

INSPECTION REPORT

HELENSWOOD SCHOOL

Hastings

LEA area: East Sussex

Unique reference number: 114600

Headteacher: Mrs J Blackburn

Reporting inspector: Dr Vivien Johnston
OFSTED Inspector Number 8402

Dates of inspection: 3rd – 7th April 2000

Inspection number: 186747

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

© Crown copyright 2000

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 – 18
Gender of pupils:	Girls
School address:	The Ridge Hastings East Sussex
Postcode:	TN37 7PS
Telephone number:	01424 753040
Fax number:	01424 752529
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Brian Fox
Date of previous inspection:	January 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
Vivien Johnston	Registered inspector
Pauline Adenwalla	Lay inspector
Raye Allison-Smith	Team inspector
Robin Coulthard	Team inspector
Richard Green	Team inspector
Peter McGregor	Team inspector
John Paddick	Team inspector

The inspection contractor was:

Qualitas Education Consultants
Langshaw
Pastens Road
Oxted
Surrey RH8 0RE

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

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

REPORT CONTENTS

Page

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

6

Information about the school
How good the school is
What the school does well
What could be improved
How the school has improved since its last inspection
Standards
Pupils' attitudes and values
Teaching and learning
Other aspects of the school
How well the school is led and managed
Parents' and carers' views of the school

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

10

Pupils do well in examinations, and the standard of their work in many subjects is above average as they make good progress.

Most teachers have high expectations of what pupils will achieve, and their teaching is stimulating and challenging.

Pupils are cared for very well and given very good educational and personal support, which encourages them to develop confidence and a sense of responsibility.

The governing body, headteacher and senior management team provide very effective leadership, and are managing the school and its improvement very well.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

15

In some lessons, teachers have difficulty in managing and motivating pupils, and do not provide sufficiently challenging work.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

16

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

17

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Helenswood School is a large comprehensive community school with 1,151 girls on roll, of whom 160 are in the sixth form. It has two sites which are one and a half miles apart, a lower school for pupils in Years 7 to 9 and an upper school for pupils in Years 10 to 13. The sixth form operates jointly with the nearby boys' school. Numbers of pupils are highest in Years 7 and 8, reflecting the school's increasing popularity with families in Hastings and St Leonards. Few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is average. The proportion with special educational needs is below the average for schools nationally. Most of these pupils' needs relate to learning, although some have emotional and behavioural difficulties. A few pupils speak English as an additional language, and they are not at an early stage of learning English. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is broadly average. The school is part of a newly set up Education Action Zone.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The overall effectiveness of the school is good. Pupils achieve well in relation to their attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 because they steadily make progress in response to the good quality of education the school provides. In particular, the teaching is good overall. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 and in sixth form work are above average, and pupils are very successful in GCSE and A-level examinations. The school is very well led and managed, and provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils do well in examinations, and the standard of their work in many subjects is above average as they make good progress.
- Most teachers have high expectations of what pupils will achieve, and their teaching is stimulating and challenging.
- Pupils are cared for very well and given very good educational and personal support, which encourages them to develop confidence and a sense of responsibility.
- The governing body, headteacher and senior management team provide very effective leadership, and are managing the school and its improvement very well.

What could be improved

- In some lessons, teachers have difficulty in managing and motivating pupils, and do not provide sufficiently challenging work.

The area 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 January 1996. It acted very purposefully on the findings of that inspection, maintaining the strengths identified and making good improvements in response to the key issues. Pupils' expectations have been raised, and higher standards are achieved by average- and most lower-attaining pupils. This is reflected in the improvement in GCSE and A-level results, both of which have risen faster than the national rate. Some lower-attaining pupils have not done as well as they should in GCSE, partly due to their irregular attendance. The school has developed a good assessment system. This enables it to monitor pupils' progress closely and set targets for their future work, and to give pupils and their parents good information about how well they are doing. The curriculum is better planned, with examples of very good schemes of work in subjects including drama and physical education. Homework is generally good, although there is still some inconsistency in teachers' implementation of school policy. The quality of teaching has improved. Revisions to the timetable have reduced the loss of lesson time caused by teachers having to commute between the two sites. The school still does not meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils, although its arrangements have improved.

