

INSPECTION REPORT

BLESSED GEORGE NAPIER SCHOOL

Banbury, Oxfordshire

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123270

Headteacher: Mr David Dawson

Reporting inspector: Jan Allcorn
1068

Dates of inspection: 5th – 7th February 2001

Inspection number: 186604

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary aided

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Addison Road
Banbury
Oxfordshire

Postcode: OX16 9DG

Telephone number: 01295 264216

Fax number: 01295 277952

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Monsignor P Corrigan

Date of previous inspection: January 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		
1068	Jan Allcorn	Registered inspector
8943	Margaret Manning	Lay inspector
19414	Janet Flisher	Team inspector
27050	Val Blackburn	Team inspector

The inspection contractor was:

TWA INSPECTIONS LTD

5 Lakeside
Werrington
Peterborough
PE4 6QZ

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33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Blessed George Napier is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school with 617 pupils on roll. It is smaller than most secondary schools. The sixth form has only 72 students who all follow A-level courses. As the only Roman Catholic secondary school in the surrounding area pupils come not only from Banbury itself but from up to 40 miles away. Nearly a third of pupils live in Bicester, 12 miles away. Pupils are from a wide range of social backgrounds and are predominately white. Employment in the area is good; consequently the number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. However, salaries are not always high. The proportion of pupils on the special needs register is about average, although the proportion with full statements is below average. Over the last three years the attainment of pupils on entry to the school has improved and is above average for the current Year 7.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Blessed George Napier is a very effective school. Pupils not only achieve well but also develop into mature and responsible young adults. Relationships between staff and pupils are very good and clearly reflect the Christian values the school promotes. It is a happy school, where the pupils work very hard and behave extremely well. Standards are good and last summer pupils gained well above average results at GCSE. The pupils take full advantage of and benefit from the good teaching that takes place. The school is very well managed. Planning makes the best use of the school's resources to achieve its priorities. The governing body is very supportive. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- The headteacher provides strong, thoughtful leadership and manages the school very well. He is well supported by a highly committed staff.
- Summer 2000 results at GCSE and in tests for 14 year olds were well above national averages.
- Pupils are happy, work very hard, have very good attitudes to learning and behave extremely well.
- Staff and pupils support and care for each other very well, with Christian values well promoted.
- Good teaching, which is appreciated by the pupils.

What could be improved

- GCSE results in science and modern foreign languages.
- The way the school reviews and acts upon how well different groups of pupils, such as boys and girls and the most able, do overall and in different subjects.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since its last inspection in January 1996, standards have improved throughout the school. In all subjects, except French, the best standards have been maintained and in others, such as art, they have risen. Areas recommended for improvement were clearly addressed. The sixth form is much more cost effective. Design and technology and information and communication technology courses now cover what pupils are expected to learn because of considerable investment in the accommodation and equipment needed to teach them. Senior staff responsibilities are clearer and subject heads take a greater role in overseeing the work of their departments. All staff know what is expected of them. This has made the school's systems for reviewing how well it does more effective. Two years ago the governors put a clear action plan in place to improve the work of the governing body. As a result, a greater awareness and knowledge of the school's work has been developed, although more needs to be done. At the time of the last inspection the headteacher had been in post for a year, since then he has continued successfully to lead improvements in the school's work. Overall improvement has been good.

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 ¹
GCSE examinations	B	C	A	B
A-levels/AS-levels	D	D	C	

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

Over the last three years results in national tests for 14-year-olds have improved in line with the national trend. They improved considerably in summer 2000 when the pupils' performance was well above the national average and above that for similar schools. In mathematics and science results were well above national averages and in English above average. In other subjects, assessments were above national averages.

Performance at GCSE has improved at a greater rate than that nationally over the last three years. In summer 2000 pupils' results were particularly good. The proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades was well above the national average placing the school in the top 25 per cent of schools nationally. This achievement was very high when compared with their performance at 14 years and this puts the school in the top 5 per cent of schools nationally. The proportion of pupils gaining the highest A*/A grades compares less favourably, being in line with that nationally. Results are particularly good in those years when both boys and girls do particularly well, such as in 2000. In 1999, boys did not perform as well as they could have done, leading to the school's results falling below those of previous years.

For summer 2000, results in English and mathematics were very good, but in science fewer pupils in the year group gained the higher A*-C grades. Boys do much better than girls in mathematics and science, although nationally boys and girls results are not significantly different. Pupils did best in English, history, physical education and design and technology and least well in art and design, French, science and geography. In 1999, pupils did least well in business studies, the single science award and French.

