not the case.
41. At Key Stage 4 some pupils follow a full or a short course in IT and this develops their skills and provides an appropriate range of opportunities. Others are expected to develop their skills across the curriculum. As at Key Stage 3 the opportunities planned within other areas of the curriculum are limited and do not fully enable pupils to make independent use of ICT to support their learning. Older pupils have skills that are below what might be expected given their ability and this reflects the lack of previous experience. There are, however, some good examples of pupils' independent use of ICT

such as in textiles where pupils were seen to use programmed sewing machines for embroidery.

42. In the sixth form centre there is insufficient access to computers for pupils to use them to support their learning.
43. There is now more strategic planning of ICT that is linked to staff development and of the monitoring of ICT experiences. The school is currently planning the next phase of development linked to its successful National Grid for Learning bid and there are clear signs of improvement, more secure coverage through the curriculum, staff training and strategic planning.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The school should now:

1. implement and evaluate the planning for the development of ICT.
(*Paragraphs 39-43*)

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	24

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
0	48	38	12	2	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	856	238
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	23	2

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	12	5

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	29

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	19
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	12

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.1
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	n/a	167	167

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	165	165	164
	Total	165	165	164
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (165)	99 (165)	98 (164)
	National	63 (64)	62 (60)	55 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	96 (160)	99(165)	88 (147)
	National	28 (23)	38 (37)	23 (29)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	167	167	167
	Total	167	167	167
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (167)	100 (167)	100 (167)
	National	64 (59)	64 (63)	60 (61)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	89 (149)	98 (164)	90 (150)
	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	n/a	163	163

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	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	163	163	163
	Total	163	163	163
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	100 (98.8)	100 (99.8)	100
	National	45 (46.6)	89.8 (90.9)	95.8 (94)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	60.4 (61.7)
	National	36.9 (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	n/a
	National	n/a

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	n/a	116	116

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	n/a	28.7	28.7 (27.4)	n/a	11.0	11.0 (n/a)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	9
Black – other	6
Indian	25
Pakistani	16
Bangladeshi	8
Chinese	21
White	990
Any other minority ethnic group	35

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	0	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)	3.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

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

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.5
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 2	n/a
Key Stage 3	28.2
Key Stage 4	21.4

Financial information

Financial year	1999 - 2000
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	£
Total income	3,131,612
Total expenditure	2,910,626
Expenditure per pupil	272,276
Balance brought forward from previous year	385,502
Balance carried forward to next year	312,268

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1094
Number of questionnaires returned	415

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	46	46	6	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	60	36	1	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	50	45	2	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	39	46	11	1	3
The teaching is good.	51	46	1	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	50	17	2	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	46	41	10	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	82	17	0	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	25	52	14	4	5
The school is well led and managed.	41	49	5	2	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	49	46	3	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	49	40	6	1	4

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

The timing of the inspection meant that a number of parents of Year 7 girls were unable to comment on a number of the statements.

Parents were pleased with the high expectations the school had of pupils, the high quality of teaching, the progress pupils make at school, the behaviour of pupils at the school and the way in which the school helps pupils to mature and to take responsibility. They felt that the school should give more information about pupils' progress and work more closely with parents.

Other issues raised by parents

Written comments were included with 36 (nine per cent) of the questionnaires returned. Many parents expressed very strong support for the school and some identified specific issues. Where support was strong, parents expressed appreciation of the way new pupils were helped to settle in, the willingness of the school to listen to problems, the thoroughness of marking, the management of the school and the range of extra-curricular opportunities. Where parents raised concerns, it was about accommodation, school uniform, the choice of second foreign language, too much homework, the management of the school, extra-curricular activities and the number of reports on progress available. A tiny number of parents' comments related to the way individual cases of theft or damage to property had not, in their view, been followed up thoroughly enough.

At the parents' meeting, which was attended by 44 parents a small minority felt that the focus of the school had slipped from academic concerns to more trivial matters such as uniform. A few parents expressed a concern about bullying. Some parents found that there were too few computers in the school whilst others were happy with the situation.