Additional successes include the school's systematic approach to raising standards in the sixth form and in subjects including science. It has achieved this by focusing on the quality of teaching and the curriculum provided. The new arrangements for pupils with special educational needs are proving beneficial, and starting to help them

achieve better. Over the last four years, a much closer focus on improving pupils' learning has informed all aspects of the school's development, contributing significantly to its good improvement overall and potential for future development.

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				<i>Key</i>
	all schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
GCSE examinations	C	B	A	A	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
A-levels/AS-levels	E	D	B		

The table above shows that results are well above average at GCSE, compared to schools nationally and to similar schools (that is, comprehensive schools with a similar proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals). A-level results were above average in 1999. In both examinations, results have risen faster than the national rate. Due to the rapid rise in results, the school has already met the target it set for overall improvement in GCSE results in 2000 and 2001.

In the 1999 GCSE examinations, pupils did better in art, drama, information technology, geography, history, mathematics and religious education than in their other subjects. They did relatively less well in English, home economics, modern foreign languages and science.

Results in the national assessments of English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 3 have consistently been above average overall. In 1999, pupils did best in English as the results improved to well above the national average, and were very high compared to similar schools – the school's results were in the top 5% of similar schools. The mathematics results were above the national average, and well above the average for similar schools. The science results were average, and above average compared to similar schools.

The standard of work seen in lessons and in pupils' previously-completed coursework was also above average in most subjects, particularly at the end of Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. It was consistently above average in English. In mathematics, it was above average but more securely so at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. In science, because of some weaknesses in teaching, the standard was average at Key Stage 3 and below average at Key Stage 4.

In relation to their prior attainment, pupils' achievement is good overall in Key Stages 3 and 4 and the sixth form. The quality of pupils' written work is often high. Pupils have particularly good skills in reflection and evaluation, which are taught well in subjects such as drama and then applied in essay writing in many other subjects. Pupils are also confident and articulate, and their good oral skills enhance their learning in many lessons. They have been very well prepared for GCSE and A-level examinations, which is why some results are higher than the standard of their coursework.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils are willing to learn, work independently and take responsibility for their own learning. They enjoy taking part in lessons and other activities organised by the school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good overall. Most behave very responsibly and well, in lessons and around the school at other times of the day. In a small minority of lessons, when teaching is weak, some pupils are inattentive. Their behaviour affects the work of others in the class. The rate of exclusions is average; most exclusions are for short periods, and

	are appropriate and effective in maintaining good discipline.
Personal development and relationships	Good overall. Pupils develop self-confidence and independence, and take their responsibilities seriously. Their response to opportunities for community and charity work is very good. A few pupils are inconsiderate of others, for example when they show off in lessons, but all have a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong. Relationships are very good, and so pupils work co-operatively and well in lessons.
Attendance	Below average attendance. The school is working hard to improve it and has had some success as attendance has risen during the current school year. Unauthorised absence is higher than nationally as the school does not usually authorise absence for taking holidays in term time.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

The teaching was satisfactory or better in 91% of the lessons observed. In 17% it was very good. In 9% it was unsatisfactory. Most of these lessons were at Key Stage 3, when teachers had difficulty managing and motivating pupils, which affected how much they learned. Usually, however, pupils of all ages are hard-working and interested. They respond well to the challenging work they are set, and to teachers' expertise and enthusiasm for their subjects.

The teaching of English is more effective than that of mathematics and science at Key Stages 3 and 4. The skills of numeracy and literacy are taught well, through strategies such as focusing on key vocabulary pupils need to learn. GNVQ courses for lower-attaining pupils at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are particularly well taught, enabling pupils to make rapid progress and to develop good skills in organising their project work. A-level teaching is consistently good, and some is very good because the challenging work is presented in a stimulating way. Throughout the school, pupils are confident learners. Teachers encourage this, for example through questioning that probes their understanding and through well-chosen group activities. Teachers generally ensure that the needs of all in the class are met as they know the pupils very well and adapt their teaching accordingly.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. It covers all National Curriculum subjects and religious education, with drama at Key Stage 3 and a wide range of options to choose from at Key Stage 4. The sixth form has a good mix of academic and vocational courses, and is enhanced by links with other sixth form providers.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Well organised and effective, meeting most pupils' needs. The individual education plans are well written, giving class teachers good knowledge of pupils' needs. The learning support assistants' work is also good.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good, with particularly strong encouragement to develop confidence and a sense of responsibility. Personal development is provided for well. Religious education and the personal, social and health education programme make good contributions to this. The wide range of extra-curricular activities, visits and links with the community are a strength of the provision for pupils' moral, social and cultural development.