Inspectors judge overall standards for current 11-16 year olds to be above average and for those pupils in higher sets well above average. In discussion with pupils it was evident that a significant number of pupils had a very good understanding of higher level work, which was not always apparent in the written work seen. The proportion of pupils working below nationally expected levels is comparatively low. This is because pupils with learning difficulties make good progress. The good teaching all pupils receive and the conscientious approach they take to their work lead to well above average results in public examinations. Literacy and numeracy skills are particularly good and significantly contribute to the good standards achieved across all subjects of the curriculum.

A-level results have steadily improved over the last three years. In summer 2000 they reached the national average with students making at least satisfactory and often better progress since GCSE. In summer 2000, results in sports studies were particularly good with a high proportion of students gaining the top two grades. Current sixth form students are working at expected levels in all subjects.

In summer 2000, the school exceeded its appropriately ambitious targets for pupil performance at GCSE and for sixth form students at A-level.

¹ Those schools in England with a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils enjoy being in the school and want to do well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils can be trusted to behave very sensibly around the school.
Personal development and relationships	A strong feature of the school. Pupils and staff all get on well with each other. There is mutual respect, pupils trust their teachers and this creates a good working atmosphere in classrooms.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Broadly in line with the national average, with little unauthorised absence.

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. Nearly all lessons seen were satisfactory or better. Two thirds were good or better with a third of these very good or excellent. Teaching is good in mathematics and English, but more inconsistent in science where it ranges from good to occasionally unsatisfactory. The main strengths in the teaching are teachers' very good subject knowledge and, management of pupils and good relationships with pupils. Pupils want to do well, listen carefully to their teachers and eagerly answer their teachers' questions. This leads to good and often very good learning taking place. However, in a small but significant number of lessons inspectors observed girls less willing to respond to teachers' questions than boys. Good strategies are in place in all subjects to develop pupils' reading and writing skills. Pupils have good opportunities to use their mathematical skills in subjects other than mathematics. The learning support department provides good support for those pupils with special educational needs and this helps them to make good progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. Eleven to 16 year olds cover all the subjects required. The range of subjects for sixth form students is appropriate for the size of the school and for the pupils who decide to stay on after 16 years. Physical education suffers from a lack of indoor spaces, especially when the weather is bad.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Well-planned programmes of support are very helpful in improving pupils' reading and writing skills.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	A strength. The school provides very good opportunities for pupils' spiritual development through assemblies, celebrations and in lessons across the curriculum. Pupils understand right from wrong, take responsibility for their own actions and work well with and support each other. Cultural development is good overall, but opportunities to develop pupils' awareness of the multi-ethnic society in which they live are not as good as they could be.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Support and guidance of pupils is very good. Regular health and safety checks take place, but a few minor issues need to be addressed, in particular the cleanliness of the building.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	A strength of the school. The headteacher provides very good leadership. Priorities are clear and appropriate and staff are well consulted. Staff, particularly those with management responsibilities, know what is expected of them and are very competent. All this leads to a high level of commitment and to effective action.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Improving area of the school's work. The new governing body is taking effective action to understand its role better than at the time of the previous inspection. Governors now make a much better contribution to the work of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school systematically reviews how well pupils do, the quality of its teaching and how well pupils are looked after. Insufficient attention is given to looking at reasons for differences in the performance of different groups of pupils, such as boys and girls, and to check that the more able and those pupils with learning difficulties are doing as well as they should.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Planning makes sure that staff, accommodation and equipment are made the best use of and that the school's budget is used as effectively as possible to meet its priorities.

The school compares its performance and costs with local and national averages, but not yet with other Catholic schools. It keeps under close review services provided by outside companies, such as the management of school meals. It provides good value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The good values the school promotes. • The care taken of their children. • The standards their children achieve. • The range of extra-curricular activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The appearance of the building. • Consistency in the setting of homework.

Parents, who responded to the questionnaire (116) and those who attended the parents' meeting (35), are very satisfied with the work of the school. They are particularly pleased with the good work habits, care for each other and responsible attitudes their children develop. Inspectors agree with parents' views on what pleases them most. Inspectors also agree with parents that the appearance of the school could be improved. Many classrooms have good displays, but much of the rest of the school is less attractive. Homework was observed to be set on a regular basis. Although pupils comment that occasionally it is not set at the planned time, this does not appear to present any major difficulties.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The headteacher provides strong, thoughtful leadership and manages the school very well. He is well supported by a highly committed staff.