How well the school cares for its pupils	Very effectively. A safe and secure environment. Staff know pupils very well, enabling them to give good academic guidance and set appropriate targets. Pupils are given personal help whenever the need arises.
------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent leadership and management by the headteacher and deputies have enabled the school to raise standards and improve the quality of teaching. A cohesive senior management team, contributing to decision-making of a high order. Heads of year provide very good management of pastoral care. Subject management is more variable, although strong in several areas.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Excellent. Governors visit the school regularly, and know its strengths and weaknesses very well. They maintain a very good relationship with the staff. They have contributed significantly to the school's improvement through their active involvement and initiatives.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Careful monitoring and effective intervention, for example in improving the sixth form provision and standards. The school development plan is very well constructed, and has helped the school to raise standards. The school has identified teaching as an area for further improvement, and has already worked on it with some success.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Staff are well deployed and learning resources are used effectively. The split site is turned to advantage by giving the lower and upper schools different atmospheres. The school applies the principles of best value excellently, and makes very good use of information and communications technology for administration.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children make good progress. • The school expects the pupils to work hard and achieve their best. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour in the school, as it can hold back other pupils' learning. • Homework – some feel it is inconsistent, some feel too much is set and some that it is insufficiently challenging. • The way the school works with parents.

The inspection team agrees with parents' positive comments. The team also agrees that behaviour is sometimes not good enough, affecting pupils' learning in a small minority of lessons. The evidence of the inspection suggests that this occurs more often at Key Stage 3. The team did not find evidence that the setting of homework is a weakness overall, although some inconsistency in teachers' practice was observed. Mostly, homework was appropriately challenging and built well on the work done in lessons. In questionnaire responses, some parents expressed concerns about the way the school works with them, whereas parents who attended the meeting prior to the inspection felt that the school successfully keeps parents informed and involved. The inspection team agrees with the latter view.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Pupils do well in examinations, and the standard of their work in many subjects is above average as they make good progress.

1. Results in GCSE and A-level examinations have improved over the last three years, at a faster rate than nationally. The improvement is particularly marked at A-level, as the summary table on page 7 shows.
2. Pupils enter the school with broadly average levels of attainment. The results in the national assessments of English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 3 were above average overall in 1999, and well above the average for similar schools (those with a similar proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals). This shows that pupils made good progress. The results were highest in English: they were well above the national average. In mathematics, they were above average, and in science they were average. Compared to similar schools, the English results were very high (in the top 5% of similar schools), the mathematics results were well above average and the science results were above average.
3. GCSE results are also good in almost all respects. The overall picture is of steady improvement, from average compared to schools nationally to well above average. The school has focused on improving the results of pupils of average and higher attainment. Its success in this is shown by the rise in results at five or more grades A* to C and five or more grades A* to G. Both are now above the national average. Compared to similar schools, the proportion gaining five or more grades A* to C is now well above average. The school plans to focus on the lower-attaining pupils next, to raise results at one or more grades A* to G as these remain below average.
4. A-level results have shown the greatest improvement, from well below average in 1997 to above average in 1999. Following the last OFSTED inspection, improving the quality of education provided in the sixth form was given a high priority, and these results show how successful the action taken by the school has been.
5. Standards observed in lessons and pupils' previously completed work are similar to the Key Stage 3, GCSE and A-level results. This confirms that pupils' achievement is good in relation to their attainment on entry to the school and that their good progress continues steadily through Key Stages 3 and 4 and in sixth form work. Some pupils make very good progress. For example, in mathematics some pupils whose results in the national assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 were below average (level 4) did much better than predicted by gaining grade C at GCSE.
6. The standard of pupils' written work is often high. For example, Year 11 pupils write substantial, well reasoned essays in religious education, making very good use of evidence to support their arguments such as on Britain as a multi-faith society. Their personal writing is wide-ranging and effective. A-level students' geography projects have been very thoroughly researched and include a very good range of maps and plans. The students had come to well-expressed and reasoned conclusions which answered their opening hypotheses well, for example on the issue of whether the development of Battle as a tourist centre is detrimental to the local environment. They had made very good use of information technology to enhance the presentation of their work. Work of similarly high quality was seen in other subjects, including English and history. In design and technology, GCSE coursework showed a wide range of practical outcomes supported by well-presented and comprehensive design folders.
7. Pupils have particularly good skills in reflection and evaluation. These are developed well in subjects such as drama, where from Year 7 pupils are taught how to evaluate their own performances and those of others. The skills are drawn on in other subjects, and contribute to the high quality of pupils' writing.
8. Pupils' good skills in speaking and listening enhanced their understanding in many lessons observed during the inspection. In a very good English lesson, Year 10 pupils brainstormed differences between women's lives now and in the past. They identified many perceptive points in small groups, and then shared their ideas with the rest of the class. They listened very attentively as a short story was read to