1. Blessed George Napier School is very well led. Since taking up his post six years ago the headteacher has continuously improved the work of the school and in summer 2000 GCSE results for 16-year-olds were well above national averages. These results were also the best for an 11-18 state school in Oxfordshire. The headteacher is well supported by other members of the leadership group, heads of school, heads of year and heads of department. They are effective in what they do because the headteacher makes his expectations for their work clear. This results in a well-managed school where there is an agreed understanding of priorities and a high commitment to work towards them. A key reason for this is the headteacher's strategy to share information as fully as possible with both staff and pupils. He involves them in the planning and decision-making process in many ways. For example, a committee of senior staff meets to agree individual subject funds. Heads of department on this committee represent other subjects as well as their own and this helps them to understand and take responsibility for the achievement of whole school priorities, not just their own. The headteacher attends the school council, informs pupils of planned developments and answers their questions. He explains why some things take a long time to happen, such as cost. Year 7 pupils are confident that they will be listened to, as are the staff, both teaching and non-teaching.
2. The school has very clear priorities for improving its work. They appropriately cover national initiatives and the raising of achievement, but also the school's high priority for developing mature and responsible young adults with good Christian values. It is the combination of these priorities and their effective implementation that lead to pupils achieving well.
3. The school has good procedures for reviewing its work. These identify where it is doing well and where improvement is needed. National test results are analysed not only to compare performance with national figures but also to compare how well individual pupils do in different subjects. Heads of department review their departments' performance yearly; this includes an assessment of pupils' results and individual teacher's results. This review forms the basis of a yearly meeting with the headteacher to set future targets. Tutors and heads of school closely track the academic and personal progress of each individual pupil. Parents are involved as soon as possible if pupils are underachieving or not behaving as well as the school expects. The school, however, does not yet sufficiently co-ordinate this information to evaluate whether any particular groups of pupils, such as boys and girls, the more able or those with special educational needs are achieving as well as they should.
4. A clear and appropriate programme is in place to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. Both senior staff, heads of year and heads of department observe teachers at work in the classroom and they provide sound support to maintain the school's high standards. However, the senior management team is aware that it should be checking the quality of work in pupils' books and the setting of homework more rigorously than it currently does. Appropriate plans are in place to do this in the future.

5. Governors take a greater role in reviewing the work of the school than at the time of the previous inspection. They have always been very committed to supporting the school, aware of what is happening and where it is doing well. They now have a greater knowledge and understanding of what they need to know and do to check fully that all is well. They have an action plan and are undertaking appropriate training. Statutory requirements are met.
6. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The school fully addressed the key issues for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. The leadership group was expanded to include an assistant headteacher to support the headteacher and deputy head. This allowed responsibilities to be distributed better and made the senior management team of the school more effective in implementing the school's priorities and in systematically reviewing its work. The methods the school uses to support and guide its pupils are also much more effective. Expectations of pupils and staff are now clearly set out, such as in the behaviour policy and handbook for tutors. Courses in design and technology and information and communication technology now cover what is required in the National Curriculum, because the school used its considerable financial reserves to improve both accommodation and equipment in these subject areas.
7. Financial control is very good. Costs and performance are compared with national figures to ensure the school is providing appropriate value for money. It does not yet compare them with those of other Catholic schools. Contracted services, such as the management of the cafeteria, are monitored for their effectiveness. The costs and effectiveness of the small sixth form are carefully reviewed, in particular their impact on the work of the rest of the school. Given the good standards pupils achieve, the school provides good value for money.

Summer 2000 results at GCSE and in tests for 14 year olds were well above national averages

8. Standards achieved by pupils at 16 years of age over the last three years have been above those expected and attained nationally. Pupils have achieved very well indeed. In summer 2000, the performance of pupils at GCSE was in the top 25 percent for all schools in England and the best for 11-18 state schools in Oxfordshire. Fourteen-year-olds also achieved well above average results in national tests for English, mathematics and science, and performance at A-level improved to be in line with that nationally. All this represents good improvement since the last inspection.
9. In national tests for fourteen-year-olds in summer 2000 pupils' performance was well above average in mathematics and science and above average in English. For mathematics and science this was a significant improvement on previous years' results. Whilst English results have more consistently improved since 1996, fewer pupils gained results at the higher levels, Level 6 and above², in summer 2000 than in mathematics and science. Performance in mathematics was particularly good when compared with that of similar schools. Results in science showed no real improvement until summer 2000

² The National Curriculum has been written on the basis that pupils, by the end of Key Stage 3, are expected to reach Level 5. If a pupil is attaining Level 6 or 7 then he or she is reaching standards above that expected for a pupil of his or her age.

- and in 1999 were not as good as those of similar schools. In both mathematics and science, the improvements in performance are attributed to better staffing over the last two years. Girls perform better than boys in English, but the gap is wider than that nationally. Boys and girls perform equally well in mathematics and science as they do nationally.
10. Improvement in GCSE results over the last three years has been better than that nationally. In summer 2000 pupils' performance was well above the national average and the progress made by these pupils since 14 years of age was very high. Both boys and girls performed well and boys performed nearly as well as girls, which is better than boys usually do nationally. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades was very much higher than that nationally, although the proportion gaining the very highest A/A* grades compared less favourably, being in line with that nationally.
 11. The proportions of pupils gaining A*-C grades in English and mathematics last summer were significantly above national averages in summer 2000 and in 1999. However, in science they were not as high. This is partly because too few pupils take the double award course, but also because girls do not do as well as boys. More girls opt for the single science award than boys. In summer 2000, pupils did best in history, physical education, English, design and technology and religious education. They did least well in modern foreign languages and science. Pupils also performed less well in French and the single award science in 1999.
 12. Standards for 11-16 year olds, seen during the inspection from lesson observations, looking at pupils' work and talking to them in lessons, were above average overall. Very high standards were seen in many upper sets. Setting in mathematics and science helps the most able pupils to make appropriate progress. Recent setting in English for older pupils has improved the proportion of pupils achieving the higher GCSE A*-C grades in this subject. The English department now plans to set in Year 9 to improve pupils' results at the higher levels in English tests for 14 year olds. Discussion with pupils often showed a greater knowledge and understanding of a subject than observed in their written work. They were able to interpret and explain information, make judgements on evidence gathered and talk about how they had arrived at an answer. In a Year 8 lower mathematics group, for example, pupils could not only work out averages, but knew why averages are calculated and how the information can be used. Fewer pupils than found in most schools are working below the levels expected nationally for their age. This is because pupils with learning difficulties achieve well. They make good progress, especially when the learning support assistants are in lessons. Individual and group sessions in the learning support room considerably help to improve these pupils' reading, writing and spelling skills.
 13. Performance at A-level in the last three years has risen to be in line with the national average. In most subjects in summer 2000 there was a 100 per cent pass rate, with the proportion of students gaining the highest A/B grades in line with that nationally. Because of the small numbers comparisons for individual subjects with national averages are not significant. However, students did particularly well in sports studies and geography in summer 2000 and in mathematics in summer 1999. Students' achievements at A-level are good when their results are compared with their performance at GCSE. As elsewhere in the school, the number of boys and girls in each year group can

vary. In summer 2000, more boys than girls took A-level, with no girls taking examinations in mathematics or the sciences.

14. Although the sixth form is small compared with most schools, it provides a good range of courses for its students. Following the last inspection, the school monitors more rigorously standards of entry, uptake and results for the courses offered to make sure the sixth form is as cost effective as possible. Links with the nearby, but much larger secondary school, provide opportunities for pupils to take a wider range of A-level subjects than the school is able to offer. The sixth form costs more than it should, but the school has a commitment to provide a Roman Catholic sixth form education for the large area the school serves. The high quality of relationships that exist in the sixth form between staff and students and the strong sense of shared worship and reflection observed in a sixth form assembly very much support this decision. There is also no evidence that the cost detracts from the standards achieved by pupils elsewhere in the school. Sixth form students are very positive about the teaching they receive and they are achieving standards at expected levels in the courses they are taking. The school has introduced courses in the key skills of communication, numeracy and information and communication technology, which all schools will be expected to provide in the future. However, given the good levels already attained by students in English and mathematics the amount of time allocated is probably more than required.

Pupils are happy, work very hard, have very good attitudes to learning and behave extremely well

15. Pupils and students state very clearly how pleased they are to be in Blessed George Napier School. They like the caring and supportive atmosphere and the good discipline, which allow them to get on with their work and achieve well. They think highly of their school and are not embarrassed to say so.
16. Pupils are keen to get on with their work in lessons. They listen carefully to the teacher, ask questions when they do not understand and conscientiously work at the tasks set. This applies to pupils across the ability range. Pupils with learning difficulties respond well to specialist support and this helps them to achieve levels close to or in line with national averages. Even when the teaching in some lessons occasionally does not excite or motivate them, pupils continue to work hard and to achieve well. Pupils show considerable independence in their learning. They try to solve their difficulties before asking the teacher, for example a girl using the 'Help' menu on the computer when she could not remember how to replicate a spreadsheet formula. Project work shows good evidence of personal research using books and the Internet. Pupils are willing to offer suggestions in response to teachers' questions such as 'what do you think will happen next?' and draw well on their previous knowledge and understanding.
17. Pupils work very well together. In gymnastics Year 9 boys worked in groups of three very effectively and safely. They showed very responsible attitudes and clear levels of trust in each other whilst undertaking lifting and carrying exercises. However, apart from lessons where teachers arrange groups specifically, boys and girls rarely work together.
18. The behaviour of pupils is very good and instances of unsatisfactory behaviour in lessons and around the school were rarely seen during the inspection. Any bullying is also rare. Parents and pupils are confident that it will be dealt with