them, after which one pupil in each group summarised the story to the others. They did this very well, showing that they had understood both the plot and the language in which it was told. Although this class was relatively low-attaining, and had a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs, their learning and achievements in this lesson were very good because of the effectiveness of the teaching.

Most teachers have high expectations of what pupils will achieve, and their teaching is stimulating and challenging.

9. Teachers have high expectations of the pupils in all aspects of school life, and this has a very good effect on teaching and learning. The expectations are backed up by a variety of strategies, enabling pupils to make good progress. For instance, teachers provide clear information about what pupils are to learn at the start of most lessons, and support pupils' learning by giving clear guidance on how to succeed in the tasks. In some lessons, their learning is extended by a short plenary discussion at the end, as in drama when groups' performances were reviewed and pupils and the teacher identified points for improvement next time. Teachers are generally very aware of examination requirements. In lessons observed in many subjects, including geography, history, mathematics, religious education and science, they gave very good, relevant advice on examination techniques.

10. Teachers' subject expertise is good at Key Stage 3, and very good at Key Stage 4 and in sixth form work. Their knowledge enables them to communicate difficult concepts in an easily understandable way. For instance, in a Year 11 science lesson, the teacher demonstrated the reactions of lithium, sodium and potassium in water, and linked the explanations to previous work on the periodic table. In this lesson as in many others, the teacher presented the content of the lesson in a lively way that engaged pupils' interest. The sequence of small steps for their learning ensured that by the end of the lesson the pupils had a good understanding of the concepts. Teachers also enthuse and motivate pupils by setting work that gives good scope for personal interpretation and response. For example, teachers in art, geography and history provide very good opportunities for coursework. This is something pupils are very good at, and invest much time and effort in, both at school and at home.

11. Lesson planning is generally good. In the most effective lessons, the teacher had carefully thought through how to implement the objectives for pupils' learning that lesson, and followed the planning systematically with a good balance between teacher-led and independent activities. This was observed in many subjects, including English, design and technology, mathematics, physical education and science. Teachers often maintained a good pace of learning by planning for a series of short, focused activities and adopting a variety of teaching styles during the lesson.

12. Very good use of resources contributed to the success of some lessons, such as photographs from a recent visit to Auschwitz which were used in a Year 11 religious education lesson discussing the causes of the Holocaust. In French and Spanish lessons, teachers used a wide variety of resources skilfully to teach new language and to stimulate question and answer sessions. Very good organisation of classrooms and equipment allowed pupils to work independently in practical activities in design and technology and science.