properly if it does occur. Pupils behave responsibly and because of this rules are not overly restrictive. Pupils can chat quietly before assembly starts, as they are instantly silent at the request of the headteacher.

Staff and pupils support and care for each other very well, with Christian values well promoted

19. An outstanding feature of the school is the support and care for each other shown by both staff and pupils. The Catholic faith and its values are central to all its actions and this creates a happy, caring and purposeful school where the quality of relationships between everyone is extremely high. Parents are very impressed with this aspect of the school's work and it is a major reason why they send their children to the school. A wide range of local organisations, including the Catholic community, businesses, the police and local schools, all speak positively of the work of the school, its openness and friendliness, contribution to the community and the high commitment of its staff and the very good behaviour of pupils.
20. Staff take the personal development of pupils very seriously. They consider it as important as the pupils' success in examinations. This area of the school's work is well led by the assistant headteacher and her team of heads of school and year heads. One of the school's current targets is to develop further pupils' consideration of others within and outside the school community and to improve their social skills. This was put forward by the staff as a priority for the school. Actions achieved within this include opportunities for all pupils to take part in a retreat, increased involvement of older pupils with younger pupils, development of the school's anti-bullying policy and monitoring of anti-racist incidents. Time has been increased for the school's personal, social and moral education programme which covers a well-thought out range of activities from awareness of drug abuse to Year 11 pupils writing their own CVs. There is little evidence of a greater emphasis on activities to increase pupils' awareness and understanding of the multi-cultural society in which they will increasingly live.
21. Pupils show high levels of support for each other and the community. Sixth formers annually accompany a local disabled group pilgrimage to Lourdes. They also successfully work with younger pupils in the classroom. They provide help on school visits and at school events such as the millennium mass. Younger pupils take the initiative in collecting and working for charities in addition to those led by the school.
22. Pupils feel well supported not only by staff, but also by their friends. They comment that they would confidently go either to their friends or a member of staff if they had a problem. A number of instances were observed during the inspection of pupils talking over individual problems with a member of staff. Year 10 pupils take part in mentoring schemes with the local business community. These help to develop their awareness of what they can achieve on leaving school and raise where necessary a pupil's self-esteem. The school has taken full advantage of the new opportunities for 14 -16 year olds to take work-related courses at the local college as part of their curriculum. This maintains their interest in school and motivates them to work.
23. The range of extra curricular activities provided by the school is very good indeed and much appreciated by pupils and parents. They provide very good opportunities for pupils to develop skills of co-operation and to form friendships

across different year groups. Staff give a lot of time to ensure these go well. Whilst sport has a particularly high profile, with the school gaining the national Gold Sports Mark³ award, drama, music, chess and computer clubs are also very popular. The school's table-tennis team achieves very well in national competitions. The parents' commitment to their children taking part in the school's extra-curricular activities is high. Because of the considerable distance many families live from the school pupils' participation relies very much on parents picking them up from after school activities.

24. The high level of care the school takes of its pupils' is not as well reflected in the actual appearance and cleanliness of the school. Whilst many classrooms have good displays, the first impression a visitor receives on walking around the school is not one of an attractive building. This is the main issue parents would like to see improved in the school. In the main building the school hall is a central point and because of its multi-purpose use particularly contributes to the unattractive appearance of the building. As well as being used for assemblies, it is an essential teaching space and a thoroughfare for pupils and staff to the main office, senior staff's offices and the staff room. It doubles as a cafeteria during morning break and at lunchtime. All this use, plus the equipment stored, makes it difficult to maintain as an attractive focal point. The sixth form centre is particularly uninviting, but it's appearance is improving under a new head of sixth form. The newer accommodation presents a better appearance, with corridor display developing. All this is in contrast to the very pleasant entrance area, which has pupils' work on the walls and where visitors receive a very good welcome from the administrative staff.
25. Although the school has regular risk assessments done and checks its procedures with the local fire service, a small number of health and safety issues were reported by inspectors to the school. Action has already been taken. However, cars driving into the playground and the traffic congestion as pupils get off school buses in the nearby road do represent possible dangers to pupils.

Good teaching that is appreciated by the pupils

26. The quality of teaching is good throughout the school. During the inspection nearly all lessons observed were satisfactory or better. Two thirds were good or better, with a third of these very good or excellent. Teaching is good in mathematics and English, but more inconsistent in science where it ranges from good to occasionally unsatisfactory. Sixth form teaching is consistently good. The school's strength in teaching has been maintained since the last inspection.
27. Pupils make good progress in their learning because they receive good, well planned teaching from teachers who thoroughly know their subject. Pupils work hard and make the most of the good learning opportunities provided for them. Lessons are well structured with a clear introduction so that pupils know exactly what is expected of them. A Year 10 textiles lesson, in which pupils were introduced to the tie/dye process moved with particularly good pace because of the teacher's very good knowledge and careful planning. The clear introductory demonstration, which quickly moved on to pupils doing their own tie/dye, led to a high level of involvement and enthusiasm from the pupils. They completed their tasks to a good standard in the time available and

³ Only 300 schools in the country have gained this award

- wanted to do more. Plenty of time was allocated to clearing up at the end of the lesson and to recap on the tie/dye process. This led appropriately into setting the homework activity – to draw a flowchart of the steps in the process.
28. The best teaching is particularly lively and interesting. It motivates pupils very well and leads to high levels of learning, for example, in a Year 10 history lesson on trench warfare in World War 1. The teacher's enthusiasm, ability to respond knowledgeably to pupils' questions and to paint a graphic picture of what it was like for the soldiers encouraged pupils to read widely on the topic and to pursue individual lines of enquiry for their report. As a result, they showed a high level of skill in selecting, organising and using relevant information to produce reports of good quality.
 29. Where teaching is good or better most teachers show particularly good knowledge of the strength and weaknesses of their pupils. They use this to set work that builds effectively on what pupils already know and can do. In a Year 8 mathematics lesson, the teacher, following whole class discussion, set the pupils different tasks on the topic, some easier than others. This was done sensitively without picking out the weakest pupils and helped all pupils to make the best possible progress and to succeed. In a Year 7 English lesson the teacher stretched a group of more able pupils with a harder task, which also provided a goal for other pupils to aim for. Teachers in most lessons take full advantage of pupils very good attitudes to work, providing good opportunities for them to research information for themselves, to discuss in groups and to reach their own conclusions. These strategies significantly contribute to the good knowledge pupils' display when talking about their work and the good connections they make between previous learning and new learning. This helps them to achieve well and makes a positive contribution to their literacy skills.
 30. On the very few occasions when teaching and learning are unsatisfactory, teachers do not plan well. They did not match work sufficiently to pupils' learning needs and were unable to interest and motivate pupils in the work.
 31. The school has good strategies for helping pupils to improve their reading, writing and speaking and listening (literacy) skills, not only in English but also in other subjects of the curriculum. Each department has identified what it needs to do to improve pupils' literacy skills and is implementing this effectively. In physical education and history, key words are displayed prominently in the classroom helping pupils to understand, use and spell correctly the relevant technical terms. Pupils also use their good number and graphical skills well in subjects other than mathematics. A whole school approach to the development of pupils' numeracy skills is planned for summer 2001. The literacy and numeracy co-ordinator will continue to use the same strategies that have been so effective in developing the school's work in literacy.
 32. The teaching of information and communication technology skills has improved considerably since the last inspection. An appropriate course for all 14-16 year olds is now in place, but for younger pupils, especially those in Year 7, the planned information and communication technology course covers skills at too basic a level. It does not take enough account of pupils' experiences in primary school and how many of the school's pupils use computers at home to play games and access the Internet. However, a very good Year 7 lesson was observed in which the teacher had written his own

material that was much more demanding and clearly gave all pupils a new skill. Pupils successfully learnt how to search the Internet for information, both text and pictures, and to cut and paste it into their own documents. Teachers are beginning to use computers more effectively to support pupils' learning in a number of subjects, for example mathematics and English. A weakness is that currently there is no rigorous process for recording the skills 11-14 year olds achieve. The information and communication technology department has plans to put this in place.