13. Relationships between pupils and teachers are generally very good. Teachers know their pupils very well. This leads to some very effective strategies being adopted for meeting individual pupils' academic needs in whole class and individual work. In a mathematics class, the teacher provided revision work which was designed to extend the highest-attaining pupils so that they were well prepared to gain level 8 in the National Curriculum assessments at the end of Year 9. Teachers have a good knowledge of the targets on individual education plans of pupils with special educational needs, and take care to adapt their teaching accordingly. In a key skills lesson with low-attaining Year 10 pupils, the teacher tenaciously kept the rather volatile class well focused by a combination of firm discipline and an encouraging, positive manner. The pupils were given individual support as necessary, channelling them into a pace and quality of work which was good in relation to their various abilities.

14. Many teachers have high levels of skill in questioning pupils in whole class and small group work. Pupils rose to the challenge of learning new ideas in lessons where teachers had the skills to develop

questions, explore, probe and help pupils express their ideas orally. For example, in a Year 9 art lesson involving figurative compositions, the teachers' very good knowledge of the subject was used very effectively to set the projects the pupils had chosen in a wider context during an introductory discussion. The teacher drew out comments from the class, who listened actively and contributed willingly, and generated high levels of involvement and interest. The pupils took this interest into all aspects of their work during the rest of the lesson, enjoying the chance to research and make choices about the work and the artist they chose to study. They made very good progress.

15. Literacy and research skills are taught very effectively. This is a particular strength of the provision for Key Stage 4 pupils and sixth formers taking GNVQ courses. For example, a Year 12 class following individual programmes in health and social care were given quiet, effective guidance and support as they worked, which increased their self-esteem. The classroom was very well resourced for independent, research-based learning. This enabled students to work in a variety of ways, such as using a digital camera and incorporating the images into their written work. The students were very well motivated, encouraged by the praise and advice given them, and so worked hard throughout this lesson. They often continue working during breaks and lunchtimes.

16. In all the lessons in which teaching was judged to be good or better, a key strength was the teacher's effective classroom management. Teachers had clear expectations of pupils' behaviour and rate of work, which they shared with pupils and backed up with firm, fair discipline. Teachers set time limits for the lesson activities, so that pupils knew they had to respond purposefully to get the work done. These strategies were very successful, with the result that the pupils enjoyed the lessons and tried hard. The energy and pace of some lessons drove pupils to achieve standards they did not believe they were capable of, for example in art and geography.

Pupils are cared for very well and given very good educational and personal support, which encourages them to develop confidence and a sense of responsibility.

17. Pupils are cared for very well. Teachers and associate (non-teaching) staff monitor their emotional and learning needs carefully, both formally and informally. Staff know pupils very well, and they use this knowledge to very good effect in negotiating an appropriate course of action when individual pupils need help. The school nurse and a number of individuals and agencies offer very good specialist support to this process. For example, the deputy headteachers are members of a multi-agency group that meets regularly to co-ordinate the school's response to individual pupils' needs and to review practice. In addition, the school has good access to a number of individuals and groups who are called upon to support the learning of all pupils, as in the personal, social and health education course.

18. The arrangements for child protection are excellent. The school has adopted the local education authority guidelines, and ensures staff are kept well informed through regular meetings, staff training days, and the induction programme for new staff.

19. The school places great emphasis on pupils' personal safety and developing their sense of confidence and responsibility towards themselves and others in the school community. For instance, pupils are encouraged to report any issues for which support and help might be needed. This they can do through the school 'Helpline' – which provides confidential access to staff. The procedures for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour such as bullying are excellent. Pupils' welfare is ably supported through the actions of senior staff, who are active in promoting regular attendance and high standards of behaviour and achievement. As a result, the school is a calm and orderly place.

20. The many strengths in the school's provision for pupils' academic achievement and personal development contribute to the ethos of high expectations, shared by both staff and pupils, and to raising academic standards. Pupils' work and progress are monitored regularly, and they are set targets to encourage them to aim high. In addition, subjects such as art, mathematics and modern languages make good use of test and examination results to check that all pupils are achieving appropriate academic standards and to set targets for their future work. A wide variety of strategies is used to meet individuals' needs. The heads of year and co-ordinator for special educational needs are key to this, but the support

network is spread widely across the school and local community. For example, the school nurse plays a very active role in helping individual pupils and in developing other staff's understanding of how to respond to their problems. Pupils are provided with good opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and respond well to them. Pupils of all ages are caring of each other, and take their responsibilities seriously. For example, sixth form students who have completed training as peer counsellors act as mentors to Year 10 and Year 7 pupils. Others do regular voluntary work in the local community. The different ethos of the two sites reflects pupils' increasing self-confidence and sense of responsibility.