33. Pupils with learning difficulties receive good support from the special educational needs co-ordinator and her team. The team's encouraging, sympathetic and knowledgeable support helps these pupils to make good progress, particularly with their reading and writing skills. Older pupils can take less demanding courses such as those leading to Certificates of Achievement and the Youth Award. They achieve well in these courses, as they do in the GCSE courses they take.
34. Feedback to pupils on their work is satisfactory. In English there is particularly good practice, with well written comments on pupils' work as to how it can be improved. Most comments in books seen by inspectors, although usually encouraging, do not help pupils to know what they can do better. However, teachers do give helpful feedback to pupils during lessons. Some teachers have particularly good strategies to help pupils understand how much they have achieved. They ask pupils to write in their books how well they have understood the work covered in the lesson. Teachers explain clearly that they will use this to plan the next lesson. Pupils take this seriously and think carefully about what they know and can do. Sixth formers particularly appreciate the way some teachers involve them in the assessment of their own learning. Good examples of this approach were seen in both mathematics and English.
35. Homework was seen to be set regularly during the inspection and was appropriate. Some parents commented that it is not set on the right day giving their child too much to do some nights. Whilst pupils agree that this can happen, it does not appear to be a significant problem.
36. The school has good procedures in place for monitoring the quality of its teaching. There is good feedback to individual teachers to help them improve their work. However, the senior management team does not yet sufficiently identify the school's overall strengths and weaknesses in teaching and share its best practice with all staff. There is the potential for raising standards even further by ensuring that all teaching contains the features present in the best lessons.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

GCSE results in science and modern foreign languages

37. In science, results at GCSE are not as good as they are in other subjects. A greater proportion of the year group gain A*-C grades in English and mathematics than they do in science. This is because fewer pupils than nationally are entered for the double award course. In a school where pupils achieve well, too many pupils opt for the single science award. A high proportion of these pupils in recent years has been girls. Classroom

observation provided evidence of less confident and positive approaches from girls in science. A greater monitoring of classroom teaching approaches and the performance and attitudes of different groups of pupils is required to raise results in science. Last summer there was a significant improvement in Key Stage 3 test results in science reversing a downward trend over the last few years. Although results had not fallen below national averages, they did compare unfavourably with those of similar schools in 1999.

38. Since the last inspection results in modern foreign languages have not improved. Pupils do less well in French at GCSE than in other subjects. Results for the small number of pupils taking Spanish are not as good as those in their other subjects. The school is well aware of the need to improve the work in this area. There have been several changes of head of department over the last five years, which has resulted in inconsistent leadership. The school has sensibly sought the advice and support of the local advisory service and with the recently appointed head of department will be putting in place plans to improve teaching and learning and consequently pupils' results.

The way the school reviews and acts upon how well different groups of pupils, such as boys and girls and the most able, do overall and in different subjects

39. The school achieved its best examination results ever in summer 2000. Nevertheless, whilst not detracting from this very good performance, inspectors noted particular aspects of the its work that the school does not yet monitor and investigate sufficiently well enough. These cover variations in examination results, teaching and learning strategies and subject choices for different groups of pupils. Such investigations would not only identify where the school could improve further but also identify strengths in its practice, for example reasons for the very good performance in GCSE English of both boys and girls. This would support the school in maintaining its current high standards.
40. The school has good procedures to evaluate its overall performance and to monitor each pupil's individual academic progress and personal development. However, it does not yet use this information sufficiently to measure the gains in learning being made by specific groups of pupils, such as boys and girls, those with behavioural difficulties and the more able. The special educational needs co-ordinator has already identified this as a target for those pupils on the special educational needs register for the coming year.
41. Girls results at GCSE are consistently above or well above national averages, but those of boys vary from being in line to being well above. In summer 2000, the school's well above average GCSE results owed much to the boys' performance being nearly as good as that of the girls, with a much smaller difference between the two than nationally. In 1999, GCSE results were not as good as these or as good as those in previous years. They also compared unfavourably with those of similar schools. This year group had a much higher proportion of boys than girls, many of whom did not work as hard as they could have done and achieved below expected levels. Currently the school has significantly more boys in Years 7 and 9, but it is not specifically monitoring the effects of these numbers on classroom practice and pupils' learning.
42. The performance and subject choices of girls and boys at GCSE and A-level reflect traditional male and female roles and expectations. Whilst overall girls perform better than boys, in summer 2000 boys did better than girls in

mathematics and science at GCSE. This is different from the national picture where results are now broadly the same for boys and girls in these subjects. Very few girls in recent years have taken mathematics or the sciences at A-level. In design and technology girls predominately choose textiles and food technology as their GCSE options, boys choose electronics and graphic design.

43. Inspectors observed a wide range of subjects during the inspection and in a small but significant number of lessons found boys responding more readily to teachers' questions than girls. Girls were often more reluctant, sometimes less confident and sometimes did not get the chance as boys, in their eagerness, do not always wait for the teacher to identify who should answer. Girls and boys frequently sit quite separately, such as girls at the back of the room and boys at the front. Some teachers show awareness of such issues, organising girls and boys to work in mixed groups. They direct some of their questioning clearly at girls to make sure they contribute to class discussion, for example, in English. Other teachers do not. On a few occasions teachers missed good opportunities to mix girls and boys for group work, for example, in drama and in a discussion on the social pressures young people face.
44. The school, although it identifies its most able pupils, does not monitor rigorously enough their achievements as a specific group as they go through the school. The school runs a programme of specialist days for these pupils. These days aim, through a range of problem solving activities, to help the pupils develop higher level skills. Parents spoke positively of these days and how much their children enjoyed them. Recent activities have involved the mathematics, science and technology departments, but with varying degrees of success. The school keeps a record of these experiences. However, it does not evaluate how effectively they help its most able pupils to achieve the highest possible standards, for example, by checking how well as a group they do in national tests and examinations.
45. Governors have yet to monitor the impact of the school's equal opportunities policy on its work. They need to include as part of the process an evaluation of how well different groups of pupils are doing. This would help the school to identify and take any action needed to maintain and improve further its present very good performance.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

46. To maintain its very good GCSE results and to improve its work further the school should now address the following:

(1) the improvement of results at GCSE in science and modern foreign languages by:

in science

- monitoring closely the performance and attitudes of girls;
- reviewing the teaching strategies used in lessons;
- reviewing guidance to pupils in Year 10 on their choice of science course;

in modern foreign languages

- putting in place an action plan to improve standards based on the recommendations of the LEA review;

(Paragraphs 9, 11, 37-38)

(2) the effectiveness of its procedures to monitor and evaluate the achievement and progress of different groups of pupils and to identify any action to take by:

- putting in place clear procedures to identify any issues relating to the overall achievement of boys or girls or their performance in different subjects;
- raising teachers' awareness of the contributions boys and girls make in lessons;
- monitoring the numbers of boys and girls in each year group and the effect this may have on teaching groups, subject choices for 14-18 year olds and pupils' attitudes and behaviour;
- identifying and tracking the performance of the most able and talented pupils as they progress through the school;
- measuring the gains in reading and spelling made by pupils on the special educational needs register and analysing their results in national tests at 14 years and GCSE, particularly in terms of the progress made.

(Paragraphs 9, 10, 11, 13, 37-45)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	37
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	22

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
0	22	43	24	8	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons. One lesson was ungraded as observation time insufficient to make an informed judgement.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7-Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	545	72
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	31	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	7	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	102	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	6
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	13

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.2
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	0.4

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	56	58	114

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	36	45	45
	Girls	49	48	45
	Total	85	93	90
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	75 (72)	82 (73)	79 (54)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	20 (33)	68 (36)	38 (15)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	36	44	44
	Girls	44	49	36
	Total	80	93	80
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	70 (66)	82 (69)	70 (63)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	36 (29)	46 (44)	29 (16)
	National	31 (31)	30 (37)	20 (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	41	48	89

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	27	38	39
	Girls	32	47	47
	Total	59	85	86
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	66 (51)	96 (89)	97 (95)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	45 (39)
	National	38.4 (38)

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

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	17	9	26

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	15.4	15.5	15.4 (13.0)	2.5	0	2.0 (5.2)
National	17.7	18.6	18.2 (17.9)	2.6	2.9	2.7 (2.8)

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

No sixth form pupils took vocational qualifications or the International Baccalaureate Diploma

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	1
Indian	2
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	0
White	589
Any other minority ethnic group	18

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	17	1
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)	35.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.25

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7– Y11

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	212

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78
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Average teaching group size: Y7– Y11

Key Stage 3	25.1
Key Stage 4	22.4

* This includes £100000 earmarked as the school's contribution towards the building of a sports hall. A bid is currently being made for lottery money.

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	1,491,793
Total expenditure	1,493,425
Expenditure per pupil	2,540
Balance brought forward from previous year	122,745
Balance carried forward to next year	121,113

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate 18.8%

Number of questionnaires sent out	617
Number of questionnaires returned	116

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	57	39	3	0	1
My child is making good progress in school.	54	41	5	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	46	50	4	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	30	53	12	3	2
The teaching is good.	42	53	3	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	41	46	12	1	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	66	29	5	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	71	28	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	40	50	9	1	0
The school is well led and managed.	60	34	4	1	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	52	44	2	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	46	36	8	0	10