21. Pupils with special educational needs are given good support. The provision for meeting their needs is well organised. Their individual education plans are detailed and thorough, identifying clearly what individuals' academic and behavioural targets are and setting out suitable strategies for teachers to follow. These plans are reviewed regularly, and the pupils know that their progress is tracked carefully. Parents are fully involved in this process. Teachers often make very effective use of the good quality support provided in some lessons by learning support assistants. A few pupils are withdrawn from class lessons for extra work, usually on literacy. This is managed carefully so that the pupils do not always miss the same lesson. The school plans to improve the provision further by introducing a withdrawal unit for the small minority of pupils whose behaviour is particularly difficult to manage in lessons.

22. The school takes a firm line on attendance, and works hard to ensure that pupils attend school regularly and respond positively to the education provided. It is recognised locally to be very effective in this. Some of the pupils who join the school during Key Stages 3 and 4 have had significant attendance and behavioural difficulties in their previous secondary schools. The school is prepared to be very flexible in order to ensure that they improve their attendance and attitudes to education, and its approach is successful. However, these pupils' continuing, though lessening, difficulties affect the overall attendance figures, which is partly why attendance is below average. Over time, however, the rewards and encouragement are effective in getting pupils into school. The rate of unauthorised absence is above average, partly because the governors' policy is that absence for holidays is not usually authorised.

23. The school is very effective in providing a safe and secure learning environment. Health and safety matters are reviewed regularly. For example, staff meet regularly with the bus companies that provide transport to and from school, in order to tackle problems that arise such as lateness, pupils' behaviour and their safety. In cases of illness and accidents in school, staff with first-aid qualifications are on hand. Health and welfare are promoted successfully through the programme for personal, health and social education.

The governing body, headteacher and senior management team provide very effective leadership, and are managing the school and its improvement very effectively.

24. The headteacher's leadership is excellent, giving a very clear direction for the school. As a result, the school has risen in status and success and is now over-subscribed. The head is reflective and forward-looking. Her vision for the school is strongly founded on the continued improvement of standards of teaching and learning. She is far-sighted, yet realistic about what can be achieved in the short term. She has a very strong and effective working partnership with the two deputies. As a result, the management of the school by the headteacher and deputies is also excellent. Their effectiveness is illustrated by the rapid rise in examination results over the last few years.

25. The reflection of the school's aims and values in its work is very good. Both teaching and associate (non-teaching) staff contribute to the school's strong community ethos. For example, associate staff have been involved in preparing the school development plan, and they offer practical assistance such as running extra-curricular activities. All employees are made familiar with the school's aims and with their roles in contributing to the pupils' education, providing a stimulating environment in which pupils can work, or supporting teachers with efficient administration. New staff undergo thorough induction to ensure that they understand the school's philosophy and implement its aims in their work.

26. By its organisation and philosophy, the school is devoted to providing equal educational opportunities to all pupils. For instance, the provision for pupils with special educational needs is good, and the school has worked hard to ensure that higher-attaining pupils are sufficiently challenged.

27. The school makes something of a virtue out of its two-site situation. Each site is very ably managed by a deputy headteacher, and each has a distinct character. Parents see the lower site as a successful and self-contained entity, providing an appropriate intermediate stage between the primary and GCSE phases of education. They like the nurturing ethos of the lower school. The upper site, which pupils attend from Year 10 until the end of the sixth form, confers on pupils the status of 'students'. Its ethos is strongly focused on academic work.

28. The governing body is very effective. Its contribution to the leadership and improvement of the school is excellent, and valued highly by the staff. A very good relationship of mutual trust exists with staff. Governors are very well informed, through being linked to individual departments and visiting the school regularly. These visits are effective as they have a focus, such as to review the impact of the science department's decision to change its curriculum. Governors also support the school by attending functions and parents' evenings, where they take opportunities to find out parents' views. As a result, the governing body has a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and has used this knowledge to inform its decisions.

29. The governing body has introduced several excellent initiatives to help the school improve. For instance, its disciplinary committee interviews pupils whose behaviour and attitudes give cause for concern, with their parents, aiming to work out a solution to the difficult situation each pupil has found herself in. This has helped several pupils to respond more positively to school and so avoid being excluded. Interviews with staff who are leaving the school also give valuable insights into what the school could improve, and provide an excellent opportunity for staff's contributions to be recognised and praised.

30. The school has a very clear focus on raising the academic standards achieved by pupils, and this aspect of its work has been managed very effectively. Standards are reviewed by a wide variety of methods, including monitoring lessons and pupils' written work, discussions with pupils and seeking the views of parents. The information gathered has been used well, contributing to the rise in standards which is most notable in the sixth form.

31. The school has adopted good procedures for monitoring, evaluating and improving the quality of teaching and learning. Senior managers are more consistently effective in implementing these procedures than heads of department are. A culture of self-review leading to improvement is promoted, supported by clear guidance in the staff handbook. Heads of department monitor the effectiveness of teaching in their areas, to good effect in subjects such as mathematics, geography, history and religious education. Additionally, from time to time the senior management team institutes a review of the effectiveness of teaching and learning in a subject. Teaching has improved as a result of these strategies.

32. The school has an excellent, three-year plan for its further development. Particular strengths are that it is explicitly related to the school's aims, and that its central focus concerns raising pupils' attainment. The current objectives have been well chosen, and are being tackled successfully. The process of development planning is very good, involving all staff, and so they share a common vision for and commitment to the school's improvement.

33. The school has taken very good action to meet the targets for improvement it has set itself. For instance, the intensive efforts to improve the quality of education provided in the sixth form led to a rapid rise in A-level results during the last two years. The senior management team reviews and analyses each year's developments, to assess the progress towards meeting the identified targets. The most recent review of the school development plan indicates a very good rate of success, with some targets having been met early.

34. The arrangements for developing staff expertise are another strength, and have contributed to raising teachers' effectiveness. In-service training is targeted very carefully at the school's priorities for development. Many training opportunities take place 'in house' and the school operates a 'lessons first' policy to minimise disruption to pupils learning by the absence of staff on courses. The school's strategy

for appraisal and performance management is very good. A particular strength is that associate staff are appraised regularly.

35. Financial planning is excellent. The school development plan is costed very carefully. Expenditure has to be justified, and is efficiently and rigorously monitored. Purchasing is queried to check that the items required are the most appropriate and will be well used. Rigorous financial monitoring ensures that all expenditure is used as intended. The school seeks tenders where appropriate, to ensure it gets the best value for money. It makes economies whenever possible, such as through the employment of a handyman who can respond rapidly when urgent jobs need doing on either site. The administration of the school is supported by a wide and increasing use of information and communication technology, and is very efficient.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

In some lessons, teachers have difficulty in managing and motivating pupils, and do not provide sufficiently challenging work.

36. In 9% of the lessons observed, teaching was unsatisfactory or, very occasionally, poor. Most of these lessons occurred at Key Stage 3, but a few were at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. However, this may not reflect an accurate picture of the effectiveness of teaching in the school. This is because the coverage of teaching is less thorough in a short inspection than in a full inspection – for example, most teachers were observed only once.

37. When the teaching was unsatisfactory, it was generally because of weaknesses in motivating and managing the pupils. Undemanding work and low expectations of pupils' effort and work were contributory factors in some lessons. Where this was the case, some pupils became restless and inattentive, or sought attention by showing off to their friends. When the teacher did not have suitable strategies for dealing with this behaviour, the learning of most or all in the class was affected. The views of parents who commented prior to the inspection on the need to improve behaviour were justified, in relation to these lessons.

38. Teachers had difficulty in managing pupils most often at Key Stage 3, particularly with Year 9 classes, and occasionally with lower-attaining sets at Key Stage 4. Some teachers were too accepting of inappropriate behaviour. For example, sometimes pupils were allowed to chat to each other when the teacher was talking to the class. Sometimes, teachers found the attitudes of some in the class difficult to handle, and were unable to establish a positive working atmosphere. For example, a Year 9 science lesson started badly because of the teacher's late arrival from the other site. Although the lesson activities were appropriate, the pupils took a long time to settle to the task of working out practical examples of pressure. The teacher attempted to deal firmly with a few poorly behaved pupils, but was only partially successful.

39. Lesson planning was unsatisfactory in a few lessons, and led to pupils making insufficient progress. Some tasks were unchallenging, such as copying diagrams in a science lesson. At other times, teachers had planned to cover too much during the lesson, and did not spend enough time on explaining and clarifying the work. The planning occasionally paid too little attention to how to present the content effectively. This led to uninspiring lessons in which the pace of pupils' learning was slow as they had little interest in the work. In a Year 11 music lesson, the teacher had not planned appropriately for what pupils were to learn from the demonstration of a variety of instruments. Although this was done well, the teacher did not ensure that all participated actively, for example by making notes, and the lesson activities were too informal. As a result, the pupils did not take their work seriously enough.

40. The pace of learning was sometimes slow because the teacher talked too much, notably in music and science. This led to pupils being uninvolved and losing interest. Teachers did not always take enough care to check that all the pupils had understood, for example by ensuring that they answered questions during whole class discussion. This affected pupils' learning in several science lessons, as some did not understand the concepts presented even though they had recorded information accurately.

41. Marking of pupils' work is sometimes a weakness. The evidence of a scrutiny of previously-completed work showed that some pupils in the lower mathematics sets had their work marked less frequently than those in the higher sets, and had been given less advice on how to improve. Occasionally, teachers had ticked a page of work without having noticed errors in the pupil's calculations. In English, whereas A-level students' work is marked in depth, that of younger pupils focuses too little on analysing strengths and weaknesses in their work and the opportunity to give pupils guidance on how to improve in future is missed.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

42. Building on the many strengths in teaching, the governors, headteacher and staff should improve the quality of teaching in the areas where it is still weak. This will involve:

- developing teachers' skills in managing pupils' inappropriate behaviour;
- planning work which is better matched to pupils' needs;
- improving the pace of lessons and teachers' skills in oral work, to ensure that pupils are actively involved throughout;
- marking pupils' written work in greater depth, to give them better guidance on what they have done well and how to improve in future.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

76

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

21

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	17	42	32	8	1	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	994	157
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	150	4

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	8	4
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	163	0

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	8

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	52
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	68

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.7
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.9
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	0	207	207

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	150	138	111
	Total	150	138	111
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	74 (74)	67 (65)	54 (54)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	44 (54)	35 (41)	20 (23)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	149	144	124
	Total	149	144	124
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	73 (67)	70 (70)	60 (68)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	40 (38)	35 (42)	30 (33)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	0	167	167

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	87	157	158
	Total	87	157	158
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	52.1 (45.2)	94.0 (90.9)	95 (96)
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.7 (95.1)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	43.3 (40.4)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	20	100.0
	National		n/a

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	N/a	120	120

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	17.6	17.6 (15.7)	N/a	2.6	2.6 (1.4)
National	N/a	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	N/a	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	13	84.6
	National		72.9

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	12
Indian	10
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	4
Chinese	2
White	1110
Any other minority ethnic group/not known	17

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	1	
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	43	3
Other minority ethnic groups		

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)	67.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	18
Total aggregate hours worked per week	431

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74
-----------------------------------------------------------	----

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	25
Key Stage 4	22

Financial information

Financial year	1998-99
----------------	---------

	£
Total income	2,731,690
Total expenditure	2,748,894
Expenditure per pupil	2,475
Balance brought forward from previous year	140,973
Balance carried forward to next year	123,769

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1151
Number of questionnaires returned	306

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	33	55	7	5	0
My child is making good progress in school.	45	48	6	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	24	49	14	6	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	55	19	7	1
The teaching is good.	22	65	7	3	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	46	42	9	2	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	46	42	9	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	55	40	3	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	24	48	19	4	5
The school is well led and managed.	31	50	6	4	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	33	52	9	2	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	24	54	10	3	9